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Open Destinies: Modern American Women and the Short Story Cycle

Rachel Lister

Submitted as a thesis for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Durham University

Department of English Studies

2005

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Rachel Lister

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Degree of Doctor of Philosophy 2005

Abstract

This thesis examines the juncture between the short story cycle form and gender politics. It explores how twentieth-century women from the United States have been using the form to represent and question gender identity. The introduction outlines commentaries on the story cycle and considers definitions of the form. It includes case studies of earlier twentieth-century cycles by American women: cycles such as Mary McCarthy's The Company She Keeps that have been passed over by critics of the form.

Chapter One presents Eudora Welty's The Golden Apples as a cycle paradigm, examining conventions such as the form's metafictional dimension and its preoccupation with communal identity. Chapter Two argues that Grace Paley's scattered Faith narratives set a standard for more dispersed versions of the form. Chapter Three considers how Joyce Carol Oates uses the sequential cycle to represent gender identity as a social construct. Chapters Four and Five examine the macrocosmic cycles of Gloria Naylor and Louise Erdrich and consider changes in their form and gender politics. The final 'composite' chapters explore postmodern versions of the form such as Susan Minot's Monkeys. The prose works of Sandra Cisneros stretch across the story cycle continuum, whilst Toni Morrison's Paradise is universally regarded as a novel. Readings of contemporary cycles by Melissa Bank, Elissa Schappell and Emily Carter demonstrate that American women are re-invigorating the form to facilitate the plural identity of the postmodern heroine.

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Declaration

I declare that no part of this thesis has previously been submitted for a degree in this or any other university. Rachel Lister.

Statement of Copyright

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my appreciation for the funding from the Arts and Humanities Research Board (now Council) that enabled me to dedicate the three years to the thesis.

Many individuals made valuable contributions to this thesis and deserve recognition. I would like to thank Colin Channer who took the time to share his thoughts, responded to all my questions and showed an abiding interest in the project. The generous, meticulous responses of Joyce Carol Oates helped enormously with my readings and opened up my own perceptions of the form. Her lecture on the faith of the writer was inspiring. Special thanks must go to Farhat Iftekharuddin for his guidance concerning the publication of the Grace Paley chapter. Michael O'Neill kindly read this chapter and offered helpful suggestions. Maria Lauret's feedback on my paper at the BAAS London Conference in 2003 was most illuminating; her encouraging comments and probing questions gave me much to think about. I would like to acknowledge enlightening conversations with Simon James and Brian Burton regarding all things cyclic. Simon James's recommendations of cyclic films were particularly helpful. Jo Kramer deserves special thanks for her anecdotes about Jewish family life and her thoughts on Jewish identity. Dialogue with Ben Knights was always encouraging and illuminating; his recommendation of Emily Carter's Glory Goes and Gets Some and generous purchase of Alice Hoffman's Blackbird House provided material for several readings. Special thanks must go to my Mum and Dad for their continued support over the many years of studying. Most of all I would like to thank Pam Knights for all of her brilliant ideas, unflagging support, and assiduous reading that reached beyond the call of duty. I dedicate this thesis to her.

"Everyone, real or invented, deserves the open destiny of life"

Grace Paley, Enormous Changes at the Last Minute.

Introduction

Developing Taxonomies: Cycles, Sequences, Collections and Composites

During an interview in 1981 Joyce Carol Oates outlined her vision of a hybrid form that would dismantle generic boundaries: "I am fascinated … with the concept of a 'novel' shaped out of a sequence of closely related and intertwined 'short stories'" (Pinsker 98). Oates's concept will be a familiar one to writers and readers of the short story cycle: a form that embodies this duality and disrupts notions of formal unity. Over the past forty years interest in the genre has developed; writers and critics have become increasingly fascinated by the elasticity of a form that yields the possibility of new configurations and definitions. This introduction will consider how taxonomies for the form both reflect upon and contradict each other, enabling me to define the parameters of my own investigation.

Forrest L. Ingram both coined the term 'short story cycle' and delivered the first detailed exploration of the form in 1971. In Representative Short Story Cycles of the Twentieth Century Ingram identified some of the defining characteristics of the genre. Whilst concentrating upon modern adaptations of the form, he traces its development back to the works of Homer, Ovid and Boccaccio. Ingram's opening definition has become a common starting point for critics of the form and has featured repeatedly in subsequent studies of the genre. He defines the form as "a set of stories so linked to one another that the reader's experience of each one is modified by his experience of the others" (13). Deploying images that capture the form's fluidity, Ingram stresses that narrative boundaries in the story cycle are never fixed: "Like the moving parts of a mobile, the interconnected parts of some story cycles seem to shift their positions with relation to the other parts … A cycle's form

is elusive" (13). Ingram attempts to establish a generic framework with a short story cycle continuum. He bases his three categories of cycle upon the nature of their construction: "Linked stories may have been COMPOSED as a continuous whole, or ARRANGED into a series, or COMPLETED to form a set" (17 Ingram's capitalization). The 'composed cycle' is "one which the author had conceived as a whole from the time he wrote its first story." The author of the 'composed cycle' "allows himself to be governed by the demands of some master plan" (17). The creator of the 'arranged cycle' consciously brings the stories together so that they will "illuminate or comment upon one another by juxtaposition or association" (18). The construction of a 'completed cycle' involves rearranging and regrouping narratives that "may have begun as independent dissociated stories" (18).

At the heart of the form's elusiveness lies its duality. Ingram registers this in his introduction when he observes how the form embodies "the tension between the one and the many": "Every story cycle displays a double tendency of asserting the individuality of its components on the one hand and of highlighting, on the other, the bonds of unity which make the many into a single whole" (19). Readings in this thesis will examine how writers use the form either to represent or, in the case of Louise Erdrich, query this tension.

Ingram attributes the "special kind of unity" achieved by the story cycle form to the "dynamic patterns of RECURRENCE and DEVELOPMENT," which, he claims, "usually operate concurrently like the motion of a wheel" (20 Ingram's capitalization). As themes, motifs, settings and characters recur they "expand their context and deepen their poetic significance" (21). This repetition and expansion forms a kind of "composite myth" that invites the reader to establish and trace patterns of signification (21).

Although Ingram's taxonomies have proved invaluable as springboards for subsequent examinations of the form, his analysis of individual twentieth-century cycles calls into question just how "representative" his study is. He devotes his three principal chapters to the cycles of Sherwood Anderson, William Faulkner and Franz Kafka; James Joyce, Albert Camus and John Steinbeck also receive considerable attention. The conspicuous absence of female writers from Ingram's study qualifies the diversity and breadth of his exploration. He makes a cursory reference to Flannery O'Connor's Everything that Rises Must Converge (1965) as an example of an 'arranged' cycle of stories linked by repetitive thematic currents. Although Eudora Welty's The Golden Apples (1949) typifies Ingram's notion of a 'completed cycle' in many ways, it appears only in a list of titles within the bounds of a footnote. By concentrating primarily on female writers my own investigation will seek not only to redress the balance but also to illuminate the contiguities between the form's dynamics and theories of female subjectivity and experience.

Ingram acknowledges that he has limited his analysis to "those story-groups which have been given an order, a pattern, by their author: therefore, a book" (19). Whilst using the more conventional short story cycle as an initial model for investigation, I intend to examine how female writers are continually reworking the form and testing its boundaries. Chapters on Joyce Carol Oates and Grace Paley in particular will analyse the effects of this kind of experimentation. Both these writers have created cycles of scattered but linked stories that stretch beyond the boundaries of the single text. Unity is continually arrested and reasserted as these writers intersperse the linked stories with other, ostensibly unrelated narratives. Whilst one might argue that these diffusive incarnations constitute a genre of their own, they enact the same basic principle of "recurrence and development" as the more

concentrated, unified story cycle. The criteria for the form in my thesis are that the individual stories within the cycle must retain their status as independent narrative entities and that there must be more than a thematic connection binding the narratives together. The size or nature of the gaps between the stories does not matter. The dynamics and effects of these fractured forms are therefore worth considering alongside the more cohesive cycles.

Since Ingram's 'representative' study, taxonomies have broadened and story cycle glossaries have become more inclusive. Published in 1988, J. Gerald Kennedy's essay, "Toward a Poetics of the Short Story Cycle," illuminates some of the strategies deployed by cycle writers to generate "composite meanings" (14): the use of a representative title; the accretion of "intertextual signs" to denote the "ideas, beliefs, concerns and fixations forming [the cycle's] ideological substance" (19). Kennedy outlines three types of sign commonly used by story cycle writers. The first of these is the "topical sign" which "includes all objects, images, and actions which readers perceive as 'symbolic' in the traditional sense" (19). Kennedy cites as examples the "recurrent doors, windows and mirrors in *Twice Told Tales*" and the bullfighting scenes in Ernest Hemingway's In Our Time (19). He notes that such signs often reinforce the sense of duality or ambiguity that intensifies from story to story. For example, the chalice in James Joyce's Dubliners embodies contradictory meanings; in "The Sisters" it denotes "paralysis and degeneracy," whereas it "metaphorizes the young boy's devotion" in "Araby" (19). "Spatiotemporal signs" offer grounding to the story cycle reader; they include allusions "which fix the action in a particular place or at a specific historical moment" (20). "Functional signs" relate to characters in the cycle, emphasizing the role that they play within the cycle rather than their distinctive personalities. Kennedy writes that one example of such a

sign-system "resides in the differentia of speech, attitude, and manner which enable us to perceive as a common type those embattled women form-owners [sic] in O'Connor's *A Good Man*" (21).

Kennedy's identification of intertextual signs proves helpful when considering how cycle writers both create and confound unity. Where appropriate, my investigation will refer to this sign-system continuum in its readings of individual cycles. Like most recent critics who are eager to broaden definitions, Kennedy disputes some of Ingram's observations on the conventions of the form. He argues that Ingram's "insistence on unity" as the "litmus test of cyclical form" has "produced a restrictive and conservative theory of form which has canonized certain collections while ignoring others" (11). He notes that the "junctures" of "collective meaning" in a story cycle "may reveal discontinuity as readily as unity" (14). In response to Ingram's more prescriptive definition, Kennedy proposes the taxonomy "short story collection," claiming that this broader term will "encompass both tightly organized story sequences and more loosely bound or problematic works" (13). He adds that his term would include multi-author volumes collated by editors.

Kennedy's analysis of some of the distinguishing features of the form is undoubtedly useful. On considering his case for a more inclusive taxonomy, however, it is difficult to perceive where to draw the line between his notion of a "collection" and a miscellany of stories. The most superficial reading of any story collection will most likely furnish some basic thematic connections. Kennedy himself acknowledges that, "any grouping of stories by a single writer will possess at least a minimal collective identity" (13-14). He cites Raymond Carver's Cathedral and Flannery O'Connor's A Good Man is Hard to Find as texts that would come

under his term "short story collection" (15). Both volumes are linked loosely only by theme; it is difficult to perceive how these collections differ from the majority of short story volumes written by a single author. Wouldn't Eudora Welty's A Curtain of Green and Other Stories qualify under Kennedy's notion of a story collection because of its portrayal of outsiders in stories such as "Petrified Man," "Keela, the Outcast Maiden," "Old Mr Marblehall" and "Why I Live at the P.O."?

Kennedy himself acknowledges the difficulties surrounding these generic distinctions in his introduction to the 1995 study, Modern American Short Story Sequences: Composite Fictions and Fictive Communities. Having abandoned his proposed term for the most current taxonomy, he recognizes that his view of the genre is "broadly inclusive" and embraces "all collections of three or more stories written and arranged by a single author" (ix). He adds: "given the ultimate inscrutability – if not irrelevance – of authorial intention, we face the impossibility of distinguishing certain cases between ordered sequences and mere selections of stories editorially arranged" and that "One must concede at last that textual unity, like beauty, lies mainly in the eye of the beholding reader" (ix). Kennedy places thematically linked collections such as Willa Cather's The Troll Garden alongside the "exemplary texts" of Joyce and Anderson (ix). His choice of words to describe these more unified collections suggests that Kennedy, despite his inclusive vision, has nevertheless created a hierarchy of the form.

In this study, individual critics look at a range of 'sequences,' including Eudora Welty's The Wide Net and Henry James's The Finer Grain: texts that have not featured in story cycle criticism before. Chapters on Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine and Hemingway's In Our Time redress the balance somewhat. Having acknowledged the breadth of his generic definition, Kennedy illuminates the

problems posed by "those twentieth-century novels that fragment narrative point of view to project multiple versions of a complex experience" (x). He cites such texts as William Faulkner's The Unvanquished (1938) which, as this introduction will note briefly, continues to generate debate in terms of generic categorisation. Strangely, Kennedy includes Gloria Naylor's The Women of Brewster Place in this category of fragmented novels, drawing attention to the way that the text's subtitle "A Novel in Seven Stories" announces its hybridity. However Naylor's first work is one of the few texts that cycle critics consistently cite as an archetype of the form. Indeed my chapter on Naylor will read her debut as a story cycle and will argue that the subtitle, by illuminating the text's generic duality, highlights the need for a third term such as short story cycle.

In 1989 Susan Garland Mann published The Short Story Cycle: a Genre Companion and Reference Guide, in which she considers the many ways in which stories in a cycle connect with each other. Mann reiterates Ingram's observations about the recurrence of settings and characters and notes the development within the form of collective protagonists such as families and clans. She also illuminates the form's utility for the exploration of particular themes: "the lack of continuity ... is used by some writers to emphasise the fragmentary nature of life" and thus a considerable number of recent cycles have offered "statements about art in general, especially the difficulty of being the artist" (12, 13). Mann briefly registers the unique kind of reading experience rendered by the short story cycle. She asserts: "readers enjoy reveling in the necessarily restricted form of a single story and then discovering that they can, as they continue to read, transcend these boundaries" (19). Mann's statement hints at a new kind of agency for the reader: a notion that more recent studies of the genre have explored in some detail and that will form a

significant part of this study. Mann's book concludes with a helpful glossary of the short story cycle. Some of her choices are interesting and underline again the potential breadth of the form. Like Ingram and Kennedy, she includes collections of stories that are connected solely by theme; Willa Cather's The Troll Garden features once more.

One year later Robert M. Luscher introduced the term 'short story sequence', emphasizing the successive rather than the cyclic nature of the form. In "The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book," Luscher argues that his term is more accurate than Ingram's 'cycle' because "the story sequence repeats and progressively develops themes and motifs over the course of the work; its unity derives from a perception of both the successive ordering and recurrent patterns, which together provide the continuity of the reading experience" (149). Whilst he views the reader's trajectory in a different light to Ingram and Mann, Luscher also enthuses about the possibilities of text/reader interaction offered by the form: "These works should be viewed, not as failed novels, but as unique hybrids that combine two distinct reading pleasures: the patterned closure of individual stories and the discovery of larger unifying strategies that transcend the apparent gaps between stories" (149-50). When applying these multiple taxonomies to forms such as Eudora Welty's The Golden Apples, I find that Ingram's term serves as a more accurate reflection of the reader's methodology. The reader's initial experience of The Golden Apples is sequential; however the interpretive process assumes a circular motion as the reader makes narrative leaps backwards and forwards in order to elicit the threads of connection.

Luscher's term is perhaps more pertinent to those forms that observe a sense of sequentiality either through their observation of chronology or the development of a particular consciousness from one story to the next. William Faulkner's The

Unvanquished is a particularly interesting case. Forrest Ingram devotes a whole chapter to the text and insists on its cyclic status; he calls the text "a composed, mythically oriented short story cycle" (126). His analysis of The Unvanquished signals the difficulties surrounding its generic identity. Ingram stresses how Faulkner conceived the seven narratives in the text as self-contained short stories, publishing them in three groups. However he also documents the revisions that Faulkner made and their unifying effect: the revisions brought "the thematic content of the earlier stories more closely in line with the serious direction of the later stories," "enrich[ing] the background of characters … that are to take an important role in some later story" and "lean[ing] toward a tightening of substance and symbol" (Ingram 106, 107). Ingram recognizes that the text deviates from more paradigmatic cycles: "Faulkner has tied his stories together with more precision than Anderson's pieces in *Winesburg, Ohio,* or Hemingway's *In Our Time*" (139).

In support of his classification, Ingram illuminates the more 'cyclic' elements of The Unvanquished: the disruption of chronology through the use of flashbacks; the shifting position of Bayard, the foregrounding consciousness, from the centre to the margins of the action; the development in each story of a "central action" unlike a novel such as Sartoris that "moves in one continuous *multiple* action" (134, 132 Ingram's italics).[1] However Ingram also acknowledges the predominantly sequential structure of the text: "the significance of *The Unvanquished* accumulates from story to story through the achievement of successively higher viewpoints embodied in the gradually maturing reflections and actions of Bayard Sartoris" (134). Ingram draws from Faulkner himself to support his contention that The Unvanquished is, at least, not a novel, quoting Faulkner's recollection of his original vision of the form:

> I saw them as a long series. I had never thought of it in terms of a novel, exactly. I realized that they would be too episodic to be what I considered a novel, so I thought of them as a series of stories, that when I got into the first one I could see two more, but by the time I'd finished the first one I saw that it was going further than that, and then when I'd finished the fourth one, I had postulated too many questions that I had to answer for my own satisfaction. So the others had to be ... written then (Gwynn 252).

Faulkner's description of the writing process and his use of the term 'series' illuminate the overriding sense of sequentiality that distinguishes this text from the more overtly cyclic Go Down, Moses (1942).[2] In light of Faulkner's commentary on the conception of The Unvanquished, Robert Luscher's term is perhaps the more apposite classification for this text: his taxonomy recognizes both the self-containment of the individual pieces and the underlying sense of sequentiality unifying them, driving the reader forward.

The title of Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris's study acknowledges the form's breadth and continuing evolution. In The Composite Novel: the Short Story Cycle in Transition (1995), Dunn and Morris examine many variations of the form. They illuminate a "three-track continuum occupied by all three genres, with the 'novel proper' and the 'mere collection' on either side, and the composite novel in the middle" (29). They state that the terms 'short story cycle' and 'composite novel' are "diametrically opposed in their generic implications and assumptions. *Composite novel* emphasizes the integrity of the whole, while *short story cycle* emphasizes the integrity of the parts" (5). Dunn and Morris claim that Ingram's term both "implies inferior status in the generic hierarchy" and "preclude[s] linear development" thus

"prescrib[ing] or at least suggest[ing] generic limitations" (5). The term 'composite novel', on the other hand, emphasizes congruities with the novel: a form that, although "usually structured by plot ... can be structured alternatively, or by association -- that is, by juxtaposing events, images, themes, and/or characters in some sort of coherent pattern" (5). However a glance at Dunn and Morris's wide-ranging glossary justifies the use of both taxonomies; texts conforming more closely to Ingram's definition such as The Golden Apples, Dubliners and Sarah Orne Jewett's The Country of the Pointed Firs sit alongside highly unified forms such as Laurie Lee's Cider With Rosie and Willa Cather's The Professor's House: works whose parts are more contingent upon each other for meaning than the narratives in the cycles of Welty and Joyce. Dunn and Morris also include Brown Girl, Brownstones, Paule Marshall's episodic novel, which must be read in chronological order. The individual sections of this text do not stand as self-contained narrative entities and some of them would not make complete sense if read as freestanding 'stories.' Such works epitomize the term 'composite novel' more than the looser forms of Joyce, Welty and Jewett; thus there remains a case for retaining these taxonomies as markers for two different forms.

This thesis will take into account the multicultural identity of the modern American short story cycle, foregrounded by James Nagel in 2001. In The Contemporary American Short-Story Cycle: The Ethnic Resonance of Genre, Nagel defines the form as one in which "each component work must stand alone ... yet be enriched in the context of the interrelated stories" (15). Nagel insists that, "The short-story cycle in modern American fiction is patently multi-cultural" and traces its origins to "a shared legacy reaching back to ancient oral traditions ... uniting disparate peoples in a heritage of narrative tradition" (4-5). He argues: "The English

'novel,' as an extended narrative with a primary central character and a main plot that extends from beginning to end, is not as universal a form as a group of short tales linked to each other by consistent elements" (5).

Nagel uses Forrest Ingram's taxonomy in his title, but, like most story cycle critics, deviates from his definition in his analysis. Controversially, he presents several texts as paradigms of the form that are closer in their structural and formal properties to the composite novel than Ingram's model. Jamaica Kincaid's Annie John (1985) is referred to by Nagel as "a quintessential example of the contemporary short-story cycle" (56). He stresses that each section of the text was published separately as a short story and that therefore the eight stories stand as "separate artistic constructs," each one presenting "a conflict, a resolution, and a sense of closure" (57). However, when Kincaid collated the stories she arranged them in chronological order, presenting them as chapters; whilst one might read the chapters as individual pieces, they achieve far more resonance when read as part of a whole. Unlike Susan Minot's Monkeys, another text presented as a paradigm by Nagel, there is no change in narrative voice or focalisation and the text consistently follows one narrative line: the development of the relationship between the narrator-protagonist and her mother. The terms 'short story sequence' or 'composite novel' are perhaps more accurate taxonomies for Annie John.

Recent reviews of new cycles demonstrate a reluctance to employ these formal taxonomies. Peter Donahue's essay on In Our Time, appeals for further recognition of the form's distinct identity. Published in 2003, "The Genre Which is Not One" observes how the use of "figurative language" by Luscher and Ingram suggests the form's "un-fixed nature, that it can be *like* something – like a novel, like a short story collection – but apparently not something definite unto itself" (161

Donahue's italics). Reviewers are however beginning to use terms which stress the unity between stories and thus distinguish cycles from miscellaneous collections. Terms such as 'linked stories' and 'interconnected narratives,' appear to be growing increasingly popular, perhaps owing to their potential to cover all bases. In the Montreal Gazette Monique Polak describes Elizabeth Hay's Small Change (1997) as "a collection of inter-linked short stories" ("Review"). In 2004 Alice Hoffman published Blackbird House, a cycle of stories unified primarily by their setting in Cape Cod. Reviews of the cycle stress the linkage between the stories: Elaine Showalter's Guardian review writes of "12 intricately connected stories" ("Learning"); Carole Goldberg in her Hartford Courant review uses the term "linked stories" ("Life"); Sharan McBride from the Houston Chronicle prefers "interconnected narratives" ("More"). One Hoffman reviewer objects to the growing prevalence of such terms. In the Rocky Mountain News review of Blackbird House, Jenny Snark criticises the "coy language" employed by publishers who favour terms such as "interlinked narratives" and "inter-related fictions"; she views such terms as a means of "avoid[ing] the dreaded admittance that Hoffman has written – gasp – a book of short stories" ("House"). Snark objects to these terms on the grounds that they illuminate the reluctance of publishers to tell readers the truth and present them with a genre that, they contend, is losing its appeal: the short story collection. Whilst this may be a pertinent point, it is surely equally important to distinguish a text such as Hoffman's that deploys a number of unifying devices, from miscellaneous collections that are loosely connected by theme only. By using these terms, reviewers are acknowledging the linked story collection as a form in its own right.

Form and Gender: Further Exploration

Unlike Ingram, Dunn and Morris acknowledge the influence of female writers in the short story cycle canon, and draw parallels between the dynamics of the form and women's lives. Prevalent metaphors for the form include the art of quilt-making. Dunn and Morris examine those cycles that emulate this aesthetic, including those that present quilt-making as their theme: Louisa May Alcott's Aunt Jo's Scrap-Bag (1872) and Maley Bainbridge Crist's Patchwork (1898). They draw links between the methodology of female cycle writers and the principle of quilt composition such as "juxtaposition and repetition with variation" (23).

In their brief final chapter, Dunn and Morris speculate about reading strategies for the form. They stress that the story cycle reader must "maintain a sense of connectedness," thinking "vertically, three dimensionally," as well as horizontally (116). Returning to the quilt as a metaphor for "visualizing in three dimensions" they note that Julia Kristeva's theory of "spatialization" has particular relevance for the story cycle reader (117). Having considered various metaphors for spatialization, Dunn and Morris summarize its basic principle: "a reader's perspective must shift from distance to depth, from the individual to the field, and back again, in a dynamic process" (120). They make a tentative link between this reading strategy and the "shape" of "female experience" (120). In their concluding paragraphs Dunn and Morris qualify this connection between form and gender by suggesting that the rise of the form's popularity owes itself primarily to changes in lifestyle (120). They stress the differences between postmodern life structures and those of the Victorians and suggest ways that these structures dictate the shape of narrative: "The Victorians (white-anglo-saxon-protestant-eminent ones, at least) lived leisurely lives that paralleled and were reflected in their big, long, linear novels.

But our lives are different from theirs, and it stands to reason that our books should be different" (120). Dunn and Morris come to doubt the relevance of race and gender politics to changes in form, although they acknowledge the limits of their definition of Victorian lives. They remain certain however that the form is above all expressive of a postmodern sensibility: a theory that is borne out by their opening glossary of composite novels. As well as their annotated list of story cycles, they provide a glossary organized by the year of publication. Their list begins with 1820 and ends in 1993. The pre-twentieth century cycles occupy three pages, whilst the remaining twelve pages are devoted to the 1900s. As the years progress, the entries become longer as more composite forms emerge.

Margot Kelley continued the debate about form and gender in 2000 with her essay "Gender and Genre: The Case of the Novel-in-Stories." Kelley observes that "about 75 percent of the current writers" of the form are women, "often women who live in positions of double marginality as members of visible minorities or as lesbians" (296). In defining seven "attributes" of the form she illuminates the importance of gaps in the form's structure and the possibility for intensified reader participation (297): "Important events occur off-stage ... having events occur in the spaces between chapters suggests that the reader's interventions are going to be of particular importance in making meaning" (298-9). In analysing the structural principles of the "novel-in-stories" Kelley highlights the congruity between the form's structure and feminist discourses. She writes:

> Each story has a climax, and these climaxes build upon each other. Consequently, the short stories each have epiphanic moments, and the action of the larger narrative follows a "rising sawtooth" pattern, creating a sense of development that is not shaped by teleology ...

> This pattern resembles one by French feminists Hélène Cixous and Luce Irigaray as an element of a viable *écriture feminine* (299).

Kelley draws parallels between the form's dynamics and the relational paradigm that has become associated with female identity. Carol Gilligan uses the images of the web and the hierarchy to figure the difference between female and male sensibilities. Her studies of children revealed that where girls confront dilemmas through "a network of connection, a web of relationships sustained by a process of communication," boys set up "a hierarchical ordering to resolve a conflict" (Gilligan 32, 33). For Gilligan these images represent the "contrast between a self defined through separation and a self delineated through connection" (35). Kelley suggests that the story cycle enacts both sensibilities: by incorporating "the tension between the one and the many," the genre "suggests that a coherent or unified identity requires both autonomy and connectivity" (304).

In Feminine Fictions Patricia Waugh identifies a movement away from "separateness" and "discrete form" in twentieth-century women's writing: "It is the gradual recognition of the value of construing human identity in terms of relationship and dispersal, rather than as a unitary, self-directing, isolated ego, which has fundamentally altered the course of modern and contemporary women's writing" (12-3). My own investigation will examine how women writers are using the short story cycle form both to enact and probe the relational construction of the self. Individual chapters will build upon these resonances with gender paradigms and discover new links with the form by drawing upon a range of gender theories. For human rights activist Grace Paley, fiction is grounded in the political; stretching from the fifties to the eighties, the Faith Darwin stories are, in many ways, shaped by the tenets of second wave feminism. In her criticism, Joyce Carol Oates draws clear

distinctions between male and female sensibilities, attributing these differences to social conditioning; my chapter on Oates will explore how her cyclic representations of gender difference anticipate Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance. Theories of masculine identity will form a significant part of the thesis, particularly in readings of cycles by Gloria Naylor and Louise Erdrich. The thesis will also take into account those plot structures and reading strategies that are traditionally assigned to a particular gender: do female writers use the form to confound traditional male structures such as the end-determined quest plot? Is gender identity a determining factor in reading methodology?

Whilst focusing primarily on female writers, the thesis will draw comparisons, where useful, with the work of male cycle writers. Some male writers have used the story cycle to challenge the norms of masculine identity with more relational models of thought. In Winesburg, Ohio (1919), Sherwood Anderson emphasized the importance of relationship and community in the quest for self-actualization. It is well documented that Anderson viewed his text as the first of its kind in terms of its formal status; despite the publication of Joyce's Dubliners years earlier, he claimed the form as his invention: "in *Winesburg* I have made my own form" (Anderson Memoirs 289). Whilst critics have queried this assertion by referring back to the earlier cycles of Joyce and Jewett, they continue to recognize Winesburg, Ohio's status as a kind of ur-text for the form. Dunn and Morris write: "Without much question, *Winesburg, Ohio* (1919) is the book that most people will think of when they hear the term *short story cycle*" (52). Mann and Ingram devote entire chapters to Anderson. In "The Short Story Sequence and the Semblance of Community," J. Gerald Kennedy writes: "Anderson's influential collection ... provided a model for the story sequence as a modern form" (97).

Winesburg is a small Midwestern town populated by men who guard their ego boundaries closely. Winesburg's women exemplify the kind of relational thinking that challenges this solipsism. As Sally Adair Rigsbee points out in her feminist reading of the cycle, it is primarily the women in Winesburg who embody the possibility of community: "The themes most frequently identified as the unifying forces of *Winesburg, Ohio*, the failure of communication and the development of the artist, are closely related to Anderson's focus on the meaning of the feminine" (178). Encounters with women like Kate Swift and Helen White enable George Willard, Anderson's recurring protagonist, to break out of the paradigm of the bounded male. In the penultimate story, "Sophistication," it is Helen's presence that enables George to "make some minute readjustment of the machinery of his life" so that he regards his community with "something like reverence" (233). This thesis will examine those female characters in modern story cycles who emulate Anderson's women, taking their transformational roles further: women who embody the dynamics of the form by defying the boundaries of the text and the self.

The thesis will also recognize those masculine cycles that have served either as models or points of contrast to feminine incarnations. An e-mail interview with Colin Channer in 2005 offered many insights into the methodology of a contemporary male story cycle writer. As this thesis approached completion Channer published Passing Through, a cycle that is in many ways paradigmatic of the form in its presentation of a common setting, recurring characters and multiple points of view. I took the opportunity to contact Channer and gain an insight into a contemporary writer's formal methodology. The full transcript of the interview is presented in the appendix but my individual readings will refer to Channer's commentary where appropriate.

The influence of Faulkner and his cyclic world will emerge repeatedly in the thesis, particularly in chapters that focus on dispersed cyclic worlds such as those of Grace Paley and Louise Erdrich. In his Nick Adams stories Ernest Hemingway uses a fragmented form to chart the development of the single protagonist. He both emulates and subverts the structure of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, a form that has become associated with masculine identity. In "Humanbecoming: Form and Focus in the Feminist Novel," Ellen Morgan writes: "The *bildungsroman* is a male affair." After noting a few exceptions such as Dorothy Richardson's Pilgrimage she suggests reasons for this bias:

> by and large the *bildungsroman has* been a male form because women have tended to be viewed traditionally as static rather than dynamic, as instances of a femaleness considered essential rather than existential. Women matured physically, at which point they were ripe for being loved. Then they deteriorated physically, at which point they either disappeared from sight in the novel or became stereotypes (184).

Readings of cycles by Sandra Cisneros, Emily Carter, Melissa Bank and Elissa Schappell will explore how postmodern women have used the story cycle form to recast the *Bildungsroman* and create new structures for the self-determining woman. The work of one of the most esteemed and analysed modern story writers must be acknowledged here. Story cycle critics continue to devote attention to Munro's most unified collections of stories. Who Do You Think You Are? (1972) and Lives of Girls and Women (1978) are generally categorised as novels, but these texts are in fact composed of independent stories, some of which were published individually before being assembled into a single form; thus story cycle critics have

claimed them as examples of the form. In these texts Munro deploys the cycle form to chart the development of heroines who seek plural identities beyond the boundaries of home. Coral Ann Howells classifies Lives of Girls and Women as a *Bildungsroman* with a "decentralised narrative structure" (33). Howells writes:

> any attempt to map the development of female subjectivity will be characterised by multiplicity as a girl like Del endlessly invents and reinvents personae for herself, some of them idealised and imaginary, some of them created in resistance to the role models offered by her mother and the women in her family and social community (32).

In her illuminating essay, "Short Fiction with Attitude: The Lives of Boys and Men in the *Lives of Girls and Women*," Janet Beer highlights one of the most significant ways that Munro has reshaped the traditional structure of the female *Bildungsroman*: through her form Munro has achieved "the fracturing of any preconceptions that the story of a young woman's teenage years must incorporate a natural or inevitable movement toward the married state or attainment of romantic love or that there is any one dominant chord in the woman's life" (126). Munro's fascination with connection also emerges in other collections which feature microcosmic cycles. The Moons of Jupiter (1982) opens with stories that concern two sides of the recurring narrator's family. Munro frames these stories with the generic title "Chaddeleys and Flemings," announcing their unity. In the final story of the collection she returns to this terrain as the narrator tells the story of her father's death: an event that is only referred to in the earlier stories. As a Canadian writer Alice Munro does not receive individual attention in my study of United States women but the influence of her formal experimentation is noted in several chapters.

Questions and Case Studies

As critics produce increasingly accommodating glossaries of the short story cycle, definitions of the form are broadening; however, commentators are consistent in their neglect of a number of texts written by American women in the first half of the twentieth century. One cycle that has not escaped attention is Sarah Orne Jewett's The Country of the Pointed Firs, in many ways a forerunner to these texts. The cycle appeared in 1896 and has achieved recognition as an exemplar of the form. Dunn and Morris write a brief section on The Country of the Pointed Firs, describing it as "Perhaps the quintessential example of a composite novel organized in the village sketch tradition" (36). Jewett was one of the first cycle writers to exploit the elasticity of the form and pursue threads of connection beyond the boundaries of the single text. As Louis Auchincloss notes in Pioneers and Caretakers, "The device of Dunnet, the village in *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, has even the advantage that it can be added to. Two of the best of her stories, "The Queen's Twin" and "A Dunnet Shepherdess," were written as sequels" (14-5).[3] Thus Jewett paves the way for writers such as Grace Paley and Louise Erdrich, whose cyclic worlds spread themselves over multiple texts. Jewett uses the form to chart the development of a character type that, according to Susan Mann, has become a hallmark of the story cycle: the writer as recurring protagonist. One thinks of Winesburg's writers, Ernest Hemingway's Nick Adams and Sandra Cisneros's Esperanza.

As Jewett's critics have illuminated, gender politics lie at the heart of her cycle. Margaret Roman writes: "Jewett lights on the dilemma of remaining in touch with one's nurturing dimension while becoming part of patriarchal society" (207). Dunnet Landing is a space that is "unusually void of polarities between men and women resulting from rigid gender behavior" (Roman 208). Such a space enables

the narrator to reconcile values that are traditionally assigned to particular genders: the desires for both solidarity and withdrawal, for contact and isolation. Jewett's form both enacts these tensions and realizes the possibility that these impulses may coexist.

Other cycles have attracted less recognition. In his introduction James Nagel briefly mentions Zona Gale's Friendship Village which appeared in 1908; Gale's cycle is highly sentimental and often moralistic, but provides further evidence of the form's utility as a tool for communal and cultural representations. Jewett's influence is clearly at work in the structure and theme of Gale's cycle: a writer visits a close-knit village, is introduced to its inhabitants and participates in its rituals; seduced by the neighbourliness of the villagers, the writer/narrator leaves wistfully, feeling that she has caught a privileged glimpse of a relational way of life that is quickly disappearing. Like Jewett, Gale uses the form to develop a series of mini-sequences. One story leads onto the other in a sequential fashion. Narrative lines stretch over two or three consecutive stories and are brought to a relatively neat conclusion, rather than dispersing themselves across the entire cycle. The narrator may encounter a character in one narrative and ask to hear about his or her past, setting up new narrative terrain; this character's history forms the next story in the sequence.

In 1920 Anzia Yezierska published Hungry Hearts, a collection of stories about the communities of Russian and Polish Jews living in the tenements of New York's Lower East Side. Yezierska's form observes many of the conventions of the story cycle. Characters recur literally and character types reappear in different stories under the guise of new identities. Strangely, Yezierska's own critics offer little analysis of her work's formal characteristics and seem to perceive no parities between her collection of linked narratives and the short story cycle. Maggie Dunn

and Ann Morris are the only cycle commentators who include Yezierska's work in their glossary. Together, the heroines of Hungry Hearts form a composite protagonist: the Jewish immigrant girl who, motivated by a highly idealized vision of America, aspires to "make from [her]self a person" by gaining access to a conventional American education, forging friendships, or experiencing romantic love (Hungry Hearts 162). Stories such as "'The Fat of the Land'" and "The Free Vacation House" concern the older generation of Jewish immigrants and present a different type: the mother figure, disillusioned by her American experience and desperate for prosperity after a life of drudgery. As types, Yezierska's characters epitomize the 'functional signs' identified by Kennedy as a common feature of the short story cycle. Whilst they stand out within the context of their single stories as independent, far-reaching visionaries, it is difficult to distinguish one protagonist from another when reading the text as a whole. Yezierska's aspiring young women usually discover that America does not live up to their ideal and find themselves drawn back to reveries of their old community. However, their stories always end on a note of tenuous hope: either a connection with the outside world or a moment of re-engagement with one's community prompts a resurgence of will and expectation.

Yezierska, like many story cycle writers before and after her, exploits the form as a site for revision. In her introduction to the Penguin edition of Hungry Hearts, Blanche Gelfant refers to Yezierska's "*one story*," for which she is unable to find a "suitable final end," and surmises that Yezierska felt "impelled to tell the story of these women … again and again" (xxx Gelfant's italics). This compulsive retelling has become a common feature of the modern short story cycle. The need to repeat one's story not only links characters within and between cycles; it also often reflects the compulsions of the writers themselves. Sandra Cisneros, author of the

story cycle The House on Mango Street (1984), emulates writers like Yezierska by using the form to tell the stories of own marginalized community. In "Ghosts and Voices" Cisneros writes: "If I were asked what it is I write about, I would have to say I write about those ghosts inside that haunt me, that will not let me sleep, of that which even memory does not like to mention. Sometimes it seems I am writing the same story, the same poem, over and over" (73).

Yezierska's compulsion to tell is mirrored in her characters, all of whom exhibit an urgent need to communicate their stories. Talking is therapy for Yezierska's silenced women; only when the narrator of "How I found America" has "talked [her]self out" can she begin to move forward (178). The modern short story cycle abounds with inscribed storytellers anxious to give expression to suppressed stories or to perpetuate the narrative tradition that underpins their community. Yezierska's compulsive narrators anticipate the multitude of storytellers that populate the communities of other story cycles: Louise Erdrich's reservation, Grace Paley's Brooklyn and Eudora Welty's Morgana.

Whilst the stories in Hungry Hearts appear to pursue the same narrative line, Yezierska uses each story as a locus for speculation on possible endings. Narrative avenues that remain closed to one character open up for another. "The Miracle" replays the narrative of the cycle's opening story "Wings," this time granting the heroine the conventional happy ending: a relationship with an American man on equal terms. Thus Yezierska achieves the kind of effect described by Margot Kelley as one climax builds upon another. Such neat conclusions read in isolation may appear excessively sentimental and naïve: adjectives that have attached themselves to Yezierska's fiction (Gelfant "Introduction" xxx). However, as Gelfant notes, Yezierska's use of repetition enables her to query such narrative paradigms as the

happy ending; it is by recasting the same story with different endings that she "expose[s] the unreality" of such scenarios through contrast (ix).

Gelfant reflects that the victory of Yezierska's heroines – breaking through the silence and articulating one's feelings with one's own voice – is "also the victory of Anzia Yezierska as she found her voice as an American writer in *Hungry Hearts*" (xxxiii). Sophie Sapinsky, the young heroine of "My Own People," is an aspiring writer searching for her subject. She is able to formulate only "flat, dead words" until she discovers that she has been experiencing her material all along, purely by existing as part of her community (140). At the end of the story she determines that she will transcribe only "the cries – my own people – crying in me" rather than mimicking the voice of revered writers such as Emerson (153). Sophie's discovery of her autobiographical material re-enacts the experience not only of her own creator, Yezierska, but of future cycle writers who would use the form to traverse the line between autobiography and fiction and meld the techniques associated with both. Sandra Cisneros spent her young life seeking her voice and narrative material: "Poverty ... became the ghost and in an attempt to escape the ghost, I rejected what was at hand and emulated the voices of the poets I admired in books: big, male voices like James Wright and Richard Hugo and Theodore Roethke, all wrong for me" ("Ghosts" 72). It was only during a writing class years later that Cisneros realized that hers was a life that none of her classmates could know about and that it would provide the inspiration for her unique voice: "this is when I discovered my voice I'd been suppressing all along without realizing it" ("Ghosts" 73).

Perhaps the most surprising omission in story cycle criticism is Katherine Anne Porter's much-admired Miranda series; although they embody many of the conventions of the form, the Miranda stories are credited only a brief reference in

Mann's glossary. Dunn and Morris make no reference to Porter in their study. Strangely, Kennedy cites Porter's collection Flowering Judas as an example of the form but does not mention any of the more unified collections that feature Porter's recurring heroine. One reason for this neglect might be the method and order of publication of these narratives. The Miranda narratives comprise two long stories, Old Mortality and Pale Horse, Pale Rider and a sequence of short stories published collectively as The Old Order. The long stories were published in 1939 with a third story, Noon Wine, which bears no relation to the Miranda narratives at all. The subtitle of this collection is "Three Short Novels." Noon Wine takes the central position in the triptych, disrupting the sense of sequentiality. In 1944 Porter published The Leaning Tower, a collection of short stories that included The Old Order. The eight stories in this sequence stand together and return to the era of Miranda's childhood, previously depicted in Old Mortality.

Although Porter published the Miranda narratives in different collections over a period of five years, these linked stories anticipate many of the themes and conventions that would feature in later incarnations of the form. A "quick flighty" subject, Miranda is, in many ways, the archetypal recurring character (Porter Collected 341). She moves from the centre stage of one story to the margins of another, wrestling with tensions that would achieve great thematic resonance in story cycles of the future: the conflict between autonomous and positional identity and the tension and pull of Home and Family. Old Mortality is composed of "floating ends of narrative" documenting the lives of Miranda's ancestors; Miranda must unravel these elliptical, shifting versions of the past, whilst seeking self-definition beyond these precedents (Porter Collected 176). Her attempts to do so form a kind of meta-commentary on the power and precariousness of story: a theme that Eudora Welty

and Louise Erdrich would develop in their cycles. As an inscribed reader, piecing together the "fragments of tales" that represent her past and shape her present, Miranda Gay is a forerunner to cyclic heroines like Welty's Cassie Morrison and Erdrich's Cally Roy (Porter Collected 176): the narrator in The Antelope Wife who sets herself the task of reassembling the scattered pieces of her convoluted family history.

Miranda's development follows the pattern observed by many writers of the traditional *Bildungsroman.* In Writing Masculinities Ben Knights identifies the "traditional formulae of the male *Bildungsroman*": "exile from the relative comfort of your community"; "a journey whose rules seem to be established by the elders, a series of encounters, some helpful, some threatening"; "emergence after a series of adventures as the reflexive agent of your own story" (117). In the final stages of Old Mortality the reader learns of Miranda's failed elopement when she returns home. Miranda recognizes the consequences of this adventure in her father's reception: "There was no welcome for her, and there had not been since she had run away … He had not forgiven her, she knew that" (218-9). Nevertheless she perseveres in her pursuit of self-actualization, "clos[ing]" her mind "stubbornly against remembering … the legend of the past" (221). In confronting and eventually rejecting the "rules" of her elders and their narrative paradigms Miranda achieves a tenuous agency by the end of Pale Horse, Pale Rider.

As noted, Forrest Ingram identifies "recurrence and development" as the principal dynamic of the story cycle. In his analysis of the form, repetition functions primarily as a forward-moving dynamic, enabling the story cycle writer to develop discourses and themes. My own thesis will examine how the form enacts both the possibilities and problematics of repetition. In Time and Narrative Paul Ricoeur

observes that repetition "opens potentialities that went unnoticed, were aborted, or were repressed in the past" (76). Many story cycle writers exploit the form to reveal the possibility of change though revision. For other writers, the repetitive structure of the form reflects resistance to development and fear of change. Thus repetition becomes a form of imprisonment. Whether fostering revision or resistance, repetition in the story cycle itself serves as a means of achieving narrative coherence.

Katherine Anne Porter's Miranda stories manifest the complexities of repetition beautifully. On one level, repetition immunises the self from the threat of change. Throughout their lives, Miranda's grandmother and old Nannie have observed the code of 'The Old Order': a structure that has evolved from the re-enactment of fixed, stable repetitions. In "The Journey," a story from The Old Order, the two old women try to perpetuate this dynamic by assigning all events – past, present, future – to the past: "They talked about the past, really – always about the past. Even the future seemed like something gone and done with when they spoke of it. It did not seem an extension of their past, but a repetition of it" (327). It is this form of repetition that both attracts and troubles Miranda.

One of the most discussed stories from The Old Order, "The Grave," reveals the revisionist function of repetition. The story's main narrative line relates a childhood experience of Miranda, closing with her epiphany concerning her biological destiny. The story does not end here, however, but leaps forward to a moment in Miranda's adult life where she relives the epiphany, far removed from her home environment. In this new context, the moment assumes a different meaning and it is the deeply personal memory of her brother's long-forgotten "childhood face" that emerges as the epiphany's dominant image (368). Thus Porter illuminates

how repetition "opens potentialities," unveils latent meanings and re-galvanizes interpretive faculties.

George Cheatham offers a detailed analysis of Porter's manipulation of recurrence in his essay, "Death and Repetition in the Miranda Stories." He notes: "'Old Mortality' and 'Pale Horse, Pale Rider' … together repeat *The Old Order*," spanning "roughly the same chronological years of Miranda's life" (610-1). Cheatham illuminates how Pale Horse, Pale Rider poses questions about the "too pat earlier conclusion" in "The Grave" (611). Having reconciled the two forces of her life – "the mythic and the personal" – in "The Grave," the older Miranda in Pale Horse must choose between the nihilism of her secular, modern self or the inherited promise of salvation espoused by her family and represented by the silver dove she found in the grave (Cheatham 617). Despite the religious references that pervade Pale Horse, Pale Rider, Cheatham argues that Miranda's doubts about inherited religious narratives qualify the story's ending. Porter engineers this repetition of Miranda's religious ponderings "to recover not a new possibility of meaning from Miranda's experiences but the possibility of their meaninglessness" (624). Thus Porter reveals through the Miranda stories the many functions of repetition: a dynamic that enables both stability and change, uncovers hidden meanings or strips away meaning of any kind. In my own analysis of individual cycles, I will consider how the form becomes a medium for the many functions of repetition.

Mary McCarthy's The Company She Keeps appeared in 1942 and is a further incarnation of the story cycle form. McCarthy published the individual stories separately before assembling them into a single text. Despite the independent status of each component narrative, the text is generally classified as a novel. Margaret Sargent is the recurring character, appearing in all six stories to some degree; her

shifts in narrative stance typify the way that cycle writers employ the form to negotiate a range of perspectives. As an anonymous woman she is at the centre of the action in "Cruel and Barbarous Treatment," relating her story of adultery and divorce in the first person. We can only assume that this woman is Margaret until we read later stories that refer back to these events. Despite these cross-references, Louis Auchincloss seems to suggest that the protagonist is not Margaret: "The collection is centered about a fictional counterpart of the author who is called Margaret Sargent in all the stories but the first, where the protagonist is a heartless poseur" (173). Auchincloss's remark appears strange; not only do the following stories include references to these opening events, but they also provide plenty of evidence of Margaret's obsession with image. In the third story, "The Man in the Brooks Brothers Shirt," Margaret herself ponders whether "her whole way of life had been assumed for purposes of ostentation" (84).

Margaret retains her position as narrator in the second story but, although participating in the action, serves more as a witness to the events in her boss's life. In "The Man in the Brooks Brothers Shirt" she is once more at the story's centre, embarking on another shambolic love affair; time has evidently moved on from the first story. In the fourth narrative Margaret again moves to the margins as a dinner guest casting a satirical eye over the machinations of a male host; she deploys a universalising second-person voice and the reader cannot be sure that Margaret is narrating until the final pages when the protagonist addresses her directly. In "Portrait of the Intellectual as a Yale Man," a detached, third-person voice takes over, telling the story of Jim Barnett's intermittent affair with Margaret as he, like Margaret in the other stories, struggles to determine which "self" to be (226). McCarthy keeps Margaret on the periphery of the story here as she plays the role of

the mysterious 'other woman'. References to 'present-day' events that have already occurred in previous stories such as the train journey in "The Man" suggest that teleology is not McCarthy's concern.

McCarthy, like Porter, anticipates some of the themes that would dominate cycles in the latter half of the century. Like Annie Quirt, the heroine from Joyce Carol Oates's All the Good People I've Left Behind, Margaret faces the threat of fragmentation in her battle against social conformity. As she substitutes the insecurity of "harum-scarum, Bohemian habits" for the sterility of married life she remains determined to retain the "inner eye" that enables her to "detect her own flaws" (278, 303). In the final story Margaret achieves a transient peace when she visits her therapist. Having ceased to approach each part of her life as a new narrative and relinquished "the life-giving illusion, the sense of the clean slate, the I-will-start-all-over-and-this-time-it-is-going-to-be-different," she embraces the disorder of life (278). Her realization of the contingency of seemingly discontinuous encounters and episodes mirrors the reader's experience of the form; one's interpretation of the next narrative is inevitably shaped by preceding stories. During their session, therapist and patient try to evade those issues that generally invoke the clichés of psychoanalysis. Pondering this mutual resistance to neat diagnoses, Margaret realizes that: "The subject frightened them both, for it suggested to them that the universe is mechanical, utterly predictable, frozen, and this in its own way is quite as terrible as the notion that the universe is chaotic. It is essential for our happiness, she thought, to have both the pattern and the loose ends" (262). Margaret's acceptance of life's duality is a fitting image for McCarthy's rather loose form, in which the constant shifts in narrative voice and character status ensure that patterns are not easily established.

These brief case studies demonstrate that the first half of the twentieth century yielded several influential incarnations of the story cycle as well as the seminal forms of Welty and Jewett. Some women who used the form later in the century continue to be ignored by story cycle critics. Another surprising omission is the work of Ellen Gilchrist, whose entire oeuvre concerns a number of recurring heroines. Gilchrist draws attention to these recurrences, often dividing her collections up into sections of stories that focus on a particular heroine. Her works stretch along the continuum from seemingly miscellaneous collection to highly unified composite, becoming more unified as they progress. In her first volume of stories, In the Land of Dreamy Dreams (1981) she leaves the reader to make connections between several dispersed stories that feature Rhoda, the heroine who would become the prototype for her other recurring heroines. The contents pages of her next two collections, Victory Over Japan (1983) and Drunk With Love (1986) give the reader more guidance, clearly demarcating where the linked stories begin and end.

Whilst story cycle researchers ignore Gilchrist completely, her own critics place her firmly within this formal tradition. In The Fiction of Ellen Gilchrist Margaret Donovan Bauer offers intertextual readings of Gilchrist's work, illuminating resonances between her formal strategies and those of story cycle writers Katherine Anne Porter, Ernest Hemingway and Kate Chopin. Bauer views Gilchrist's exhaustive coverage of the lives of Rhoda, Nora Jane and her other recurring heroines as one "*organic story cycle* ... that continues to evolve as each new book appears" (2-3 Bauer's italics). Perhaps one of the reasons that commentators on the story cycle overlook Gilchrist is that she has included the novel form in what has become a macrocosmic cycle of southern belles.

In recent years, Gilchrist has gone one step further than other story cycle writers. In 1995 she published Rhoda: A Life in Stories, in which she assembled all of the Rhoda stories, placing them in chronological order for her readers. According to Bauer, the presence of gaps in this sequence – Rhoda's life during her forties remains a mystery in this volume – merely confirms that her Rhoda stories are, first and foremost, parts of a cycle. Even after the publication of this collection the reader does not feel that Rhoda's story is complete and thus awaits further instalments (Bauer 9).

Most story cycle critics acknowledge the form's breadth but continue to identify paradigms of the form. Some, like Dunn and Morris, provide a continuum in order to chart the form's development and create a kind of generic framework. Placing "the miscellaneous collection" and the "traditional novel" at opposite ends of the spectrum, Robert Luscher argues that Sherwood Anderson's Winesburg, Ohio and Eudora Welty's The Golden Apples "serve as the midpoint," as cycles that "illustrate a balanced tension between the independence of each story and the unity of the collection as a whole" (163). In his essay "Falling into Cycles," Thomas L. McHaney argues that the term 'cycle' carries more resonance for Welty's form than those of Ernest Hemingway, James Joyce and Sherwood Anderson:

> For all their marvellous interconnectedness, in comparison to *The Golden Apples*, the books ... cited here are not only quite loosely strung but also not so self-consciously concerned with the broad idea of cycle and things cyclic ... The author not only weaves a story cycle of her own but also pointedly evokes cyclic tales, poems, and music from several traditions" (176).

McHaney gives a fascinating and detailed analysis of all things cyclic in The Golden Apples. However it is perhaps the cyclic nature of the reader's trajectory that affirms this text's status as, if indeed such a concept exists, a paradigmatic 'cycle'. Of all the texts discussed in this thesis, Welty's is the one in which I found myself making more circular expeditions as I moved from story to story. Reading The Golden Apples, one enacts what Welty terms the "inward journey" of consciousness: "forward or back, seldom in a straight line, most often spiraling ... As we discover, we remember; remembering we discover" (Beginnings 102). It is owing to this cyclic navigation that I have decided to explore Welty's The Golden Apples first before moving on to further variations of the form.

1

"The Illusory Shape":

Eudora Welty's Aesthetic of Openness

"I always loved the conception of *Fata Morgana* – the illusory shape, the mirage that comes over the sea" (Welty Kuehl "Art" 88).

"The writer's mind and heart, where all this exterior is continually *becoming* something – the moral, the passionate, the poetic, hence the *shaping idea* – can't be mapped and plotted ... It's the form it takes when it comes out the other side, of course, that gives a story something unique – its life" (Welty Eye 109 Welty's italics).

In a television interview for BBC's Omnibus in 1985 Eudora Welty identified the central theme of her fiction as the "common dilemma of trying to communicate with your fellow human beings ... [of] understanding yourself in relation with the world and with other people." She continues: "when that breaks down, when you can still only see yourself, I think that's the dilemma that I use most often in my writing" (Welty A Writer's). For Welty, the most useful medium for this prevalent "shaping idea" would be the cyclic form that she chose for The Golden Apples: a form that realizes the possibilities and problematics of connection. Welty's only short story cycle became her favourite work, owing to this symbiosis of form and subject. Speaking to Charles T. Bunting in 1972 she confirms that The Golden Apples is "closest to my heart of all my books" (Bunting 714). She recalls

her methodology with a sense of wonder, describing how her cyclic form evolved incrementally from instinct and perseverance rather than a premeditated design. She tells Bunting:

> I didn't begin it as a book of connected stories. I only realized the stories were connected after I was about halfway through the book ... Quite suddenly I was writing about the same people. All their interconnections came to light. That's what I mean by the fascinations of fiction: things that go on in the back of your mind, that gradually emerge (714).

She explains this process again to Jean Todd Freeman in 1984, describing her role in it as that of a "belated detective" (192). Welty's patient quest for revelation is one that many story cycle writers would emulate in the latter half of the twentieth century. In 1985 Louise Erdrich described a similarly instinctive process for her first story cycle, Love Medicine: "I didn't have it chronological – I had no real theory behind the form. I started it way in the past ... then went to the present, and then back and forth without any real structure, just a kind of personal liking" (Grantham 16).

Welty's letters to her editor, Diarmund Russell, during this process reveal that she did not know of a definitive formal taxonomy for her new work. She describes her latest collection as "a conglomeration ... holding everything under the sun" and proposes the term "Variations on a Portfolio" as a possible title (Kreyling Author 135, 146). Emerging from Welty's vision of her new work are some of the hallmarks of the story cycle form. She writes that she is driven by "the hope that some over-all thing would emerge from the group, that might have a significance greater than that of the stories taken one by one – by virtue of accumulation and

familiarity and so on" (Kreyling Author 137). Resisting the pressure to turn her stories into a novel, she asks: "why not just go my own way, writing the stories as short stories, the way they occur to me, but letting them go on and be inter-related, but not inter-dependent?" (Kreyling Author 136). These letters express her growing enthusiasm for the freedom afforded by a form that relieves her of the "burden of the novel, with all that tying up of threads and preparing for this, that and the other" (137). She appeals to Russell:

> Just let the material take its natural course with me, and not force anything on it but just have the flexible plan ahead of a number of additional stories with these characters – the stories might move far from Battle Hill, [later Morgana] and up and down in their lifetimes, anywhere and any point a story might want to take them up. Not have plots and strings tied to them except for the short stories' sakes (136-7).

Nevertheless Welty felt the pull of the more familiar form when writing what would become the cycle's longest story, "June Recital." A month before this declaration of independence from the novel, she wrote:

> one thing I don't know about is my long story Golden Apples [later "June Recital"]. I've had ideas about *that* – maybe fruitless ones – that it might be really a novel, in which case I wouldn't want it coming out as a short story, prematurely ... In the same way it seemed to me perhaps the short story I've been working on just lately ["Moon Lake"] may be part of a novel too – hadn't realised that, till yesterday on a cable car (Kreyling Author 134).[4]

The length of "June Recital" – it occupies almost a third of the seven-story cycle – is only one feature that has prompted critics to query the generic identity of both the story and Welty's cycle as a whole. In "The Challenge of 'June Recital'" Donna Jarrell argues convincingly that while the story's lengthy digressions may appear to stretch the capacity of the story itself, they serve a significant purpose within the context of the cycle. Reading "June Recital" as a self-contained short story, Jarrell questions the need for the "elaborate," "novel-like" story of Miss Eckhart's history, claiming that the story's primary narrative thread – Cassie Morrison's expedition into the past and subsequent epiphany – could "be effected" without it (Jarrell 3). She observes that the history of Miss Eckhart follows the paradigmatic structure of chronological development generally associated with the novel. By including a detailed account of Miss Eckhart's history, Welty asks the reader to "dip into" a "new schema … that of the novel" (5). Jarrell argues that although Miss Eckhart's history is "not essential … for the success of 'June Recital' as a short story," it nevertheless "establishes [her] as an unforgettable character, and places her 'story' at the center of the structure of the seven-story sequence" (4).

Other stories in the cycle certainly support Jarrell's reading. Excluded by the town that frames her identity with prejudice and rumour, Miss Eckhart occupies a commanding position in the cycle, emerging as one of its most mobile characters. Her image imprints itself on the minds of her former pupils and surfaces at the most unexpected moments. When Eugene encounters the mysterious Spaniard in "Music from Spain" he is suddenly reminded of Miss Eckhart and expresses surprise that he could have forgotten her: "He had even forgotten all about old Miss Eckhart in Mississippi, and the lessons he and not Ran had had on her piano" (Welty Collected 408).

Welty herself recognizes the centrality and endurance of Miss Eckhart. In One Writer's Beginnings, she identifies her not only as the character who "persisted in spite of herself with the other characters in the stories" but who sits at the "solitary core" of her own consciousness: "Not in Miss Eckhart as she stands solidly and almost opaquely in the surround of her story, but in the making of her character out of my most inward and most deeply feeling self, I would say I have found my voice in my fiction" (101). Compounding Miss Eckhart's centrality to the cycle, Welty notes how the music teacher's recital emerged as a paradigm for her own act of narrative composition: "what I had done in assembling and connecting all the stories in *The Golden Apples*, and bringing them all off as one, was not too unlike the June recital itself" (101).

When talking to Charles Bunting, Welty discusses the technical differences between writing short stories and novels.

> In the case of the short story, you can't ever let the tautness of line relax. It has to be all strung very tight upon its single thread usually, and everything is subordinated to the theme of the story: characters and mood and place and time; and none of those things are as important as the development itself. Whereas in a novel you have time to shade a character, allow him his growth, in a short story a character hardly changes from beginning to end. He's in there for the purpose of that story only, and any other modification is ruled out (717).

For Welty the short story cycle becomes the perfect medium for circumventing the restrictions of the short story whilst achieving some of the form's most powerful effects. By delving into Miss Eckhart's history in "June Recital," she ventures down

a new narrative avenue; this enables her to relax the story's "tautness of line" and achieve a character development that would compromise the integrity of a completely freestanding story.

Although Miss Eckhart's history is not an essential component of the individual story, its place within the larger frame of the cycle is highly significant: "this memory of Miss Eckhart's life-fable ... helps us understand the fates of Cassie Morrison and Virgie Rainey as revealed in 'The Wanderers'" (Jarrell 4). Indeed the reader need only compare the reactions of Cassie and Virgie to Miss Eckhart to understand the differences between them. Although fascinated by her piano teacher, Cassie concedes that she shares her community's distrust and prejudice towards outsiders: "she thought that somewhere ... there could have been for Miss Eckhart a little opening wedge – a crack in the door ... But if I had been the one to see it open, she thought slowly, I might have slammed it tight forever" (Welty Collected 308). Cassie eventually takes Miss Eckhart's position as music teacher and, like her predecessor, remains an old maid. However, she does not become, as Jarrell argues, a "full-blown version of Miss Eckhart" (7); she is destined to remain "a dreamer dreaming with reservations" (Welty Collected 296). In contrast to Cassie, Virgie emulates their teacher by resisting the insular sensibilities of the Morganans and goes one step further by striking out on her own. In the final pages of the cycle Miss Eckhart's influence continues to assert itself as Virgie, the recalcitrant pupil, comes to terms with the "separateness" she shares with her old teacher (Welty Collected 460): a separateness that Miss Eckhart, bound by circumstance to a town that will not accept her, could not fully express. Using the terms of Ian Reid, Jarrell notes how Miss Eckhart serves as a "part-for-whole-mirror" for the entire cycle (7). Manoeuvred into a marginalized position by Morgana's community, Miss Eckhart

nevertheless occupies a central position both in the landscape of the story cycle and the wider world of Welty's fiction.

It is not only the length of some of the stories that prompts critics and readers to query the generic status of The Golden Apples. Welty's use of myth in each story leads critics to analyse the text as a tightly unified whole. Paul Binding writes that the unity between the characters is "shown for the living force it is, by mythology" (164).[5] In conversation with Bunting Welty reveals that numerous students have dedicated entire theses to verifying that The Golden Apples is in fact a novel: "I've had students write to me and say, "'I'm writing a thesis to prove that *The Golden Apples* is a novel. Please send me....' They want me to support them. So I write back and say that it isn't a novel, I'm sorry. They go right ahead of course" (715). Most critics are more tentative in declaring the text a novel outright; they acknowledge the potential independence of the seven stories but argue that the reader will be best served by approaching the text as they would a novel. In A Season of Dreams Alfred Appel opens his chapter on the cycle with the following piece of advice: "Although each was published separately, the seven interrelated stories in *The Golden Apples* can best be read as a novel" (205). Thomas McHaney justifies the impulse to define the text in such terms by tracing it to "a sincere desire to canonize an admirable piece of work within an accepted form" ("Falling" 173). As Elizabeth Evans aptly notes, however, the inclusion of The Golden Apples in The Collected Stories of Eudora Welty in 1980, offers confirmation of Welty's unchanging view of her form and serves effectively as perhaps "her final word on the subject" (Evans 64).

* * *

"Easter's hand hung down, opened outward. Come here, night, Easter might say, tender to a giant, to such a dark thing. And the night, obedient and graceful, would kneel to her" (Welty Collected 361-2).

Critics have made much of Welty's affiliation with feminist aesthetics, whilst recognizing that she wrote without a specific feminist agenda.[6] This reading of The Golden Apples will focus upon her exploitation of the short story cycle form to debunk prescriptive ideologies of gender. Without designating Welty as a feminist, this exploration will illuminate the affinities between her formal poetics and some of the tenets of feminism. If, like Nina Carmichael, we interpret Easter's extended hand as a gesture towards transformation and connection, it becomes a paradigm for Welty's aesthetic of openness. In The Golden Apples Welty uses the short story cycle as a site both for transgressive characters like Easter – those "human beings terribly at large, roaming on the face of the earth" – and for her own artistic concerns: her interest in straining generic boundaries and rupturing conventional narrative structures to explore a more relational, open conception of subjectivity (Welty Collected 330).

Many female writers have used the form to recast the linear quest plot that has become identified with masculine experience. Writing about Sarah Orne Jewett, Josephine Donovan notes that the quest narrative is usually represented by "progressive plots" that are "oriented toward events happening sequentially or climactically" (Donovan 218, 219). In The Country of the Pointed Firs Jewett decentres her questing hero by placing his narrative of enterprise and adventure early in the sequence. As Elizabeth Ammons notes in her reading of Jewett's cycle, Captain Littlepage's story is a paradigm of the "solitary, climax-oriented, city-

focused literature – significantly coming from a man and totally about men – that the narrator … accepted as the model" (Ammons "Finding" 48). Jewett presents the story at the beginning of her sequence because "It is to be confronted early on, appreciated, and then moved beyond" ("Finding" 49). In The Golden Apples Welty goes further than Jewett in her containment of this structure by denying her questing hero the privilege of narration. Constantly leaving the home to assert his ego boundaries through sexual encounters, King MacLain pursues the archetypal trajectory of the quest hero, identified by Mary Brewer as one of "adventure, project, enterprise, and conquest" ("Loosening" 1153). In The Golden Apples Welty exiles the male wanderer to the margins of the form by denying him a voice and staging the process of fictionalisation that shapes his identity.[7]

In "Shower of Gold," Welty alerts the reader immediately to the duality of King's status within the storytelling community and the cycle itself. He exists simultaneously as a discrete subject – he is the self-commanding author of his own quest, wandering in and out of the community and negotiating his sexual encounters with its women according to his will – and as a vehicle for the storytelling and sexual energies of Morgana's female watchers and waiters. For Katie Rainey, the act of tracking King MacLain displaces unfulfilled needs and compulsions: "Why do I try to figure? Maybe because Fate Rainey ain't got a surprise in him, and proud of it" (265).

In her examination of narrative trajectories, Margery Hourihan notes how the conventional, heroic, quest plot moves "both towards concealment and towards disclosure, creating uncertainty and constantly promising the reader that all will be revealed" (46). With his sporadic appearances and enigmatic gestures, King perpetuates this dynamic, tantalizing the storytellers of his home town. As readers

and co-authors of his plot, the Morganans play along, responding "Just like he wants us to" (Welty Collected 263-4). By mapping out his latest move and speculating upon his next one, they respond to the repetitive dynamic of concealment and disclosure.

Any attempts to elude the communal eye of the storytellers result in failure for the wanderer whose story depends upon the teller. In the final story, "The Wanderers," King has returned to Morgana for good. In a rare moment of articulation, he registers his loss of control over his story: he has, he tells Virgie, "ended up at the wrong end" of life (443). In the final story Welty presents her hero's dissatisfaction with this ending in a series of comic moments that infantilize the aging King: he makes a "hideous face" at Virgie that is like "a yell at everything – including death, not leaving it out"; we witness him mischievously creeping down the hall for food, "as if nobody could see him" (446).

In Feminine Fictions Patricia Waugh observes that modern representations of the male hero have integrated elements of the "master-plots" of nineteenth-century history, perpetuating the image of the male self "conceived in terms of containedness, difference, autonomy" (Waugh 17). This kind of subjectivity does not always thrive in the short story cycle. As a nonhierarchic and fragmented form, the story cycle confounds notions of fixed origins, queries identity boundaries and decentres master-plots. The form enacts the possibility of multiple beginnings and connections and renewable identities; as such it becomes the ideal space for representing the kind of subjectivity that has become associated with the female subject: a selfhood that develops from "relationship and dispersal" rather than "the maintenance of boundaries and distance" or "the subjugation of the other" (Waugh 22).

In One Writer's Beginnings, Welty illuminates the centrality of confluence to her poetics: "I'm prepared now to use the wonderful word *confluence*, which of itself exists as a reality and a symbol in one. It is the only kind of symbol that for me as a writer has any weight, testifying to the pattern, one of the chief patterns, of human experience" (102). As a fluid, open form the story cycle is a particularly fertile ground for this kind of vision. Images of reversibility and merging permeate The Golden Apples, as ego boundaries are tested and often erased. Cassie experiences a disconcerting moment of transformation when she suddenly realizes that, "without thinking she could *be* Mr Voight" (296 Welty's italics). Transformations are less disturbing for Morgana's female wanderer, Virgie Rainey. In "The Wanderers" she returns home to bury her mother and submerges herself in the Big Black River, sensing that "in the next moment she might turn into something without feeling it shock her" (440).

Virgie's openness to transformation signals her rejection of the self/other polarity upon which King's conquests depend. Like Katherine Anne Porter's young Miranda, Virgie is a "quick flighty" subject. Welty initially preserves her elusiveness, exploiting the elasticity of the form to limit her appearances and comply with her resistance to definition. The reader's first glimpse of Virgie is as a moving image of transgression; Loch Morrison spies her leaping across the ditch with her sailor in full flight towards sexual consummation. For most of the cycle she appears only within the bounds of Morgana's consciousness; where the community mythologizes King for his defiance of their boundaries, it castigates Virgie for her air of self-sufficiency and abandon. Virgie is a member of an established if rather lowly Morganan family, yet she leaves home and returns at will, neither spurning the community nor defining herself in terms of its norms. She elides the difference

between inside and outside, disconcerting Morgana's carefully constructed boundaries.

In the final story Welty centralizes the consciousness of one of her autonomous "wanderers" for the first time. Here the differences between Virgie and the cycle's other wanderers come to light. King's identity as quest hero is predicated upon the community's mythologizing of his actions. Other wanderers such as Easter the orphan in "Moon Lake" and the Spaniard who appears only in "Music from Spain" are entirely self-defining. In many ways Virgie is the archetypal cyclic heroine; she enacts the dynamics of the form, eventually reconciling the competing demands of personal and positional identity. Her sensibility in "The Wanderers" provides a model for future heroines of the modern short story cycle. Whereas King's sense of identity depends on the suspension of boundaries and the separation of self and other, Virgie challenges hierarchical polarities:

> Virgie never saw it differently, never doubted that all the opposites on earth were close together, love close to hate, living to dying; but of them all, hope and despair were the closest bond – unrecognizable one from the other sometimes, making moments double upon themselves, and in the doubling double again, amending but never taking back (452-3).

Rachel Blau DuPlessis defines this kind of perception as a "both/and" vision that signals "the end of the either-or, dichotomized universe, proposing monism … in opposition to dualism, a dualism pernicious because it valorizes one side above another, and makes a hierarchy where there were simply twain" ("Etruscans" 276). This either/or thinking characterizes King MacLain's consciousness: he is either heroic as the romantic quester or defeated as the bounded, domesticated husband.

Similarly, the Morganans exhibit this kind of absolutism; people are either integrated into communal legend or written out of it. Virgie rejects this hierarchic model for a "both/and vision" that enables her to sit with the "old black thief" at the end of the cycle, "alone and together" (Welty Collected 461). Virgie embraces the kind of duality that is represented by the humming-bird, a recurring motif in the cycle. The humming-bird performs the function of the 'topical sign' identified by J. Gerald Kennedy as a convention of the story cycle form: presenting itself periodically throughout the cycle, it figures the possible unity of opposites: it is "Metallic and misty together, tangible and intangible, splendid and fairy-like" (308).

Gender polarities remain firmly in place for Morgana's male wanderers; the home is designated as female and domestic boundaries are shunned. Loch Morrison moves to New York and does not return to his home town. King returns reluctantly to Morgana when mortality catches up with him. Virgie's wandering has taken the form of the alternative quest outlined by DuPlessis in Writing Beyond the Ending: a quest through which "the hero … breaks with individualism in her rupture from gender-based ends," "encompasses opposites," and sustains "a psychic interplay between boundaries and boundlessness" (142).

To polarize King MacLain and Virgie Rainey as diametrically opposed paradigms of masculine/feminine identities belies Welty's aesthetic of openness. Whilst we might define Virgie's questing sensibility as ontologically female, her recognition of the contiguity of life's "opposites" implies her rejection of binaries. Much critical attention has focused on the androgynous qualities of Welty's most autonomous characters.[8] In "Music from Spain" Welty explicates the femininity of the red finger-nailed Spaniard: "he pulled in the big Spaniard – who for all his majestic weight proved light on his feet, like a big woman who turns graceful once

she's on the dance floor" (401). The Spaniard dismantles more boundaries by moving beyond this androgynous state during his musical performance at Aeolian Hall: "a smile was seen to have come on his face – and to be enjoying itself there; it had the enchanted presence of a smile on the face of a beast" (403). Miss Eckhart reaches a similarly boundless state during her impromptu performance in "June Recital": "Miss Eckhart assumed an entirely different face" that "could have belonged to someone else – not even to a woman, necessarily. It was the face a mountain could have, or what might be seen behind the veil of a waterfall" (300). In "Moon Lake," Easter, the mysterious orphan, confounds the gender identifications of the other children. She stands apart as the only girl to have "started her breasts" and the "withstanding gold" of her hair distinguishes her from the other orphans who sport "bangs like young boys' and old men's hair" (347, 346, 346). Countering this pronounced femininity are her freedom of movement and apparent fearlessness: "The one named Easter could fall flat as a boy, elbows cocked, and drink from the cup of her hand with her face in the spring" (346). This androgyny is one of the qualities that secures Easter position at the story's centre as a testing ground for the children's social sensibilities. She becomes the main preoccupation of the girls at the camp; even the unshakable Jinny Love acknowledges her singularity: "'Even after all this is over, Easter, I'll always remember you'" (358).

Comparison of these impenetrable, androgynous wanderers furnishes further parallels; all three characters possess an artistic intelligence that separates them from their communities. Miss Eckhart and the Spaniard make their livings from music, and it is surely no coincidence that Easter, who, like her fellow wanderers, "never did intend to explain anything unless she had to," delivers only one significant revelation about herself: her intention to become a singer (358). Eugene MacLain's

most resonant memory of his tragic daughter Fan is of her response to the Spaniard's music: "When the music began the child had held out her little arms, saying Pierre Monteaux came out of *Babar* and she wanted him down here and would spank him" (401). Fan's gesture of reception to the music recalls Easter's open hand and frames her as another potential wanderer, had she lived.

Welty's delineations of both the Spaniard's and Miss Eckhart's performances illuminate the attractions of music as an alternative mode of expression: it is both a fluid and fractional form that disregards temporal boundaries – "Miss Eckhart struck the music open midway" – and devastates the kind of order sought by Morganan rituals (300). In "Eudora Welty and the Multitudinous Golden Apples," Thomas L. McHaney compares the dynamics of Welty's cyclic form to those of a musical composition: he notes how the stories may be "regarded as movements like those in a piece of cyclic music, a sonata or a symphony." He adds: "Given all the references to Beethoven in 'June Recital' … it might even be that we should think of that great composer's powerful symphonies which, like *The Golden Apples*, hold the individual movements together with a strong textual consistency that comes from the reiteration of themes and figures and tonal material" (611).[9] As previously noted, Welty herself compared her act of formal innovation with Miss Eckhart's arrangement of the June recital. Story cycle writer Colin Channer also sees strong affinities between the form and music. Indeed musical paradigms played a greater part in his conception of his cyclic form than literary models. His "preferred metaphor" for his form is "the concept album" (Appendix 335).

For Welty's wanderers, music represents a powerful means of subverting the response of the listener: "'Play it again, Miss Eckhart!' they all cried in startled recoil, begging for the last thing they wanted" (302). It is through her delineation of

the "roaming … lost beasts" who occupy a liminal space in Morgana's history, that Welty unveils the subversive potential of marginalization (330). Whilst Welty's thematics favour the specificity of the individual and look beyond the prescriptive bounds of gender, her poetics clearly resonate with the discourses of feminism. Julia Kristeva's vision of "woman" places her, like Welty's autonomous wanderers, beyond signification: "I therefore understand by 'woman', that which cannot be represented, that which is not spoken, that which remains outside naming and ideologies" ("La Femme" 21). The duality of marginalization is a recurring theme in feminist criticism. Susan Watkins notes: "To be on the margin or borderline is to be simultaneously away from the centre and yet essential to defining where that centre is" (4). Similarly, Toril Moi states:

> if patriarchy sees women as occupying a marginal position within the symbolic order, then it can construe them as the *limit* or borderline of that order … but because of their very marginality they will also always seem to recede into and merge with the chaos of the outside … they will be neither inside nor outside, neither known nor unknown (167 Moi's italics).

For the Morganans, characters like Easter and Miss Eckhart occupy this disconcerting position. They embody the threat of the uncontainable world beyond the communal frontier: a world glimpsed occasionally through freakish events like Miss Eckhart's explosive performance and Easter's sensational resurrection at Moon Lake. Welty's representation of marginal characters is paradigmatic of the ways that writers from minority groups continue to use the short story cycle to confound notions of centrality.

Feminist critics stress patriarchy's marginalization of women but in Welty's cyclic world no status is gender specific. "The Whole World Knows" and "Music from Spain," the fifth and sixth stories in the cycle, present the dilemmas of the MacLain twins as they struggle to shape an identity in the shadow of King's legacy. Although Ran MacLain's first-person voice ostensibly drives "The Whole World Knows," other discourses threaten constantly to contain or obscure it. The narrative incorporates Snowdie MacLain's maternal badgering, King and Eugene's weighty silences, Miss Perdita Mayo's charged monologues, and the collusive voices of the "Circle" (380). The awareness of outside knowledge and signification, verified by the title of the story, inhibits Ran's voice. This discursive fluidity threatens to dislodge him from the role of narrator, mirroring his tenuous position as husband, father, provider and inheritor of King's legacy. Ran's plaintive appeals for empathy occupy an increasingly liminal space in the narrative.

Also inhibiting Ran is his ambivalence towards the discourses of interiority. In his study of masculine dilemmas in modern fiction, Ben Knights illuminates masculinity's "deep suspicion of introspection, conventionally associated with dreaminess, passivity and hence with feminisation" (1): the kinds of activities and qualities we associate with Cassie Morrison, described by Welty as "the girl who hung back," and Nina Carmichael, the young dreamer of "Moon Lake" (Welty Beginnings 101). These characters aspire momentarily to the lives of the wanderers but ultimately retreat into preordained roles, destined to dream only with "reservations" (Welty Uncollected 296). Uncomfortable with his subjectivity, Ran buries his most urgent thoughts in the midst of circumstantial detail; he tentatively disperses his revealing petitions to his absent father throughout the narrative, curtailing them as if in fear of what Henry James termed "the terrible *fluidity* of self-

revelation" (xx James's italics). Eugene MacLain, Ran's twin, experiences a similar kind of verbal paralysis in "Music from Spain" when he attempts to explain his assault on his wife: "It was a life-long trouble, he had never been able to express himself at all when it came to the very moment" (421).

Ben Knights attributes this masculine apprehension to hegemonic gender identifications: "the opposition of word and deed is tinctured with a female/male opposition ... Ambivalence towards the feminising word marks the lore of deeds" (117). The dynamic between Ran's adventurer father and Morgana's female storytellers enacts this opposition; rather than tell his own story, King offers his deeds to the feminising words of the town gossips. However Ran's attempts to emulate his father culminate in desperate deeds: his bungled suicide attempt and the rape of Maideen. As Knights observes:

> Part of the problem for the man who knows that he is not living up to the heroic narratives is the sense of a gap in his own consciousness: the rankling awareness of the disparity between the model and the actuality ... Violence against self or others is one response to the dissonance between ideal and real self: an attempt to act out in however self-destructive a physical form the dominance that you believe you were promised but of which the world has cheated you (190-1).

This "rankling awareness" haunts Ran's voice as he becomes increasingly conscious of the hiatus between his "ideal and real self." Abortive fantasies of violence infiltrate his fractured narrative as he seeks admission into "the lore of deeds":

> I fired point-blank at Jinny – more than once. It was close range – there was barely room between us suddenly for the pistol to come

> up … I was watching Jinny and I saw her pouting childish breasts, excuses for breasts, sprung full of bright holes where my bullets had gone. But Jinny didn't feel it (385).

Eugene's attempts to assert the self through violence are equally fruitless. In "Music from Spain" his irrational assault on Emma leads only to further disembodiment: "His act … slipped loose from him, turned around and looked at him in the form of a question" (394). Eugene's internal dialogue betrays the disjunction between "the model and the actuality"; Welty italicizes the voice that encodes the masculine ideal, marking the disparity with Eugene's "real self": *"Why not strike her? And if she thought he would stay around only to hear her start tuning up, she had another think coming. Let her take care and go about her business, he might do it once more and not so kindly"* (395). When read in the context of Eugene's story, this macho discourse verges on the absurd. In reality, Eugene perceives female sexuality as a threat to self. Grotesque images of women plague him throughout the day: the provocative mechanical dummy in the House of Mirth and the menacing vision of Emma's sexual advance, her kisses assailing him "like blows" (417, 423). By placing her male subjects in worlds of shifting discourses and tenuous realities, Welty challenges the viability of the 'heroic' narratives that they aim to emulate.

The Morganans, however, remain determined to make a hero of King MacLain's son. Eugene eludes their grasp but Ran eventually submits to communal fictions. Morgana's either/or mentality is no more apparent than in its responses to two potentially taboo narratives. When Miss Eckhart is reportedly raped and refuses to leave town, the community spurns her. However, Ran MacLain's scandal becomes his finest hour in the eyes of the Morganans. The female storytellers weave

their version of the narrative into Morgana's tapestry of MacLain legends, framing Ran as the "bad twin," a role that secures him the position of town mayor: "They had voted for him for that – for his glamour and his story, for being a MacLain and the bad twin, for marrying a Stark and then for ruining a girl and the thing she did … They had voted for the revelation; it had made their hearts faint, and they would assert it again" (433). Virgie recognizes Ran's uneasiness with this role that has been authored by the community: "Ran knew that every minute, there in the door he stood it" (433). In the open terrain of the short story cycle, particular moments or revelations often achieve full significance only within the context of other narratives. By working backwards the reader may verify Virgie's evaluation of Ran's displacement. A single sentence in the fifth story illuminates the absurdity of Ran's position at the end of the cycle: his rare self-revelation that, "To me, ambition's always been a mystery" (382). Through Ran's ensnared plot Welty reveals how men themselves fall prey to patriarchal discourses and paradigms. As Ben Knights writes: "to collude with a system of power it is not necessary to be objectively a beneficiary of that system, only to be persuaded that you are a beneficiary" (6).

In "The Whole World Knows," Ran's autonomy disintegrates under the controlling gaze of the Morganan storytellers. The eye of the story, and arguably the whole cycle, is that of Morgana. In several of the narratives, this communal eye is figured in the penetrative, inescapable glare of the redoubtable Mrs Lizzie Stark:

> My wife's mother – Miss Lizzie Morgan, Father – put her face to her bedroom window first thing. She'd know it first if I came back, all right. Parting her curtains with a steel crochet hook, she looked down on Ran MacLain coming to her door, and bringing who-on-earth with him (377).

Reference to the self in the third person verifies Ran's status as the object of communal signification: a far cry from his stance in the preceding story, "Moon Lake," in which he exercises the hegemony of the male onlooker at the scene of Easter's resuscitation:

> Under his cap bill, Ran MacLain set his gaze – he was twenty-three, his seasoned gaze – on Loch and Easter on the table. He could not be prevented from considering them all. He moved under the tree. He held his gun under his arm. He let two dogs run loose, and almost imperceptibly, he chewed gum. Only Miss Moody did not move away from him (369).

Even here Ran's autonomy is undermined by Welty's mock-authoritative tone, her solemn, measured sentences, and the addition of the word "seasoned." The authority of his position hinges upon recognition from his community, signalled by their retreat from his space. By the fifth story Ran's insecurities have risen to the surface and by the final story he has submitted to the pressure of communal surveillance.

Throughout the cycle Welty presents acts of looking and signification that subvert the traditional dynamics of gendered gazing. In "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" Laura Mulvey describes the conventional positions assigned to each gender: "the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly" (442). This split "supports the man's role as the active one of advancing the story, making things happen" (443). Welty's cycle presents a fund of moments that stage a reversal of these gender roles. As we see in Ran's story, it is the women who advance and shape his narrative destiny. In "Sir Rabbit," the third story in the cycle, Welty dismantles this traditional split by casting Mattie

Will Sojourner in the role of sexual adventuress and signifying onlooker to a passive King MacLain.

Mattie's encounter with King is framed by her childhood experience with the MacLain boys. When Mattie senses the presence of the twins in Morgana's woods she anticipates meeting their father. Dwelling on the outskirts of Morgana, the young Mattie is eager to display her familiarity with the legend of King MacLain: "Oh-oh. I know you, Mr. King MacLain! ... When it came down to it, scared or not, she wanted to show him she'd heard all about King MacLain and his way" (331). This time she has mistaken King's twin sons for the man himself, but she is eventually given an opportunity to enter the legend when she is seduced by King, years later. Although Mattie submits to King, she finds that, during their encounter, "she could answer to his burden now, his whole blithe, smiling, superior, frantic existence" (338). She destabilizes the frame of the male quest myth, in which, to quote Margery Hourihan, "the women are, essentially, not 'characters' at all, but symbols of events in the hero's psyche" (156). At the end of the story a somnolent King becomes the unsuspecting object of Mattie's gaze and is reduced to the comic image of a promiscuous rabbit whose "*habit*" is to "*dance in the wood*" (340): "With her almost motherly sway of the head and arms to help her, she gazed at the sounding-off, sleeping head, and the neck like a little porch column in town ... the bent leg and the straight, all those parts looking no more driven than her man's now" (339-40). The use of "motherly" infantilizes King and compounds Mattie's authority as the determining voyeur. She thus rejects the preordained role in the legend of the adventurer's hapless victim. Her deviance from the town's fictional paradigm manifests itself in her physical position at the end of the story. Emerging from the woods, she can survey all of Morgana stretched before her, "all in rays, like a giant

sunflower in the dust of Saturday" (340). Rather than reflecting on her admission into Morganan legend, she re-imagines the more intimate experience of her youthful tumble with the MacLain twins. By centralizing a past experience in favour of what is ostensibly the main narrative line, Mattie Will enacts one of the key methodologies of the story cycle reader.

Other gazers in the cycle exercise less control. In "June Recital" Loch Morrison's status as unobserved onlooker awakens his creative energies; the association of gazing with narrating is played out by Loch, who assumes the authoritative stance of the storyteller: "Loch gave the sailor time, for it was he, Loch, who was in command of leniency here; he was giving him day after day" (278). Loch's authority is illusory; through his telescopic perspective he weaves a laconic narrative full of inaccuracies: gaps gradually emerge that the reader, as surrogate-voyeur, must fill. Loch fails to identify Miss Eckhart and mistakes King MacLain for Mr Voight.

Loch reassumes the position of chief gazer in "Moon Lake." He dons the guise of the unitary, "wizardlike" wanderer, emulating the elusive movements of King MacLain (343); dwelling in his "tent of separation," he is a silent and invisible Puck-like figure whose presence "seriously affected" the girls (374, 342). He presides over "the Dip" and dictates the pace of the day with the strident blasts of his horn (343). In the closing vignette his authority collapses as Welty locates him in the same vulnerable position as the sleeping King of "Sir Rabbit"; he ends the story as the unwitting object of a feminine focalisation that deflates his near-mythic status as the wandering, onlooking male. His posing betrays the narcissism that affiliates him with the girls, undercutting his daily assertions of masculine difference: "he

stood there studying and touching his case of sunburn in a Kress mirror like theirs" (373).

Ran MacLain succumbs to the tyranny of the communal gaze, but other characters discover the means of subverting its power. Easter, like the other wanderers in the cycle, is one of the most watched characters in The Golden Apples. As the "dominant" orphan at Moon Lake camp she is the object of constant speculation and becomes a site for the fantasies of the young Morganans (346): "Jinny Love's gaze was fastened on Easter, and she dreamed and dreamed of telling on her for smoking, while the sun, even through leaves, was burning her pale skin pink, and she looked the most beautiful of all" (358). In the final scenes of "Moon Lake" Easter occupies a similar position to the unsuspecting Loch and King. Sprawled across the table, naked and unconscious, she becomes the focal point for the girls' uneasy, rudimentary sexual fantasies. Unlike Ran, King and Loch, Easter's status as spectacle compounds her autonomy. When she recovers, she retains her mystique; the experience has served merely to heighten her elusiveness:

> In that passionate instant, when they reached Easter and took her up, many feelings returned to Nina ... At least what had happened to Easter was out in the world, like the table itself. There it remained – mystery ... Their minds could hardly capture it again, the way Easter was standing free in space, then handled and turned over by the blue air itself (372).

Thus Welty reveals how, to quote Beth Newman, "the gaze ... however coercive, is never a locus of complete control" and how it "even opens a space for resisting that control" (Newman "Situation" 458).

* * *

Resistant spaces abound in the short story cycle, a form that enables characters to "stand[ ] free in space" and elude the shackles of linearity. In One Writer's Beginnings Welty identifies clock time as a divisive, prescriptive force that "spaces us apart so inhibitingly" (102). In The Eye of the Story she illuminates how the fiction writer might outmanoeuvre the "arbitrary, bullying power" of "clock time" (165): "Fiction does not hesitate to accelerate time, slow it down, project it forward or run it backward, cause it to skip over or repeat itself ... it can expand a single moment like the skin of a balloon or bite off a life like a thread" (166). As an elliptical form that enables multiple repetitions and beginnings, the story cycle is the ideal site for the fictional experimentations described by Welty. Although the stories in The Golden Apples are arranged in chronological order, this structure is almost incidental. Cutting across the linear axis are the shifting time frames of each individual story. The temporal structure of "Sir Rabbit" inverts that of its predecessor, "June Recital" by framing a present-day event with a memory of the past. Similarly, the temporal experiences of self-governing characters like Virgie challenge Morgana's acquiescence to historical time: "Time goes like a dream, no matter how hard you run" declares Katie Rainey in "Shower of Gold" (267). In his study of the short story cycle, Forrest Ingram states: "Time does not exist in a cycle for the sake of hurrying through a single series of events, but rather for going over the same kind of action again" (24). In a text of endlessly interlocking cycles of signification, Welty transports the reader backwards and forwards as moments "double upon themselves, and in the doubling double again" (Welty Collected 453).

Through her form Welty mutes the emphasis on historicity and teleology. In Time and the Novel: the Genealogical Imperative, Patricia Tobin links these modalities to the rudiments of "patriarchalism." She notes how "the prestige of

cause over effect ... is analogous to the prestige of the father over the son" and how "Both initiate a time that may be imagined as a unidirectional and irreversible arrow, whose trajectory is determined by an original intention" (12). In her observations on the modern novel she notes how linear plots have been usurped by more cyclic structures. Tobin contends that genealogy is unable to "survive the assault on linearity" and observes that "All the sins against the family – adultery, illegitimacy, bigamy ... and especially incest can be found within a spectrum of values that arches from the tragic recognition of disorder to its joyous celebration" (12).

In The Golden Apples Welty repeatedly violates Morgana's lines of descent with covert narratives of adultery and potential incest. Critics have speculated at some length on the parentage of several Morgana adolescents, suggesting that Loch Morrison, Virgie Rainey, and Easter are, in reality, the offspring of King MacLain.[10] The most disturbing of these sublimated narratives has its origins in the revelation of Maideen Sumrall's ancestry in "The Whole World Knows." As Ran begins to tire of their relationship, he reveals: "And now I was told her mother's maiden name. God help me, the name Sojourner was laid on my head like the top teetering crown of a pile of things to remember. Not to forget, never to forget the name of Sojourner" (386). It is Ran's knowledge of future events that heightens the significance Maideen's name; he will forever be associated with her death. The reader of the short story cycle often finds herself in a more informed position than a character who may not be aware of other narrative threads. If the reader reverts to the events of "Sir Rabbit," she will recall Mattie Will Sojourner's fleeting liaison with Ran's father. Thus Ran's rape of Maideen in "The Whole World Knows" carries incestuous undertones; ironically, it is the deeds of the father that pose the greatest threat to patriarchal structures.

Susan Donaldson's insightful essay on "contending narratives" in Go Down, Moses notes a similar strategy in Faulkner's story cycle; the form enables Faulkner to rupture McCaslin's master plot of self-reduplication with aberrant narratives. Donaldson writes:

> if the McCaslin ledgers and the continuous threads they spin suggest the totality of a master narrative, the seven individual stories making up *Go Down, Moses* offer unceasing resistance to all attempts to establish unity and continuity ... juxtaposing tales of runaway slaves, recalcitrant tenant farmers, black grief, Indian lore, hunting stories, love affairs, and funerals, those stories pose narrative strategies of interruption and discontinuity in marked contrast with the stifling bondage of the McCaslin ledgers. No sooner does one tale begin, it seems, then it is interrupted, sidetracked, discontinued, and backtracked ("Contending" 139).

Unlike Faulkner, Welty buries these deviating plotlines within her cycle rather than placing them alongside the master narrative.

As a young girl Virgie Rainey rejects temporal boundaries when she refuses to play to the metronome's regulatory beat: the symbolic barrier that Miss Eckhart's students must cross in order to achieve a more experiential understanding of time. By abandoning the metronome, both Miss Eckhart and Virgie dismiss what Frank Kermode describes in The Sense of an Ending as "simple chronicity ... the emptiness of *tock-tick*, humanly uninteresting successiveness" (46). For the teacher and her student, *chronos* – "'passing time'" or "'waiting time'" – becomes *kairos* – "a point in time filled with significance, charged with a meaning derived from its relation to the end" (Kermode 47). This kind of temporality best reflects the reader's

experience of short story cycles such as Welty's: sequentiality collapses and "that which was conceived of as simply successive becomes charged with past and future" (Kermode 46).

The story cycle is the ideal form for enacting the shift between *chronos* and *kairos*. In "Sir Rabbit," King MacLain's seduction of Mattie Will casts a new, refracting light upon her spring tumble with the MacLain twins: "They were soft and jumpy! ... they were like young deer, or even remoter creatures ... kangaroos ... For the first time Mattie Will thought they were mysterious and sweet – gamboling now she knew not where" (340-1). For Mattie, *chronos* becomes *kairos* as the simple order of events is disrupted and a single point of time in the past becomes "charged with meaning derived from its relation" to her recent encounter with King.

The ending of the story signifies Mattie Will's "bundling together" of her "perception of the present, memory of the past, and expectation of the future, in a common organization" (Kermode 46). Kermode observes how writers as diverse as E. M. Forster and Robert Musil equate this transformation from chronicity to a more fluid temporality with "the experience of love, the erotic consciousness which makes divinely satisfactory sense out of the commonplace person" (46). Mattie Will's recovery of her erotic consciousness opens up a space beyond her commonplace marriage to Junior Holifield. Similarly, Virgie's "all-embracing" experience in the water is charged with erotic overtones: the immersion and fleeting loss of the self, the "suggestions and withdrawals" of the grass and mud, the transient union with nature (440).

Feminist theories are again pertinent to Welty's representations of time. In her study of patterns in women's fiction Annis Pratt notes how the female hero displays a "quality of consciousness" that is "alinear" and "cyclic," transporting her

into a "timeless achronological world" (169). Virgie displays this quality of consciousness when she submerges herself in the water before the community assembles for her mother's funeral. This submersion frees her of both the temporal constraints that threaten the elderly Morganans and the burden of communal memory that challenges her autonomy. She experiences the classic Weltian "still moment," in which the boundaries of linearity and corporeality dissolve: "She moved but like a cloud in skies, aware but only of the nebulous edges of her feeling and the vanishing opacity of her will … Memory dappled her like no more than a paler light … She hung suspended in the Big Black River as she would know to hang suspended in felicity" (440).

Virgie's still moment resonates clearly with Julia Kristeva's description of "women's time": "As for time, female subjectivity would seem to provide a specific measure that essentially retains *repetition* and *eternity* from among the multiple modalities of time" ("Women's" 862 Kristeva's italics). Kristeva sets this cyclic sensibility against the kind of metronomic time that regulates Miss Eckhart's conventional piano lessons and controls King MacLain: time as "project, teleology, linear and prospective unfolding; time as departure, progression, and arrival … the time of history" (863). Kristeva associates her conception of "women's time" with "cosmic time," "vertiginous visions" and "an unnameable *jouissance*"; emerging from this affiliation is "the massive presence of a monumental temporality … which has so little to do with linear time (which passes) that the very word 'temporality' hardly fits"; this modality is, Kristeva suggests, "All-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space" (862). In the final sentence of The Golden Apples, Welty suspends the reader in this kind of monumental temporality; she manoeuvres us away from the unities of time and place that have bound the stories together and

removes the determining frame of Morgana's eye; she erases all temporal and spatial parameters with a miscellany of elusive images that, like Miss Eckhart's music, strains the boundaries of the senses: "They heard through falling rain the running of the horse and bear, the stroke of the leopard, the dragon's crusty slither, and the glimmer and the trumpet of the swan" (461). The notion of hearing "the glimmer of the swan" and its possibility of sensory fusion is a fitting image with which to conclude Virgie's "all-encompassing" epiphany.

* * *

These rare, individual experiences of boundlessness become all the more resonant when read within the context of a cycle in which the community asserts itself as the most prolific protagonist. Commentators on the short story cycle have persistently explored the form as a tool for representing communal identity.[11] The formal possibilities of the story cycle certainly lend themselves to explorations of community: the form asserts the need for integration and independence and thus both enacts and queries communal instincts. The story cycle accommodates multiple shifts in perspective, often presenting the reader with a large cast of narrators; writers such as Louise Erdrich and Gloria Naylor re-enact through their forms the storytelling rituals that bind communities together.

The proliferation of Bakhtinian readings of Welty has illuminated the plurality of voices that infiltrate her texts.[12] With its multi-faceted narration and constant shifts in focalisation, The Golden Apples is Welty's most effective realization of communal identity. Welty capitalizes on the openness of her form to present a community of narrators and storytellers. Katie Rainey and Ran MacLain are granted the privilege of first-person narration whilst a third-person voice mediates the stories and memories of focalising characters such as Eugene, Cassie

and Loch. Welty's third-person voice tells some of the stories that exist beyond Morgana's carefully patrolled narrative boundaries: we hear the history of Miss Eckhart in "June Recital" and we are privy to the events at Moon Lake, which, we suspect, Lizzie Stark may embellish on her return to "Circle." In some stories the narrative voice's fluctuating allegiances with other discourses frustrate the reader's search for the precise locus of authority. In "June Recital," the voice moves seamlessly from one mental landscape to another. In Welty's representation of the recital the narrative voice shifts from the position of the detached onlooker to the collective consciousness of the participating students within a single paragraph: "So they played, and except Virgie, all played their worst ... You expected the whip, almost, for forgetting to repeat before the second ending, or for failing to count ten before you came around the curtain" (313). The most resounding voice in the cycle is undoubtedly that of Morgana; it tempers both the omniscient third-person narrative voice – the recurring phrase "people said" reminds us that the source of many narratives is the community itself – and the personalized focalisations of the characters. A single image from "June Recital" captures the dominance of Morgana's discourse over the cycle's other voices: "Miss Perdita Mayo was talking, and they were clicking their summery heels and drowning out – drowning out something ..." (280).

An array of impinging discourses compromises the singularity of Cassie's focalisation in "June Recital." The voices of her mother and Morgana's women seep through her narration; in her recollections of Miss Eckhart, the abrupt statement that "Her love never did anybody any good" betrays the influence of the abrasive vernacular that characterizes the town's most formidable gossip, Mrs Lizzie Stark (307); Welty isolates this sentence from the surrounding paragraphs perhaps to

emphasize its separateness from Cassie's largely sympathetic vision. Similarly, Loch's clipped sentences and self-aggrandizing assertions in "June Recital" carry inflections of the Circle's uncompromising evaluations: "Everything she did was wrong, after a certain point. She had got off the track. What she really wanted was a draft ... let her try to make fire burn in an airless room" (284).

Other voices are entirely subsumed by communal discourses. The Morganans inhabit a residually oral reality, in which language is valued for its performative function. In Interfaces of the Word Walter J. Ong notes that the practices of such oral communities evolve from "pre-existent, imitable, formulary elements" (283). Ran MacLain scorns the mimetic practices of Maideen Sumrall who draws from these elements in her mechanical regurgitation of the town's language:

> it was being told ... in the clear voice of Maideen where it had never existed – all the worse for the voice not even questioning what it said – just repeating, just rushing, old – the town words. Telling what she was told she saw, repeating what she listened to – young girls are outlandish little birds that talk. They can be taught ... to sing a song *people* have made (378-9 Welty's italics).

In contrast, the elusive wanderers reject the limitations of the word for open, dynamic signs: the extension of the hand, the compelling musical performance, the magnetic silence. The impregnable narratives of these characters appear to preclude even the third-person narrative voice. It appears that Welty's voice operates in collusion with the wanderers; it preserves their indeterminacy by shunning overt

omniscience. Immune to the constraints of chronological time, these characters move beyond the bounds of narrative patronage.

Through her heteroglossic narrative Welty demonstrates the lure and power of communal discourse whilst subtly challenging its dominance. In Eudora Welty's Aesthetics of Place, Jan Nordby Gretlund argues that "Welty creates a greater distance between the inhabitants of Morgana and herself than she has done with most other characters in her fiction" (125). Whilst the third-person voice often adopts the vernacular of Morgana, it frequently undercuts any sense of *allegiance* with Morganan discourse. At key moments Welty allows the communal voice to take the stance of the narrator, prompting the reader's resistance. In "The Whole World Knows," the narrative voice slips effortlessly into Morgana's idiom:

> They say Jinny MacLain invites Woody out there to eat, a year younger than she is, remember when they were born. Invites, under her mama's nose. Sure, it's Woodrow Spights she invites. Who else in Morgana would there be for Jinny Stark after Ran, with even Eugene MacLain gone? (379)

In this passage Welty's narrative voice sets up the reader as mock reader, implicating her firmly in a communal dialogue with a series of affirmatives, rhetorical questions and direct addresses; this overt form of manipulation serves however to distance the reader who begins to search for an untrammelled line of communication.[13] Indeed the absence of a distinct, extradiegetic perspective involves the reader in the isolation that emanates from Ran's voice. As Ran strives to read his father's silence, so must the reader scrutinise the blanks in the story: the reverberating ellipses that follow Perdita Mayo's verbal onslaughts; the oppressive silences that arrest the dialogue between Ran and Maideen; the unsettling blank that follows the rape of Maideen.

"Shower of Gold" sets the standard for this interpretative system, by involving the reader immediately in a nexus of felt omissions. The story sets the reader up as a silent narratee of Katie's tale; she is an inconsequential passer-by, to whom Katie intimates thoughts that she conceals from her husband: "What makes me say a thing like that? I wouldn't say it to my husband, you mind you forget it" (274). This concluding sentence confirms the reader's suspicion that suppressed stories lurk beneath the narrative surface, and finally confirms Katie's lack of control over her story. Katie's narrative confronts the reader with two kinds of blank; at times she openly acknowledges the gaps in her story and her own secrecy: "I wish I'd seen him! ... I can't tell you why, but I wish I'd seen him!" she tells us when King makes another appearance (266). There are other moments however when she betrays herself; her own involvement in the King MacLain myth is suggested by her precise knowledge of his location in Morgana woods when he returns to impregnate his wife Snowdie: "I could have streaked like an arrow to the very oak tree, one there to itself and all spready" (264). In this opening story Welty draws attention to the problematics of storytelling and relativizes the authority of the other voices in the cycle.

In her study of the short story Armine Kotin Mortimer writes that the presence of "second stories" in the form afford the reader a particular agency: "The second-story reader is a special case of 'the reader in the text' ... His stage directions are often directly encoded in the text, in the form of a created model, an obvious guide" (296). Mortimer does not include the story cycle in her exploration, but the form provides particularly fertile ground for second stories; fragments of stories may reveal themselves over long stretches of narrative and endings may remain buried. The Golden Apples abounds with "second stories" that the reader must both elicit

and co-create: Catherine Morrison's unexplained suicide; the relationship between Miss Eckhart and her mother; Mr Sissum's sudden demise. We sense the incredulity in the narrative voice when it informs us that, "Mr Sissum was drowned in the Big Black River one summer – fell out of his boat, all alone" (297). With a laugh that is "soft and playful but not illuminating," Catherine Morrison eludes the boundaries of the text by constantly "slip[ing] away" until she eventually commits suicide (295 299).

Mortimer claims that, in some narratives, the construction of a second story "does not leave the outcome up in the air; quite to the contrary, it often brings closure to the first" (277). In the open, nonhierarchic story cycle the status of the individual narratives shifts constantly; the main thread in one narrative may assume the status of a "second story" within another, and vice versa. In "Moon Lake" and "The Whole World Knows" respectively, Nina Carmichael and Ran MacLain take the stance of the foregrounding consciousness. They do not resume this position again in the cycle. However, in "The Wanderers," Welty provides the reader with vignettes that mark possible endings to these sublimated stories; rather than using one story to complete another, she offers the reader a gesture towards closure and invites her to fill in the intervening narrative space. Welty represents Nina's fate with beautiful economy. The girl who longed for the "fiercest secrets" in "Moon Lake" is engaged in safe, domestic activity (361): "Nina Carmichael, Mrs. Junior Nesbitt heavy with child, was seated where he could see her, head fine and indifferent, one puffed white arm stretched along the sewing machine" (433). A solitary sentence drives the reader to double back through the text and become surrogate-narrator of Nina's story: evidently it is a narrative of compromise and the suppression of reticent yearnings. Exactly how Nina reconciled herself to this

destiny remains a subject for the reader's conjecture. As Karen Castellucci Cox observes, the realization that one "may never be satisfied on particular points" is central to the reader's experience of the story cycle form (155).

Welty's cycle of disrupted and buried narratives calls for reading strategies that respond to the theme at the centre of her fiction: the possibility of connection. In "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading" Patricinio Schweickart states: "Mainstream reader-response theories are preoccupied with issues of control and partition – how to distinguish the contribution of the author/text from the contribution of the reader" (55). In response to this preoccupation, Schweickart posits "the dialectic of communication" that "inform[s] the relationship between the feminist reader and the female author/text" in which, "the central issue is not one of … partition, but of managing the contradictory implications of the desire for relationship (one must maintain a minimal distance from the other) and the desire for intimacy, up to and including a symbiotic merger with the other" (55). These contradictory implications threaten Virgie's relationship with Miss Eckhart whose love she initially rejects but cannot forget. As a mature woman Virgie finally manages to balance her desire for autonomy and symbiosis by recognizing and accepting the "horror in love … the separateness" (Welty Collected 460).

Schweickart proposes the drive "to connect" as the most fruitful basis for interpretation (55). In a comparison of male/female readings of Faulkner's "Barn Burning," David Bleich found that women accumulated meaning through associative patterns whilst men pursued resolute structures and narrative lines. Schweickart paraphrases his findings:

> men retold the story as if its purpose were to deliver a clear, simple structure or chain of information … Their primary

> concern appeared to be getting the 'facts' of the story 'straight'. Women ... presented the narrative as if it were an atmosphere or an experience ... they retell it in terms of interpersonal motives, allegiances, conflicts, rather than in terms of a single character's or the author's perspective (Schweickart "Introduction" xxv-xxvi).

In her essay "Gender and Reading" Elizabeth Flynn reports that when she presented male and female readers with a selection of three ostensibly unconnected short stories, "more women than men were able to resolve the tensions in the story and form a consistent pattern of meaning" (272). Indeed one can conclude from the research of Schweickart, Flynn and Bleich that female reading strategies offer the most useful model for the reader of the short story cycle. Resonances with Welty's poetics are striking. Schweickart's female reader regards her experience of the text as an "intersubjective encounter" with its writer (55). Welty's commentary on the reader/writer relationship emphasizes connection over consensus: "No other saw life in an ordering exactly like this. So shape begins and ends subjectively. And that the two concepts, writer's and reader's, may differ, since all of us differ, is neither so strange nor so important as the vital fact that a connection has been made between them" (Welty Eye 144).

Welty's cycle is populated by readers. In keeping with her aesthetic of openness, she does not assign particular strategies to either gender. Indeed the tactics of Morgana's readers bear a close resemblance to those of Schweickart's male reader. In "June Recital" Cassie reflects upon the community's reading of outsiders, noting their primary objective of permanent definition: "They only hoped to place

them, in their hour or their street or the name of their mother's people. Then Morgana could hold them, and at last they were this and they were that" (325).

Other inscribed readers in the cycle move beyond these limits. They experience private moments of illumination that form a metafictional plot for Welty's reader; if pursued, this plot coheres into a kind of interpretive guide for the cycle as a whole. "How much might depend on people's being linked together?" ponders Cassie Morrison, holding a mirror up to the reader's experience of the form (306). Mattie Will's participation in a Morgana legend illuminates the potential agency of the reader in the text. Eugene and Virgie's revisionary readings of Miss Eckhart's picture demonstrate the pliability of text and its cumulative dynamism. Throughout the cycle, Welty disperses metamorphic moments and images as warning signs to the reader intent on pursuing fixed meanings and establishing rigid chains of information: the old MacLain house that, Cassie reflects, was "something you saw without seeing it" (285); Cassie's tie-and-dye scarf that defeats any premeditated design "like a spiderweb" (286); the woman whose "strange beauty" Eugene admires before realizing that "she was birth-marked and would be considered disfigured by most people" (405); Virgie's "hard-to-match-up plaid" (430). The most fitting paradigm for Welty's reader is, perhaps, Virgie's concluding interpretation of Miss Eckhart's picture of the Perseus and the Medusa: constantly inviting new interpretations, this elusive cycle is a "constellation which the heart could read over many a night" (460).

2

"The One and the Many":

Grace Paley and the Art of Balance

"[A story] can curl around on itself, it can just fall down and slip out through one of the spirals and go back again. That's the way I see. I see us all in a great bathtub of time just swimming around" (Paley Lidoff 87)

"People keep reappearing for me ... I don't see life in what used to be called an alienated way. I see people going away and coming back" (Paley Conway 10).

In her statement to Joan Lidoff, Grace Paley posits the recursive nature of her favoured form – the short story – as a model for the dynamics of everyday life.[14] Her investment in the retroactive power of narrative and her resistance to an "alienated," unitary vision suggest strong affinities with the aesthetics of the short story cycle. Even an initial reading of Paley's stories opens up further congruities with the form: the recurrence of a group of characters and a unifying protagonist, Faith Darwin; the explicit and well-documented metafictional dimension of her work; the continual rejection of causal and chronological plot structures; the emphasis on collective experience; the representation of silence as "the space ... in which little truths growl" (Paley Later 203).

Paley's 'Faith stories' do not appear in even the most inclusive and diverse glossaries of the short story cycle. It is the liberal and seemingly random dispersal of the stories that distinguishes Paley's form from the more unified cycles that appear

in bibliographies. Using Katherine Mansfield's much-admired stories, "Prelude" and "At the Bay," as a paradigm, Suzanne Ferguson examines linked stories that feature recurring characters or settings but that are not presented as a story cycle or sequence; instead they are dispersed among collections of stories that are related perhaps only tenuously by theme. Ferguson argues that these related but scattered stories should be regarded as a distinct genre from the short story cycle. As examples she cites Paley's Faith stories, Sherman Alexie's Victor stories in The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven (1994), as well as Mansfield's Burnell stories. These scattered narratives often disperse themselves beyond the boundaries of the single volume or collection, as is the case with Paley's Faith stories. Ferguson notes that this form is the perfect medium for both enacting and subverting a sense of marginalization. All of the examples she considers were "written by authors self-identified as 'on the margins' of the mainstream of their society"; nevertheless they "appeal to the mainstream audience and depend for some of their impact on its resistance to their formal challenge: to remain outside the rules of 'sequence'" (Ferguson "Genre" 26). It is of course helpful to examine these forms together as a separate group. I would argue however that the basic principles of the unified story cycle and the scattered composite are similar enough to warrant further comparison.

Narratives concerning Faith and her friends appear in all three of Paley's short story collections, written over a thirty year period: The Little Disturbances of Man (1959), Enormous Changes at the Last Minute (1974) and Later the Same Day (1985). Further Faith narratives, "Midrash on Happiness," "Demystified Zone," "The Lion and the Ox," and "Conversations," appeared separately over a period of thirteen years, stretching from 1977 to 1986. Only one Paley critic locates the Faith stories within the short story cycle canon; Judith Arcana, Paley's biographer, refers

to them as "an ongoing story cycle," arguing that they are closer in their formal properties to Faulkner's wide-ranging Yoknapatawpha tales than Sherwood Anderson's more integrated Winesburg, Ohio (Arcana 3). Paley herself claims an affinity with Faulkner: "I see the world very much in a Faulkner kind of way" she tells Celeste Conway (10). Arcana places Paley in the company of Katherine Anne Porter and Mary McCarthy, noting that these writers created "one female character ... whom several critics refer to as the author's 'alter ego'" (2-3).

The subject of formal strategy arises frequently in interviews with Paley but her personal interest in form vacillates. In discussion with Celeste Conway, she ranks content as the forum for innovation over form: "I think the great experiments to come are not the experiments with forms, but the experiments with subject-matter" (12). She reiterates this notion to Kathleen Hulley but later reneges on her dismissal of form, insisting, "I *am* interested in form, despite the conversation we had before" (Hulley "Interview" 36). She retains a consistent vision however of the evolution of her own forms; for Paley, form is determined by content and finds its shape as the writing process takes place. Echoing Eudora Welty's aesthetic of openness, Paley insists that she cannot work with a specific formal structure in mind: "The form is given by grace ... it descends on you. You find it. You work and you work and you work. And you make connections" (Hulley "Interview" 37). This abdication of authorial responsibility contrasts with Faulkner's more deliberate construction of his Yoknapatawpha cycle. Michael Millgate highlights how Faulkner asserts his position as the origin of his fictional world and form through his representation of place. Not only does Faulkner provide the reader with a map marking the boundaries of this world, but he "stakes out his territorial claim" by making "existing geography his own through the invention of new names and the

relocation of places and buildings in order to suit his artistic convenience" (Millgate 37). Whilst Paley insists that the Faith narratives do not originate from a premeditated design, Faulkner recalls how he conceived the idea for the entire Yoknapatawpha cycle in a single vision. His was, to use Ingram's terms, a "composed cycle": "I thought of the whole story at once like a bolt of lightning lights up a landscape and you see everything" (Gwynn 90).

Paley's most metafictional story draws attention to the pliability of narrative form. In "A Conversation with My Father" a writer tells her father a story. Conflict arises when the narrator preserves the indeterminacy of the ending, insisting upon an "open destiny" for her heroine (Enormous 162). The father, who is described by Paley as coming from an era "when nothing could change," objects to such optimism (Hulley "Interview" 42-3). Favouring the plot which resembles "an absolute line between two points," he dismisses his daughter's open ending as evidence of her inability "to look [tragedy] in the face" (Enormous 162, 167). When Hulley suggests to Paley that this substitution of flexibility for "irrevocability" opens up new formal possibilities, Paley concurs emphatically (Hulley "Interview" 51).

By introducing the opportunity of renewal and re-orientation into her narrative, the writer/daughter releases her female character from the demands of causality and predetermined structures. This strategy informs Paley's refusal to cohere the Faith stories into a unified, homogeneous form; instead she generates a particularly diffusive story cycle that complements her aesthetic of continuity and redirection: an aesthetic that announces itself in the titles of all her story collections. The girl who "'never guessed'" the ending to her narrative in "Faith in the Afternoon" serves as a poignant reminder that both little disturbances and enormous changes are likely to occur later in the day (Enormous 42).

The Faith stories present a particular formal challenge to the reader, who must not only establish a network of connections across three different collections, but must keep up with a profusion of other voices that constantly come into play; at various points in the stories Ginny, Mrs Raftery, Ruth, Anna, Kitty and Jack assume the position of the foregrounding consciousness. To compound the reader's confusion, Paley queries constantly the line between fiction and reality, relativizing the reader's experience of her characters and stories. In "Love" a husband and wife debate the existence of Dotty Wasserman. Whilst the husband recalls real-life encounters with Dotty, his wife insists that she is "a character in a book" who was "just plain invented in the late fifties" (Later 4, 5). In "The Long-Distance Runner" Faith casually declares that recurring character Mrs Raftery was "liked by me, loved, invented and endured" (Enormous 180). In "Faith in a Tree" she assumes, as noted by Neil Isaacs, a seemingly godlike "vantage point" as she surveys the scene below her, recounting the narratives of friends and spinning new ones (Isaacs 49). Undermining her omniscience is the presence of a footnote that disrupts the reader's frame of reality. Faith interrupts her story to reference a teacher as its source; Marilyn Gerwitz does not play any further role in the primary narrative but she is, Faith informs the reader, "*the only real person in this story*" (Enormous 84 Paley's italics). This postmodern slippage between reality and fiction emerges in interviews when Paley frequently conflates the two during discussions about character. For her, origins are largely insignificant in determining the authenticity of a character. When asked by Arcana to explain how Faith has developed, she states: "The only thing you can say is that Faith *is* a real person ... Every story I write is a story of what I think happened. Even if I invented it" (Arcana 4).

The parameters of the Faith cycle grow ever more expansive as the stories continue to grow out of each another. In typical Paley fashion, several of her stories re-enact in their structure this process of narrative proliferation. In "Somewhere Else," Joe's story of the South Bronx emerges from the group's experience of cultural disparities during their trip to China three months earlier. In "The Expensive Moment," Faith's account of her life galvanizes Xie Feng's narrative facilities; her story in turn dissolves cultural barriers and unites them as women in the "eternal, universal woman's questioning of how to raise children in the real world" (Isaacs 76). Paley has commented that she often creates one story out of two narrative threads: "You really don't have a story until you have two stories. It's these two stories working against each other and in connection with each other that make it happen" (Perry 99). As Neil Isaacs documents, "Faith in a Tree" began as two separate narratives; in its original form the narrative revolved around Faith's search for a mate; the story ended with her acceptance that Phillip – a prospective lover – will end up with Anna, her beautiful friend (Isaacs 47). Paley later added the final scene with the activist parade, Richard's gesture of recalcitrance, and Faith's resolution to think "more and more and every day about the world" (Enormous 100). Most of these supplementary narratives emerge only at the very end of the stories, casting a refracting light on what has gone before, projecting the reader back into the heart of the story and forwards in the expectation of new narratives.

The metafictional dimension of Paley's work reveals itself in her handling of time. Like Welty, Paley exploits the pliability of her form to pursue lines of connection that transcend the traditional markers of time. In "The Expensive Moment" she constructs a dialogue about world trade from interrelated statements of Faith's friends, parenthetically acknowledging that Ruth's comments on the methods

of Cuban trade helm from the future: "*her remarks actually came a couple of years later*" (Later 184-5). In "Listening" Paley illuminates her process of fictionalisation when she propels the reader suddenly into the future: "Then, as so often happens in stories, it was several years later" (Later 209). These leaps backward and forward in time are initially startling, jolting the reader out of the immediate time frame of the main narrative.[15] However if we read the Faith narratives as a cycle of interlinked stories stretching across several decades, these unheralded gaps and transgressions become less disconcerting; they form an integral part of the cycle's retroactive and proleptic structure. Paley challenges the reader's expectations of narrative by demonstrating how all stories, like the lives of her female characters, are open to revision. "Distance" and "An Interest in Life" come from different story collections, yet both tell the history of the relationship between John Raftery and Ginny; when read in juxtaposition, the conflicting versions relativize each other, thereby exposing the artifices of storytelling and debunking the possibility of one incontestable truth. Paley's fictional world demands a particularly agile reader, as meaning is not anchored in definitive narratives or stable boundaries.

Faith's stance in her stories shifts from one narrative to the next. In some stories, we can only speculate as to whether the anonymous first-person voice belongs to Paley's recurring protagonist. The narrator of "Anxiety" appears to share Faith's social conscience and addresses the young father with the authority of a veteran parent. Paley offers the reader a hint to confirm her suspicion several stories later; in "The Story Hearer," Faith mentions an encounter with "The New Young Fathers" whilst inwardly recounting her day (Later 142). In the first story of the Faith cycle, "The Used-Boy Raisers," Faith maintains a detached stance before moving to the centre for the following story, "A Subject of Childhood." When other

voices narrate Faith recedes into the background, assuming the role of silent listener or group member. Although the story does not specify whether or not Faith is the narrator of "A Conversation with my Father," the father's complaint about "people sitting in trees talking senselessly, voices from who knows where" casts a cynical eye over Faith's activity in "Faith in a Tree" (Enormous 162).

By functioning as both an isolated, distinctive voice and a fluid, shifting persona, Faith enacts the dialectic that, according to Forrest Ingram, characterizes the short story cycle form: "the tension between the one and the many" (19). It was by engaging with this kind of tension that Paley found her form and narrative voice. By expressing herself through prose rather than poetry she found a way of balancing the demands of the personal and relational. She tells Perry: "poetry is addressing the world and fiction is getting the world to talk to you. When I was able to get into somebody else's voice, when I was able to speak in other people's voices, I found my own" (107). Seven years later she reiterates how this "dialectical experience" enabled her "Own voice to come through, almost in opposition" (Wachtel 205).

Through her narrative poetics Paley strikes a balance between the one and the many. Her fictional world hosts an array of narrators but her distinctive narrative voice is always present. Her much-discussed unifying narrative persona is even more pervasive than Faith; it comprises in fact a hybridity of voices: it carries the inflections of the many social groups that appear in her stories, shifting seamlessly from one discourse to another. She is, as Angela Carter suggests, a "ventriloquist *par excellence*" for whom "Shape-shifting is no problem" (Carter 157). Whilst adopting the voices of different cultural communities, Paley sustains the impression of a single, distinctive voice; Judith Arcana writes of "the widespread assumption among Paley readers that in her stories the characters, narrators, and author are all

one" (2). Just as there is no definitive version of events or characters, so there is no truly autonomous narrative voice. This relational aesthetic permeates Paley's stories on every level. Speaking to Cora Kaplan, Paley spells out the dangers of the individualism that, she believes, characterizes the consciousness of mainstream America. She speaks of:

> That normal American emphasis on individualism and pride and religion – positions that seem anti-political, are very political really. They come from the ideology and structure of bourgeois capitalism – a wholly private emphasis. The general mode is one of thinking individualistically. It is the only value; it becomes *the* value (Kaplan 151 Paley's italics).

Resistance to individualism underpins Paley's fictional work. Published in the same year as this interview – 1985 – "The Story Hearer" opens with Faith's avowal to "curb" her own "cultivated individualism" that "seemed for years so sweet." The word "cultivated" signals Faith's sense that society has tended to her solipsistic impulses: instincts that the older, more political Faith realizes "may not be useful in the hard time to come" (Later 133).

In "A Symposium on Fiction," Paley explicates the parity between her narrative aesthetics and the fundamental tenets of her socialist sensibility: "People ought to live in mutual aid and concern, listening to one another's stories …I want to find out a way. Is there a way for people to tell stories to one another again and to bring one another into that kind of speaking and listening and attending community?" (Barthelme 82). Paley includes the reader in this 'attending community.' By omitting quotation marks from her later stories she erases one of the conventional boundaries that separate reader and text. Repeatedly in Paley's

fiction, the narrator draws the reader into her story with direct appeals for sympathy and engagement. In "Faith in a Tree," Faith queries her mother's wisdom in sending her as a baby on a plane to see her grandmother. She solicits the reader's assistance in analysing her mother's motives: "*Why* would anyone send a little baby anywhere alone? What was my mother trying to prove? That I was independent? ... That in the sensible, socialist, Zionist world of the future, she wouldn't cry at my wedding?" (Enormous 80 Paley's italics). In any other fictional world, these direct addresses would perhaps appear intrusive. In Paley's stories they appear in the midst of conversation or silent reflection; they merely open up another line of communication in the highly verbal context of her heteroglossic narratives; Paley seamlessly inscribes the reader in her dialogic community.

* * *

With their characteristic hybridity, Paley's stories conflate the personal and the political without becoming overtly didactic. She identifies this dualism with the principles of the women's movement. In "How Come?" she writes: "The women's movement ... had been scattering consciousness-raising groups all over the country. Concluding that the personal was political gave a way of speaking and writing and thinking, a way for women to make art, ... rename time and themselves" (287).

In contrast to Welty, Paley writes from a self-proclaimed feminist perspective. In interviews she cites women's experience as her inspiration for writing. When asked by Hulley exactly what she was attempting to "balance" in her fiction, she states that she became concerned with "the dark lives of women," affirming that, "This is what made me write to begin with" (Hulley "Interview" 43). Paley decided to unveil aspects of female experience that she felt fiction had failed to represent: the dilemmas facing single mothers like Faith who raises her children "with one hand

typing behind my back to earn a living"; the struggle to cultivate an autonomous and collective voice that represents the one and the many; the role of friendship and communication in women's lives (Disturbances 139).[16]

Hulley's use of the word "balance" is most pertinent as it illuminates another of Paley's guiding principles. Critics have questioned how she determines the order in which she places her stories; why, for example, does she intersperse the Faith stories with other, ostensibly unrelated narratives? Judith Arcana reveals the method behind Paley's arrangement of the stories: "Grace makes decisions about the placement of individual pieces for the sake of balance, in terms of tone and (likely) emotional impact" (156). Undoubtedly Paley achieves this kind of effect with juxtapositions such as the tragic "Samuel" and the darkly comic "The Burdened Man": stories that illuminate the double face of tragedy.

In many ways Paley's seemingly arbitrary distribution of the Faith stories serves as a formal model for the kind of lives her female characters lead. With its constant shifts in time frame, voice and perspective, the Faith cycle represents the pluralistic, fragmented nature of these women's experiences. Significantly, as Faith begins to achieve more balance in her life, Paley begins to move her particular stories into closer proximity with each other, gesturing towards a more unified form. In Later the Same Day several Faith stories follow on from each other. The recurring protagonist's political activism transports her beyond the boundaries of home, enabling her to live a more balanced life. Compounding this 'unity' in the latest collection is the underlying theme of closure. The stories in Later are, as Salman Rushdie points out, more apocalyptic: "The passing away of things is very much the theme of Grace Paley's collection *Later the Same Day* ... It is a book full of endings, endings faced with the firm, mild, rueful honesty that makes Grace Paley

special" (Rushdie 362). The structure of the Faith cycle shifts with this latest collection; with the emphasis on closure and the presentation of a more mature protagonist the scattered cycle begins to resemble a sequence.

Whilst Welty seeks to universalise the dilemmas facing her men and women, Paley uses her stories to expose and examine the gulf between the genders. Her stories abound with dialogues about gender difference. In "Listening" Jack perceives the mutual suspicion between Faith and his friends, telling her that she does not understand "the way men talk to one another" (Later 206); in "The Story Hearer" he notes the clash between his father's and mother's time frames: "my father, who was a decent man – your typical nine-to-fiver – it seems to me he settled into a great appreciation of the middle just about the time my mother said, Well, Willy, it's enough. Goodbye" (Later 133-4). In "A Subject of Childhood" Faith despairs of these conflicting sensibilities when Clifford criticises her childrearing skills: "'You don't say things like that to a woman ... You damn stupid jackass. You just don't say anything like that to a woman'" (Disturbances 140).

By placing gender difference in the foreground of her stories, Paley displays her strong affinities with second wave feminism. In the introduction to her collection of essays, Just as I Thought, she aligns herself with this movement when she documents the political and cultural discourses that have shaped her development as a writer and a woman:

> I was a member of an American movement, a tide really, that rose out of the civil-rights struggles of the fifties, rolling methods and energy into the antiwar, direct-action movements in the sixties ... returning bold again in the seventies and eighties in the second wave of the women's movement (xii).

In her analysis of second wave feminism Maggie Humm notes its emphasis on gender difference: "Second wave feminism, because it focuses on the conditions of many groups and on women's everyday 'difference' from men in the street and in the home, makes visible the powerful realities of gender difference" (Feminisms 12). This new wave of feminism encouraged Paley to fuse the personal with the political: a feat that Faith begins to achieve in the later stories as she frees herself of the shackles of "him-itis, the dread disease of females" – and juggles family life with committed political activism (Later 79).

Paley identifies the dialogue between Livid and Pallid in "The Used-Boy Raisers" as the "beginning of feminism" for Faith. From listening to this conversation between her current and ex-lover, Faith develops "a sense of separation. The idea that her life really is different from the men's. That they are in a world that really was not her concern" (Hulley "Interview" 44). In "Listening," from Later the Same Day, Faith's commentary on men and women's stories resonates back to the debate in "A Conversation with my Father," emphasizing the role of gender identity in the conflict over plot-lines. She associates controlled, end-determined fictions with the plots that men devise for women. She refuses to share any "woman stories" with Jack, telling him: "you have your own woman stories. You know, your falling-in-love stories, your French-woman-during-the-Korean-War stories, your magnificent-woman stories ..." (Later 203).[17] Faith dismisses Jack as an inappropriate reader of her "woman stories," sensing his inability to make connections and enter into an intersubjective narrative encounter. For both Faith and her creator, these stories require the kind of mind that "pays no attention to time and speedily connects and chooses" (Later 186).

Other Paley stories verify Faith's evaluation of the "woman stories" that men construct. In "Love," the opening story of this collection, the anonymous narrator/wife tells her husband that she has written a nostalgic poem about love; rather than asking to hear it, he responds by cataloguing his romantic experiences and sexual conquests since the age of fourteen. His list of women features little differentiation but several clichés: "Then he told me about Sally Johnson on Lake Winnipesaukee, who was twelve and a half when he was fourteen. Then he told me about Rosemarie Johanson on Lake Sunapee ... Then he told me about two famous poets, one fair and one dark, both now dead, when he was a secret poet" (Later 3-4). Through this female narrator Paley turns this male storyteller's strategies upon himself; she denies him narrating privileges and his speech is contained within the voice of his wife, just as these female types are contained within his narrative.

Gender difference is a contributing factor to the generation gap separating Faith and her sons. In "Friends" Tonto's 'realism' clashes with Faith's optimism. When Faith insists that Abby, the deceased daughter of her friend Selina, was a victim of what "times can do to a person," Tonto attacks his mother's "goody-goodies" vision of the world in which "everything is so groovy wonderful far-out terrific" (Later 88). Faith heeds her son's approach to Abby's story but asserts the validity of her own, more upbeat philosophy, denouncing the limits of Tonto's world in which all things must come to an end: "Living and dying are fastened to its surface and stuffed into its softer parts" (Later 89). Richard, Faith's more openly antagonistic older son, reacts to her optimism with the same intolerance. He continually draws his mother into debate, instructing her to account for her actions only to deflate her buoyant responses. At the end of "The Long-Distance Runner" Faith leaves her children to return to her first home. She tries to justify her absence

and explain the appeal of her old home, by recreating the atmosphere of her experience: "I stayed a few weeks in my old apartment, where Grandpa and Grandma and me and Hope and Charlie lived, when we were little ... Not so far from the ocean where Grandma made us very healthy with sun and air" (Enormous 198). Intent on getting the "facts" of the story "straight," Richard fails to engage with Faith's story, reacting against her emotional narration (Schweickart xxv): "What are you talking about? ... Cut the baby talk." Neither Tonto nor Jack understands her experience although Jack invites her to tell the story again. "I repeated the story. They all said, What?" (198); this masculine bewilderment compounds the connection between Faith and the reader. In the final paragraph Faith directs her narrating energies solely to the reader, communicating the exhilaration and awe that the men in their desire for facts and justifications have dismissed: "Have you known it to happen much nowadays? A woman inside the steamy energy of middle age runs and runs. She finds the houses and streets where her childhood happened. She lives in them. She learns as though she was still a child what in the world is coming next" (198).

The women in Paley's fictional world often register their division from men through silence. Ginny refuses to provide her children with an ending to her truncated love narrative with John Raftery. In a move typical of the Paley heroine, she chooses instead to leave the story open:

> I didn't know how to tell the children: something about right and wrong, goodness and meanness, men and women. I had it all at my finger tips, ready to hand over. But I didn't think I ought to take mistakes and truth away from them. Who knows? They might make a truer friend in this world somewhere than I have ever made. So I

> just put them to bed and sat in the kitchen and cried (Disturbances 97-8).[18]

Ginny prefers to preserve an open destiny, even when she knows the ending.

Paley's representation of gender identity does not rest wholly upon such rigid polarities; like all aspects of her aesthetics, her reading of gender resists fixed codifications and points optimistically to avenues of convergence. Key moments in her latest collection gesture towards a commonality between men and women. Jack's very desire to hear "stories told by women about women," signals a new openness to female narratives and storytelling techniques (Later 203). In "The Expensive Moment" Ruth observes similarities between her conversations with Jack and the talk of her female friends: "I love the way Jack talks ... He's a true gossip like us ... he's the only one who ever asks me anymore about Rachel" (Later 180-1). Here Ruth stresses Jack's adoption of tactics and practices that she identifies with female talk: his interest in the personal – Ruth's feelings about her lost daughter – and his sympathetic ear. Sociolinguist Jennifer Coates observes that "'Gossip' is a term used almost exclusively of women's talk; it usually has pejorative connotations" (Coates Women, Men 135). Here Ruth employs the term positively, basing her definition on the group's ability to, in Coates's words, "build progressively on each others' contributions" and "work together to sort out what they feel" (Coates Speech Communities 105, 102). Where Ruth sees mutuality, Faith insists upon difference: "Don't trust him," she warns Ruth (Later 181). Faith exhibits here the same kind of protectiveness over female talk that prevented her from sharing her woman stories with Jack.

The concluding stories of Later the Same Day reveal a growing tension between author and "alter ego"/narrator; Faith continues to assert gender difference

and Paley, through other characters and scenes, discloses underlying contiguities between men and women. As Betty Friedan affirmed five years earlier in The Second Stage: "there is no way out of the deadlock, the impasse, if we keep on fighting, even thinking, in terms of women alone, or women against men" (89).

Paley's politics of difference stand in stark contrast to Welty's apolitical, universalising eye. Both writers however use a cyclic form to challenge the *restrictions* of gender roles, acknowledging how men become victims of patriarchy at least as much as women. Paley's fictional world is populated by disillusioned, darker versions of King MacLain who fail to forge lasting bonds with each other or the women they try to love; Faith's first, errant husband Ricardo is a prime example. In The Second Stage Friedan devotes a chapter to the dilemmas of masculinity that have emerged since the sixties. "The Quiet Movement of American Men" documents the effects on men of feminism and other modern political movements and illuminates the limits of modern masculine paradigms: "They certainly don't talk about their feelings to other men. It's part of the masculine mystique – the definition of man by his 'score,' competing against other men – that he constantly keep his guard up" (136).

In Paley's fiction the male preoccupation with resistant, self-contained forms often expresses itself through an obsession with the body. Peter's grandfather in "A Pale Pink Roast" tells his grandson how he would live his life if given a second chance: "'I'd build my body up till God hisself wouldn't know how to tear it apart ... This structure ... this thing ... 'this me' ... this is got to be maintained'" (Disturbances 48). Perceptions of the female body are diametrically opposed. Where the male body protects ego boundaries, the female body immobilizes the self. In The Second Sex de Beauvoir notes: "[Man] thinks ... of his body as a direct and

normal connection with the world, which he believes he apprehends objectively, whereas he regards the body of woman as a hindrance, a prison weighed down by everything peculiar to it" (15). Several of Paley's men assert their gender boundaries by articulating polarized conceptions of male and female bodies. Zagrowsky observes smugly how "time takes a terrible toll off the ladies" and draws attention to the degeneration of his wife's body, complaining that she has become "a little bit on the grouchy side," "a little overweight" and that "her legs swell up" (Later 154, 159, 159). Ricardo declares his agency in relationships by renaming his lovers and reducing them to physical signs; the names locate and expose potential areas of weakness on the women's bodies, so that Faith, who has fine hair, becomes "Baldy" and a shapely girlfriend becomes "Fatty" (Enormous 34).

Paley's world (both 'real' and 'fictional') aligns these men with the principles of capitalism. In "Women's Pentagon Action Unity Statement" Paley claims that women "understand" that "all is connectedness" (146). She contrasts this vision with the capitalists of the world, who live, she concedes, beyond the bounds of her imagination: "I can't imagine the lives of ... the corporate bosses of our economy, whose patriarchal dream is exhausting our mountains and rivers ... I can't imagine their lives, but I see they are the disconnectors" ("One Day" 197). Similarly, Ginny recognizes the limits of men who define themselves in terms of financial status: "men ... have to own money, or they have to be famous, or everybody on the block has to look up to them from the cellar stairs" (Disturbances 94). Whereas women limit themselves by grounding identity in their relationships with men, male subjectivity often hinges upon social status.

Speaking in 1980, Paley stated that, in the post-war era, men "didn't know what to do. They were prey to the fear that they weren't macho enough which is as

bad as being macho" (Hulley "Interview" 45). She returns to this subject in her interview with Conway, stating that, post Vietnam, "the guys were free to just wander around doing this and that, and I think that in a real sense they were adrift" (5). Studies of the cultural changes in post-Vietnam America illuminate the paradoxical effects of this liberation: the dissolution of gender boundaries and the destabilization of masculine norms. Betty Friedan identifies Vietnam as "the watershed," after which men grappled for definition: "The Vietnam war probably was the beginning of the end of the hunter-caveman, gun-toting he-man mystique ... If men stop defining themselves by going to war or getting power from jobs women can't have, what is life?" (Second 138, 137). In 1985, Time magazine published a special issue on Vietnam. In "A Bloody Rite of Passage," Lance Morrow states that during war "the damage to American faith in government and authority ... has a sometimes chaotically liberating effect, breaking old molds and freeing the imagination to create new forms, new movements" (20). In The Remasculinization of America Susan Jeffords adds that this sense of liberation "came ... at the expense, specifically of the Vietnam veteran, but generally of masculinity itself" (119). In Touched with Fire: the Future of the Vietnam Generation, John Wheeler writes: "Viet Nam changed American notions about the virtues of masculinity and femininity. In the 60s, during the great violence of the war, masculine power came to be subtly discredited in many circles as oafish and destructive" (24).

Paley recognized and wished to convey this sense of dislocation; she was undoubtedly driven by her feminist interests, but saw that her concerns with marginalization came to include men; thus she locates her male characters on the periphery of the cycle, wandering in and out of the stories amidst a welter of assertive, resounding female voices. Faith's father and Jack are the only fully

developed male characters in the Faith cycle; however Jack is also, to a certain degree, "adrift," as Faith exiles him to the margin of female discourses.

At the beginning of "The Story Hearer," Faith notes sardonically how men share a predilection for beginnings. When Jack confesses that he has "always loved beginnings," she replies: "Men do ... No one knows if they will ever get over this" (Later 133). Many of the men in Paley's stories are present for the beginnings of their lives as parents but rarely see this particular plot through. As a form that enables open structures and shifts in direction the story cycle could facilitate this sensibility. Faith herself engineers several new beginnings. However the masculine desire to author beginnings springs from the need to assert identity boundaries rather than revise or reshape them. Dorothy Dinnerstein notes this masculine preoccupation with origins and observes how men engage themselves in "initiation rites through which they symbolically and passionately affirm that it is they who have themselves created human beings, as compared with the mere flesh spawned by woman" (80). In "Reading as a Woman," Jonathan Culler writes: "Phallogocentrism unites an interest in patriarchal authority, unity of meaning, and certainty of origin" (Deconstruction 61). Culler suggests that the differences between maternal and paternal sensibilities represent gendered methods of construing all relationships:

> One might predict an inclination to value what are generally termed metaphorical relations – relations of resemblance between separate items that can be substituted for one another, such as obtain between the father and the miniature replica with the same name, the child – over metonymical, maternal relationships based on contiguity (Deconstruction 60).

By naming his first son Richard, Ricardo lays claim to his identity as a virile male, although he eventually becomes little more than a "hovering shadow" in Faith's life (Enormous 39). This masculine insistence upon origins opposes Paley's postmodernist, feminist and formal sensibilities. She does not designate the starting and finishing points of the Faith stories and each narrative sees Faith revising her dreams and reshaping her ideas. Faith comes to resemble Hélène Cixous's model of woman, "arriving over and over again" who "does not stand still" (Cixous "Laugh" 361). The questions surrounding the status of characters like Dotty Wasserman and Faith herself challenge this masculine emphasis upon stable origins and "metaphorical relations" based upon predetermined replication.

In Paley's stories theme imitates form as her female characters reject or subvert patriarchal models. Several heroines enact the open destiny favoured by the narrator/daughter in "A Conversation with my Father." "Enormous Changes at the Last Minute" describes how a daughter achieves her sense of self by substituting her father's notion of a suitable ending for a life of her own. She rejects a preordained ending – in this case marriage rather than death – for an open one that offers possibilities of connection and relationship; she shares her home with three pregnant teenagers, setting "a precedent in social work which would not be followed or even mentioned in state journals for about five years" (Enormous 134). Alexandra is liberated from her father's prescriptive gaze when he falls in the bathroom and cracks his skull, losing "twenty, thirty years in a flood," enabling him "to begin with fewer scruples to notice and appreciate" (Enormous 134, 135). Other father/daughter relationships are fraught with tension. Discrepancies and tensions continually arrest Faith's conversations with her father. Their dialogue culminates frequently in stalemate as ideas and visions clash. In "Dreamer in a Dead

Language," Faith's father distinguishes his generation as idealists, prompting his daughter to share her own sense of idealism; she informs her father of the freedom of choice in her life, using her three concurrent lovers as an example. Faith's father however reads this as a form of prostitution and the conversation ends in mutual alienation.

By debunking the authority of the father with the deviant responses of the daughter, Paley subverts one of the conventions of Jewish literature. In From Shetl to Suburbia, Sol Gittelman observes Jewish literature's consistent preoccupation with "the rights of the father": "most Jewish-American fiction is, in fact, taken up with the relationship between fathers and sons" (176). In her essay, "Mother at the Center," Janet Burstein observes how Paley redresses the balance by "'re-visioning' the dominant ideals of service and duty to others that shaped the lives of generations of Jewish mothers" (194). When writing about her own mother's life, Paley characterizes it as a "known closed form": "Together with the aunts and grandmother she worked to make my father strong enough and educated enough so he could finally earn enough to take care of us all. She was successful" ("Other Mothers" 42). Unlike many Paley heroines, the ending is already in place for women who live to support the dreams of others. Through her form, Paley moves the daughters beyond this paradigmatic, positional identity, whilst privileging the metonymical, relational sensibilities of the Jewish mother.

Faith's initial assessment of Judaism suggests that religion bears little influence on her everyday life. In "The Used-Boy Raisers" she outrages Livid and Pallid by assigning the Jewish race to a liminal position: "Jews have one hope only – to remain a remnant in the basement of world affairs – no, I mean something else – a splinter in the toe of civilizations, a victim to aggravate the conscience"

(Disturbances 132). However if we place this statement within the context of Faith's position as a marginalized woman challenging phallocentric discourses it achieves a more positive resonance; Faith recognizes the possibility of using one's marginality to "aggravate" the dominant ideology. In the essay "Like All the Other Nations" (1988), Paley articulates this potential by querying the need to conform. She examines briefly the biblical story of Samuel, whose people ask God for a king because they "want to be like all the other nations" (49). Paley questions this demand, echoing Faith's words: "to be like all the other nations seems to me a waste of nationhood, a waste of statehood, a waste of energy, and a waste of life" (49). Faith neither fully embraces nor rejects Judaism, claiming that her race is not "meant for geographies but for history," and holding the anti-Zionist belief in the Diaspora (Disturbances 132). In "Faith in the Afternoon" Paley writes: "Faith pretends she is an American." On the same page she states: "Faith really is an American and she was raised up like everyone else to the true assumption of happiness" (Enormous 33). Faith has therefore not resisted the pull of the popularised version of the American dream. According to Paul Levine the "conflict between Jewish ethics and American materialism was central to the Jewish immigrant experience." He observes that the "opposition between the Jewish vision and the American dream" has established itself as "the central theme" of much "recent Jewish-American fiction" (Levine 72).

Paley is undoubtedly interested in the paradigms that shape the lives of Jewish women but she does not allow these issues to dominate her work completely. Typically, Paley's characters offer meta-commentaries on her controlled approach to these matters; in "Friends" Faith and Ruth debate over how much attention one should pay to certain identity categories. When Faith contests Ruth's statement that she has had an easy life, both women recall an old discussion about feminism and

Judaism. Ruth mocks the idea that such identifications contribute to unhappiness but Faith asserts that "on the prism of isms, both of those do have to be looked at together once in a while" (Later 81). Through Faith, Paley addresses the interaction of ethnicity and gender "once in a while" but does not need to broadcast the connection between her identity as a working mother, straddling two worlds, and her biculturalism. Hybridity is a feature of Faith's everyday existence. The image of Faith "typing with one hand behind my back" is a telling one; she neither fully embraces the role of the traditional housewife nor the identity of the professional woman. "'When will you be a person'" asks her mother, anxious that her daughter's life has failed to take on any "known form" (Enormous 33). Paley uses her highly fragmented form to challenge such unitary conceptions of life. Freed from the ramifications of causality, Faith need only "look at" those identity categories that in the past have enclosed her female ancestors in predetermined forms.

* * *

Both Faith and Paley recognize the significance of those spaces separating hegemonic and marginalized ideologies. In the midst of conversation Faith reflects that the silences that punctuate dialogue represent the "space ... in which little truths growl" (Later 203): a realization that reflects the reader's experience of Paley's form. In Paley's highly verbal stories, silences are laden with meaning. One of Paley's most potent poetics of silence is the image; the visual trope offers closure to many of her more discursive stories, overturning the reader's expectations and prompting her to reassess the narrative. In "A Subject of Childhood" Faith silently watches Clifford and her sons indulge in playful combat. When the fighting turns too physical and Clifford criticises her methods of parenting, she retaliates, attacking him with a series of pejoratives. The story closes however with Faith cradling her

youngest son Tonto and registering the complexities of maternal love that Clifford cannot understand:

> I closed my eyes and leaned on his dark head. But the sun in its course emerged from among the water towers of downtown office buildings and suddenly shone white and bright on me. Then through the short fat fingers of my son, interred forever, like a black and white barred king in Alcatraz, my heart lit up in stripes (Disturbances 145).

This condensed image captures beautifully the contradictions at the heart of Faith's relationship with her sons: the restrictions imposed by domestic duties work against the boundlessness of maternal love. The image exemplifies the Paley ending, offering an opening onto other emotions and transporting reader and character beyond the main narrative line. For Faith, the actions of her sons often provide glimpses of these openings. In "Faith in a Tree" Richard's final gesture of allegiance with the activists opens up a new narrative for Faith, away from the rehearsed discourses of the "sexy playground" (Enormous 100). These concluding epiphanies, usually experienced in moments of silence, release her from the scripts of familiar scenes, sending reader and narrative in a new direction.

Like many aspects of Paley's work, her imagist endings place her both within and outside the Modernist tradition. Her vexed relationship with Modernism is perhaps one of the reasons why critics and readers find it so difficult to pin her work down. Whilst Paley's imagism signals her allegiance with Modernist poetics, it also indicates her resistance towards some Modernist preoccupations: the image enables Paley to represent epiphanic moments of consciousness without plumbing her characters' psychological depths. Indeed the depth in which Modernist writers probe their characters' minds could not be in greater contrast to Paley's stories, in which

dialogue comprises much of the narrative space. Paley traces the significance of dialogue in her narratives back to her experience of Jewish traditions of discussion and exegesis. In her review of the book Coat upon a Stick she writes of the dialogism of the Jewish community:

> This is a very Jewish, constantly talking work. It believes that what happens inside a person's head is dialogue, not stream of consciousness or third-person reporting. Free association is just right for psychology, but ... Jews are made of history and they talk in long, hard sentences, especially to themselves. They *are* the tradition of argument and discussion learned in yeshivas and shuls (217).

Faith's contempt for psychological jargon is unmistakeable. Asked by Jack to explain the behaviour of his parents she replies: "I'll tell you. It's not so hard. Any dope who's had a normal life could tell you. Anyone whose head hasn't been fermenting with the compost of ten years of gluttonous analysis" (Enormous 173). In her writing Paley rejects the role of psychologist. She tells Conway: "I wouldn't try to psyche some character out" (12). The associative techniques of many Modernist writers signal their affiliation with Freudian models of the unconscious. In his study of Modernism Peter Childs draws parallels between the stream-of-consciousness method of representation and Freud's notion of "free association" (Childs 52). Paley avoids such levels of penetration, representing the inner workings of the mind either through silence or plain speaking. Although she resists probing her characters' minds too deeply, she does not prohibit the reader from doing so; rather through this resistance Paley offers the reader the role of psychologist. Faith's father and brother tell Faith repeatedly that she is the perfect candidate for psychiatric therapy. Although Faith refuses such levels of self-examination she is

willing to admit that, by eclipsing certain emotions, she may have foregone a level of self-knowledge: "Luckily, I learned recently how to get out of that deep well of melancholy. Anyone can do it. You grab at roots of the littlest future, sometimes just stubs of conversation. Though some believe you miss a great deal of depth by not sinking down down down" (Later 83-4).

Paley and, to a certain degree, Faith, choose to concentrate on the surface details but this does not prevent the reader from "sinking down" and developing their own psychological readings. Paley exploits both her form and voice as ways of "getting the world to talk" to her; she thereby facilitates the "intersubjective encounter" between herself and the reader that Schweickart envisages in Gender and Reading (55). Paley acknowledges the agency of the world that she is addressing when she tells Cora Kaplan that "every story is completed by the reader" (Kaplan 152). Her solicitation of the reader's agency is strangely at odds with the responses of some critics and readers to her texts. When Kathleen Hulley called upon critics to contribute to her special issue on Paley, she encountered reservations concerning the vexed role of the reader/critic in Paley's stories. Jonathan Baumbach struggled to find a theoretical framework for Paley commenting that her prose "makes critical language seem excessive" (Baumbach 304). One unidentified critic declined Hulley's invitation, stating that: "[Paley] is too direct, she leaves me with nothing to say. Paley has no secrets … she tells what she is doing" (Hulley "Resistant" 9-10). One might attribute this sense of reader-preclusion to the conspicuous presence of inscribed readers in Paley's stories; perhaps these critics sensed that, by providing their own meta-commentary on the action, they 'write' the reader, leaving her little to do.

Indeed this reader alienation could not be further from the kind of response that Paley seeks. During a conversation with Paley and Donald Barthelme, William Gass reveals the method behind one of his stories and admits to the limits he places on the reader's role: "I didn't want the reader filling in anything behind the language." Paley replies: "Right, that's what's wrong with you. You don't leave him enough space to move around" (Barthleme 63). In response Gass recalls his frustration at the way that readers reacted against his esoteric depiction of an Indiana town; he claims that by querying his representation the reader reduces the text by "taking the complexities" of his own "experienced reality" and "simplify[ing] it" (Barthelme 62). However Paley insists upon her vision of a balanced writer/reader relationship. She always leaves room for the reader in the text:

> What you're forgetting, what you're underestimating, are the readers ... It's perfectly true I can't say e*verything* about my block in the city. I never can, but I can say enough so that anybody who is out there ... can build up enough of the rest of it and recognize that block, maybe even in a better way than a kind of quantification of events and people and paving stones ... I think that is art ... it's the reader and the writer, and that's the whole of the experience (Barthelme 62).

Wolfgang Iser's phenomenological codification of the reading process posits a similar form of dynamic between text and reader. He argues that textual meaning evolves from the process of interaction between the "aesthetic pole" - "the realization accomplished by the reader" - and the "artistic pole" - the author's text (Iser Act 21). In contrast to the New Critical emphasis on the self-sufficiency of the text, Iser focuses attention on the role of the reader. He advances the notion of reading as an active, experiential process, in which meaning remains provisional and

contingent. Blanks and silences perform an essential function in the act of interpretation and the preservation of this contingency:

> Communication in literature, then, is a process set in motion and regulated, not by a given code, but by a mutually restrictive and magnifying interaction between the explicit and the implicit, between revelation and concealment ... the gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text/reader relationship revolves (Iser Prospecting 34).

Critics of the story cycle have presented Iser's codification as a particularly useful model for the reader of the form. Indeed Robert Luscher argues that Iser's reading paradigm is more pertinent to the story cycle form than the novel, the form around which he built his theory: "In the short story sequence, even more so than in the novel (the basis for Iser theories of aesthetic response), the artist may set forth even less of the whole picture and rely on the reader's pattern-making faculties to formulate the variable connections and build textual consistency" ("Short" 155). Dunn and Morris use Iserian terminology to describe the interpretive methodology of the story cycle reader. They note that a number of devices such as recurring settings and motifs serve as "referential fields" for the reader in her search for connections (Dunn 31).[19]

Iser identifies the fundamental principle of the reading experience as "the process of anticipation and retrospection that leads to the formation of the virtual dimension, which in turn transforms the text into an experience for the reader" (Iser "Reading" 281). In "The Long-Distance Runner" Faith enacts this process of anticipation and retrospection; whilst running 'forwards' towards her future destination, she runs towards her past which, when she arrives at her old house, she

begins to reconstruct. Moments of reflection reveal the value of anticipation and retrospection. At the end of "Friends" she realizes that "Hindsight, usually looked down upon, is probably as valuable as foresight, since it does include a few facts" (Later 89).

For both Iser and Paley the agency of the reader is double-edged; the reader wields a high level of interpretive freedom yet is highly selective and therefore exclusionary. This duality characterizes Faith's reading strategies. Her quasi-godlike perspective in "Faith in a Tree" enables her to negotiate the voices that surround her, filling in the blanks of those narratives that most interest her; whilst she closes herself off to Lynn Ballard she centralizes the Kitty's benevolent voice. As she 'reads' the situations of her friends in the park her own fund of stories enables her to control the kinds of connections that she makes. She evades the familiar discursive territory of a confrontation with Richard by retrieving the memory of another story to drown out his voice: "I digressed and was free" (Enormous 89).

This fund of old and new narratives is rich in variety and, on the surface, inclusive. However Paley ends her latest collection with a challenge to Faith's selective strategies. In "Listening," the final story of Later the Same Day, Cassie, Faith's lesbian friend, chastises Faith for repeatedly eliminating her from her stories; she features only as a neglected gap, a silent and passive witness to the adventures of Faith and her friends: "you've just omitted me from the other stories and I was there. In the restaurant and the train, right there. Where is Cassie? Where is *my* life?" (210 Paley's italics). Cassie's closing words form an ironic coda to the entire Faith cycle as the pressure of her untold story bears down upon the linked narratives. The coda invites the reader to reflect upon past scenes and speculate upon the possible silences

and absences that inhabit them. Paley's affinities with postmodernism emerge strongly in this final story. Cassie's coda contests the ideal of community that Faith has built in the preceding stories. Not only does Faith consciously exclude Jack but both she and her creator have assembled a community that generates its own exclusionary discourses and boundaries. Together, Ruth, Selina, Ann, Susan and Faith form the kind of 'composite protagonist' that Susan Mann identifies in her study of the short story cycle: each voice "bear[s] a close resemblance to" the central protagonist, in this case Faith (Mann 10). Indeed the voices in Faith's female community are, to a certain degree, interchangeable. Even those women who do not belong in Faith's immediate world emerge as familiar types. In her introduction to The Little Disturbances of Man A. S. Byatt draws comparisons between those women who inhabit Paley's stories but do not belong to Faith's circle of friends. She places these women along a continuum, categorizing them according to their connections with Faith and each other: "Anna, of *The Pale Pink Roast*, is a woman somewhere between Cindy and Josephine, the nubile and seductive, and Faith and Virginia, the prolific, sloppy, loving and deserted" (n. pag.). Faith and Paley have compiled their own fund of "woman stories" whose characters represent facets of a composite personality.

In "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference," Iris Marion Young highlights the dangers of communal sensibilities for doubly-muted women like Cassie: "A woman in a feminist group that seeks to affirm mutual identification will feel and be doubly excluded if by virtue of her being different in race, class, culture, or sexuality she does not identify with the others nor they with her" (Young 301). Ironically, the communal ideal harbours the same dangers as the individualism that Paley opposes so vehemently: the establishment of a hierarchical structure that

excludes and silences the voices of the marginalized. Thus the final scene of the collection compels Faith to confront her dismissal of Jack's "woman stories"; just as Jack must realize that he cannot categorize and homogenize women, so Faith recognizes that, in the words of Hélène Cixous, "you can't talk about *a* female sexuality, uniform, homogeneous, classifiable into codes" (347 Cixous's italics).

* * *

One year after the publication of Later the Same Day Paley extended her cycle with another Faith story. "Midrash on Happiness" appeared in the 1986 issue of Triquarterly and has been reprinted in several anthologies, among them The Oxford Book of Jewish Stories and Peace Calendar 1989: a collection that was published by the War Registers League. In many ways the story exemplifies Paley's narrative poetics; only two pages long, it records a conversation between two familiar characters, Faith and Ruth, and ends with a characteristic shift in perspective as Ruth's supplementary, corrective vision undercuts Faith's personalized philosophy. "Midrash on Happiness" pivots on the possibilities of female community, perhaps as a response to Cassie's criticism. The story explicates the values of female connection and solidarity in its opening; Faith bemoans the limits of her experiences with men but continues to harbour great hopes for female relationships.

Midrash refers to the Hebrew tradition of producing commentary and debating interpretations of biblical texts. In his essay "Midrash and Indeterminacy" David Stern draws parallels between the practices of midrash and literary criticism, emphasizing the openness of both discourses:

> The very nature of midrash ... has now come to epitomize precisely that order of literary discourse to which much critical writing has

aspired, a discourse that avoids the dichotomized opposition of literature versus commentary and instead resides in the dense shuttle space between text and interpreter. In the hermeneutical techniques of midrash, critics have found especially attractive the sense of interpretation as play rather than as explication, the use of commentary as a means of extending a text's meanings rather than as a mere forum for the arbitration of original authorial intention (Stern 132).

One could apply Stern's broad analysis of midrash to Paley's aesthetic principles: her rejection of authorial intention as the source of the text and solicitation of the reader's interpretive play. In Reading the Book: Making the Bible a Timeless Text, Rabbi Burton Visotzky stresses the communal basis of midrash: "This ability to open the biblical text to new meaning allows us to open ourselves to the possibility of finding meaning. We can connect to the past, we can connect to the community with whom we read and share our dialogue with Scripture. Midrash lets us search for ourselves" (Visotzky 9-10). It is such a community that Faith has begun to establish among her female friends; by using the form of a male-authored dialogue, Paley challenges the tradition that restricts such privileges to men.

In The Dictionary of Feminist Theologies, Rabbi Donna Berman observes direct links between the practices of midrash and feminism. Most interpretations of biblical narrative arise from the presence of gaps in the text. Some of the most neglected gaps call into question the narratives of silenced and absent women: narratives that one might define as "second stories." Berman identifies examples of "glaring omissions" in biblical text: "how did Lot's daughters feel when their father offered them to the mob of men that surrounded their house? Where was Sarah

while Abraham was taking Isaac to the top of Mount Moriah to sacrifice him?" She notes: "These white spaces provide the canvas on which to paint midrashim" (Berman Dictionary). Cassie asks similar questions of Faith when she confronts her with the white space that signifies her presence in her stories.

The effects of Cassie's reprimand are clearly evident in this story. In the first paragraph Faith struggles to reach beyond facile generalities; as she seeks more precise terms for her definition of happiness she finds herself trapped in a kind of linguistic labyrinth: "she meant having (or having had) (or continuing to have) everything. By everything, she meant, first, the children, then a dear person to live with, preferably a man (by *live with*, she meant for a long time but not necessarily)" ("Midrash" 222). Faith recognizes the assumptions and associations that have become attached to her terms and tries to neutralize them, thereby creating an interpretation of happiness that is available to everyone. She continues by itemizing the memories and sensations that are essential to her happiness. As the reader of Faith's exegesis Ruth takes up a primarily silent but active stance; like most of Paley's reader/listeners her interjections provide a commentary, framing and querying Faith's discourse and prompting her to clarify and redefine her meaning.

The story takes the familiar shape of a dialogue between well-known female voices, but its form differs from other Paley stories. In a shift away from the usual charged exchanges and quips, "Midrash on Happiness" enables the reader for the first time to "hear Faith out" (222). Whilst in other narratives Faith has often avoided or abandoned contentious dialogue – she does this several times in "Faith in a Tree" and in her conversations with her father – here she delivers her interpretation of happiness in great detail, countering and supporting each statement with qualifications and explanations.

In a typically metafictional twist Ruth's response to the midrash verifies her friend's faith in the value of female talk; Ruth both "hears Faith out" and relativizes her emphasis on the personal with a reminder of the world's problems: "When I read the papers and hear all this boom boom bellicosity, the guys outdaring each other, I see we have to change it all – without killing it absolutely … Until that begins, I don't understand happiness – what you mean by it" (222). Ruth both listens to her friend and opens up the debate, projecting it to another level, extending the meanings of Faith's univocal, autobiographical text. In the final paragraph of the story Faith reciprocates by assuring her friend that she is aware of the world's problems and trying to explain her momentary lapse into solipsism; whilst female conversation offers an open forum for balanced and vigorous debate it also provides a cherished sanctuary of evasion: "Of course, Faith said, I know all that. I do, but sometimes walking with a friend I forget the world" (222).

For Faith, the female conversation remains the most effective form for defining the self. Read as an independent story, "Midrash on Happiness" seems to endorse her idealization of female community. Both women agree that the macho, competitive discourses of men are at the roots of the world's problems. However, read within the context of the cycle, Faith's midrash proves problematical. Many of the tensions of the earlier narratives remain unresolved; questions of gender difference are still a point of contention. Never before has Faith's frustration with the inadequacy of the masculine word been expressed so vigorously: she derides the "silence" and "stupidity" of men on the subject of capitalism (220). Only the men remain bound by absolute definitions in her carefully constructed midrash. When she addresses the need for male companionship, Faith assigns "that nice bunch of worried left-wing boys who flew … into a dream of paid-up mortgages" to the past

(221). By asking Ruth if she recalls these men, Faith appeals for confirmation that these figures no longer play a role in their lives; with Ruth's affirmation, she may eliminate them from her midrash. Ruth responds however by stating that not only can she remember them, but she remains "married to one" (221). Faith is clearly in danger again of reducing men to types and seems to have assembled several "man stories."

Clearly, Paley's feminist agenda informs her formal poetics. Her form has become a site for reinvention and reconnection, providing multiple points of entry and departure for her female characters. She continues to expand the cycle's boundaries in order to accommodate the balancing acts that shape female experience. Paley's men have less staying power in these scattered stories and have difficulty adapting to the open plots in which the women may run away from home, change jobs, or take up a new political cause at any moment. In "Midrash on Happiness" Faith's current "preferred man" is not named, but grouped along with the "silent" men who will not speak out against capitalism (220). However, Faith's dismissal of masculine sensibilities does not go unchallenged. Interestingly, it is the same voice that begins to query her homogenization of men in Later the Same Day. In Ruth's eyes Jack's gender does not disqualify him for appreciating her "woman stories." Moreover she has remained married to one of the well-intentioned men of the past that Faith excludes from her midrash; the marriage has not compromised her socialist views. Thus the more recent stories offer tentative evidence that men will perhaps find ways of securing a more stable position in Paley's open, permeable form. Until then, it is her female characters who will realize her vision of a world in which "people keep reappearing," "going away and coming back."

3

Insularity and Integration:

Joyce Carol Oates's Sequential Cycles

"One of the holiest of our myths always has been the unique, proud, isolated entity of a 'self'" (Oates "Myth" 74).

In 1989 Robert Luscher introduced the term 'short story sequence' to the growing number of taxonomies for the short story cycle. In "The Short Story Sequence: An Open Book," he argues that whilst the term 'short story cycle' illuminates the recurrence of characters and themes, it "does so at the expense of deemphasizing the volume's successiveness" (149). Luscher argues that the shift in term draws attention to the reader's "dominant experience" of the form which, he claims, is "sequential." My first chapter argues that the term 'cycle' is most appropriate for forms such as Eudora Welty's; the reader's experience of texts such as The Golden Apples is, on the surface, sequential, but the term 'cycle' is a more accurate description of the reader's journey through the text as she makes connections and traces networks of imagery. Luscher's term is perhaps more appropriate for those linked narratives in which the sequential structure remains paramount.

Luscher is one of the few story cycle critics to cite Joyce Carol Oates's Crossing the Border as an example of the form. In this case, his term is perhaps more accurate than Ingram's. In Luscher's words, Oates's text observes a "loose sequential progression" that is disrupted by "lapses" that "merely require a more

astute perception of the work's thematic unity" (164-5). In Crossing the Border most of the stories chart the lives of a married couple in linear fashion; other stories are ostensibly unrelated to this main sequence but illuminate thematic resonances that bind the work together as a whole.

Joyce Carol Oates has published a wide range of story cycles and sequences, most of which do not feature in explorations of the form. James Nagel focuses primarily upon the ethnicity of the short story cycle and does not refer to Oates's work at all. Dunn and Morris include Crossing the Border and All the Good People I've Left Behind in their "Chronology" of the composite novel but also cite Heat and Other Stories, a collection of short stories that are linked only by theme. Similarly, Susan Garland Mann refers to Oates in her bibliography in which she cites collections such as By the North Gate. She omits Crossing the Border and All the Good People I've Left Behind, two more consciously unified cycles. She does include, however, The Hungry Ghosts: Seven Allusive Comedies (1974) and The Poisoned Kiss and Other Stories from the Portuguese (1975): texts that bear a closer resemblance to the paradigmatic cycle form.

Oates's interest in the form dates back to her earliest days as a writer. She revealed to Robert Phillips in 1978 that she experimented with fragmented forms in high school, using Hemingway's In Our Time as a paradigm:

> I remember a 300-page book of interrelated stories that must have been modeled on Hemingway's *In Our Time* (I hadn't yet read *Dubliners*), though the subject matter was much more romantic than Hemingway's. I remember a bloated trifurcated novel that had as its vague model *The Sound and the Fury* (Phillips "Joyce" 76).

For Oates, formal boundaries are always flexible. In her interview for The Ohio Review she states: "Well, here is my theory of 'art,' at least my temporary theory: any work can be expanded nearly to infinity, or contracted back to almost nothing. And any 'work,' any artistic experience, can be translated back and forth into various forms – music, painting, literature" (51). Like Paley, Oates feels that content dictates form: "my subject matter does, in a sense, take precedence over the experimentation. I'm not at all interested in experimentation for its own sake" (McLaughlin "A Conversation" 126).

In The Poisoned Kiss and The Hungry Ghosts Oates emulates Jewett, Hemingway and Updike, exploiting the form's hybrid status to realize the ambivalent position of the artist.[20] In her essay "Between the Categories," Eileen Teper Bender examines how Oates tests "traditional forms" and experiments with a "variety of styles" in order to explore "the predicament of the artist, who, like herself, is caught between the categories, a medium for both the voiceless and the articulate, registering traditional contexts and an evolving 'new' consciousness" (415). Teper does not use the term 'short story cycle', but states that both The Hungry Ghosts and The Poisoned Kiss "could be considered 'fragmented' novels – short stories that, taken together, seem to offer a coherent vision" (416). Both the cycles cast a satirical eye over the world of art and academia: the egocentricity of the artist, the obsession with verifying one's individuality and originality. Although the stories in The Hungry Ghosts were initially published separately in the early years of the seventies, they all take place at Hilberry, a fictional university in Ontario. Oates uses a form that contests origins and notions of centrality to cast the territory of the campus novel in a new light and bring these preoccupations with identity to the fore. The cycle opens with a 'framing' story that is linked to the following narratives only

by theme but the next four stories feature recurring characters in the same setting. Like Welty, Oates signals the unity of the narratives by prefacing them with a cast list. Her exploitation of the form's elasticity, however, resembles that of Grace Paley; she does not bind her recurring characters and settings within the frame of the single cycle. Characters from The Hungry Ghosts reappear in Oates's later cycle, Crossing the Border.

As Bender notes, Oates's experiments with form enable her to explore "conflicting and disparate perceptions of the self" (Bender "Between" 423). Oates's theories of subjectivity arise continually in her prolific collections of reviews and essays and have become the subject of much critical debate. Emerging from her welter of formulations about selfhood is her deep antipathy towards egocentrism: "Suffering, [the human ego] projects its emotions outward into everything, everyone, into the universe itself" (New Heaven 260). Oates aligns this mode of consciousness with patriarchal ideology. In the condensed essay, "New Heaven and Earth," she chastises her male contemporaries for enacting "the old, losing, pitiful Last Stand of the Ego, the Self-Against-All-Others, the Conqueror ... Namer and Begetter of all Fictions" (53).

Such self-conceptions become the object of satire in The Hungry Ghosts. Oates parodies the self-absorption of the isolated academic by dramatizing moments that expose the permeability of closely guarded ego boundaries. When Roland Pauli enters a deceased copy-editor's room to search for his misplaced manuscript, he comes across several pages from similar versions of his book mixed in with his own. As the "invisible forms" of his rivals "swayed and lunged around him," Roland experiences a terrifying moment of disembodiment: "What if he had spent all these hours putting together the manuscript of another man, and he himself, Roland Pauli,

would be displaced?" (22, 28). Although he eventually recovers every page of his manuscript, Roland's identity boundaries have been irreparably damaged and he flees the scene for the haven of his own apartment, aware that "something terrible had happened to him" (30). It is not only men who fall prey to this kind of disembodiment. In "Angst," the final story in The Hungry Ghosts, a reclusive female author loses her sense of self when a hysterical young woman assumes her identity at a conference to a largely credulous audience of readers and critics. Suddenly unable to verify herself as the author, she leaves the conference bewildered and vaguely aware that, "Something had happened" (200).

Similar themes emerge in The Poisoned Kiss, a cycle whose stories are introduced as "translations from the Portuguese." In this cycle Oates plays with the reader's notion of authorship by presenting the stories as translations by "Fernandes de Briao." Like Paley, who queries or verifies the existence of her characters in a footnote, Oates offers a metafictional commentary on the status of this 'voice', confounding the reader's frame of reality. In her preface she writes:

> To the best of my knowledge he has no existence and has never existed, though without his very real guidance I would not have had access to the mystical 'Portugal' of the stories – nor would I have been compelled to recognize the authority of a world-view quite antithetical to my own" (Poisoned Kiss n. pag.).

The stories present moments of disorientation as the realities of the protagonists dissolve and they encounter ghostly, second selves. These encounters reflect Oates's Borgesian experience of conceiving the stories through the persona of another writer, "Fernandes de Briao": "One day I wrote a story that was strange to me, a highly abstract story set nowhere at all; I did not understand the story and in a way felt that

it was not my own" (Poisoned n. pag.). In 'writing' the book she responded to "a great pressure, a series of visions, that demanded a formal, aesthetic form; I was besieged by Fernandes – story after story, some no more than sketches or paragraphs that tended to crowd out my own writing" (Poisoned 188).

After the publication of these cycles, Oates continued to pursue her interest in new forms. In Crossing the Border (1976) and All the Good People I've Left Behind (1978) seemingly unrelated narratives disrupt a chronological sequence of stories concerning a set of recurring characters. The thematic links between these tangential stories are however just as evident in Oates's cycles as they are in Grace Paley's Faith cycle; indeed one might apply Dunn and Morris's notion of the composite protagonist to Oates's texts, as modes of consciousness recur constantly under different guises. Husbands and wives from one narrative become interchangeable with others as marriages undergo cycles of breakdown and reconciliation; unattached outsiders such as Annie Quirt in All the Good People oscillate between conformity and alienation, both soliciting and rejecting 'normality.' In both collections cyclic and sequential structures intertwine.

Speaking to Oates in May 2005, I asked her how she would define these forms. She described Crossing the Border as a "novel in the form of short stories": a definition that resembles Margot Kelley's taxonomy, "novel-in-stories," more than any other. Oates immediately aligned her incarnation of the form with Alice Munro's Lives of Girls and Women, in which the consciousness of Del Jordan establishes itself as the sustained focal point. Oates distinguished her more unified form from cycles such as Dubliners and The Golden Apples: works for which she expressed a great admiration. She views Crossing the Border as a more concentrated form than these "linked narratives," in which characters may disappear from the

reader's vision for several stories at a time. Affinities with Welty emerged, however, when Oates described her methodology. She found that the form "evolved" gradually as she was drawn back to particular characters, settings and themes. She reflected that she grew to "love the form" and now regards it as a particularly useful tool for the young writer who may find writing the "unwieldy" novel "a difficult psychic experience." The form serves, Oates suggested, as a means of "protecting yourself emotionally or psychologically ... if you give up on the novel you still have seven great stories" ("Postgraduate Seminar" 2005).

Seven of the fifteen stories in Crossing the Border follow the lives of married couple Renée and Evan Maynard who have moved from America to Canada. In this chapter I will examine the interaction of personal and geographical 'crossings' for the Maynards. The only other recurring characters are Hilberry academics Vincent Scoville and Jake Hanley; their stories feature characters who have crossed textual borders, moving from their original location in The Hungry Ghosts. In Crossing the Border the Hanley and Scoville stories form a kind of diptych although they do not follow each other in the collection. In the Renée-Evan 'sequence' Oates observes a chronological structure; indeed at times the collection reads like an interrupted novel.

In All the Good People I've Left Behind Oates experiments further with cyclic and sequential structures. Half the stories follow the life of Annie Quirt, the only woman in these narratives who remains single. Annie's narrative trajectory combines elements of both structures; although her series of doomed love affairs precipitates an ongoing cycle of agony and ecstasy, her final stories chart the development of a more autonomous, self-actualizing identity. Each of the Annie stories retains its status as a self-contained narrative: "The Leap," "Sentimental Journey," "The Tryst" and "Eye-Witness" appear as short stories in a variety of

publications. "The Tryst" is a particularly malleable story, as it crosses the borders of the Annie sequence into an entirely different text; it appears in A Sentimental Education, a collection of thematically linked stories of love and alienation published in 1979. The remaining stories in All the Good People trace a network of married couples. In these narratives Oates introduces a cyclic dynamic which emerges strongly in the final story, as names of characters recur, revealing hitherto concealed connections; the reader learns that characters from the seemingly unrelated stories, the 'couples cycle', and Annie's sequence, attended university together. Chronology is disrupted as sections of the final story transport the reader back to 1960 when the couples first met. Thus the cyclic structure supplants the sequential in the concluding story.

In her study of Oates's short stories Katherine Bastian argues that Crossing the Border and All the Good People are, ultimately, "sequences within short story cycles" (150). Torborg Norman responds that it is equally possible to assert that "the sequence is embedded in the flow of other stories and so place the eight disconnected stories on a par with any other autonomous Oates story" (203). Bastian's description seems more accurate in capturing the reader's experience of the form, as cyclic patterns certainly emerge from the seemingly unrelated narratives. My reading will explore how Oates exploits the elasticity of her form primarily to examine the *tension* between these structures and to represent the two sides of repetition; characters like Annie break out of repetitive patterns of doomed relationships and embark upon more open trajectories. Other characters in these stories continue to seek solace in the familiar; they repeat patterns in their marriages or reassert their ego boundaries through sexual conquest.

Whilst Grace Paley's Faith Darwin capitalizes upon the pliability of life's structures – she changes lovers and jobs frequently in order to rupture daily routines – most of Oates's characters remain locked within familiar scripts throughout these cycles. For Welty and Paley the form realizes the possibility of plural identities and revision. In Crossing the Border Oates uses the form primarily to foreground fixed structures and moments of paralysis. Through the convergence of cyclic and sequential narrative strains in All the Good People, Oates finds a way out for Annie, her wandering heroine.

* * *

In Joyce Carol Oates, Artist in Residence, Eileen Teper Bender highlights Oates's preoccupation with the psychology of the self and observes how she exploits the novel form as a "vehicle[] for personality in process" (9). Oates uses the cycle form to represent the progress of a particular kind of self. Most of the stories in Crossing the Border are expeditions into the consciousness of the educated but alienated wife. In All the Good People Oates intersperses Annie's experiences with narratives of disenchanted wives; these women take centre stage in the concluding title story.

Oates's account of the "human ego" recalls the masculine preoccupations in Welty and Paley's cyclic worlds: King MacLain and Ricardo's obsessions with origins and their self-designated roles as "conquerors" of the women in their communities. By renaming his girlfriends, Ricardo aims to establish himself as the "namer and begetter" of their identities. Whilst Virgie Rainey sympathises with King's "hideous face" that is a "silent yell at everything" it strikes the reader primarily as a "pitiful Last Stand of the Ego" (Welty Collected 446).

Similarly, the men in Crossing the Border display a traditionally masculine obsession with control. In "The Transformation of Vincent Scoville," Oates satirizes the protagonist who, having yearned to "'be like everyone else,'" finally substitutes an old photograph of a dead woman for a living and breathing partner (128). When a colleague suggests that the woman in the photograph is cross-eyed, Vincent's extreme egotism emerges in his fierce protestations and comic accusations of jealousy. The final phrase – "Vincent was alone again and all was well" – reverberates with irony (147). In "Through the Looking-Glass" Father Colton reflects how "He had always taught himself to control every emotion, even those that appeared to admirers to be spontaneous" (57). The preservation of the body plays a significant role in his construction of a public persona: "he liked to stride into his classes and feel that spark of excitement touch him as the students' eyes turned upon him, actions that led outward from himself and his long, lean, muscular body, activities that kept him alert" (49). By revelling in the centrifugal power of his body he enacts Oates's image of the "suffering" ego that "projects its emotions outward into everything." When Father Colton begins to fall in love with Frieda, this control dissipates; it is only by convincing himself that Frieda represents a new calling for him – "he thought of how Frieda was Christ, in her loneliness and suffering ... and how he was Christ in ministering to her" (61) – that he can assimilate the abstract uncertainties of love into his life. When she abandons him he ends the story in a moment of disembodiment, "sifting and groping through the fragments of his life" (64).

This concluding sense of estrangement has become a hallmark of the Oatesian short story. In "The Golden Madonna," another story from Crossing the Border, Alexander's brush with social taboo – a sexual encounter with his aunt –

leaves him bereft of orientation: "He stared, amazed. He was somewhere he didn't recognize. It was strange to him, new to him, evidently he was in a foreign city" (168). "Love. Friendship," another story from Crossing the Border, leaves reader and character with an ominous openness; Blaine's presence eerily haunts the final pages as it will continue to torment Judith and Larry. Just as these endings strip away the characters' ego boundaries, so do they contest the parameters of the individual story by establishing a thematic pattern that binds them together.

The image of the bounded male recurs in All the Good People I've Left Behind. In her portrayal of John Reddinger, Oates anticipates Judith Butler's theory of gender as performance. In "The Tryst" John Reddinger conducts his relationships according to polarized gender identifications. His fixed conceptions of masculinity and femininity typify what Butler describes as "the cultural configurations of gender" (Gender 138). His 'configuration' of manhood is immediately apparent in his stance at the beginning of the story. John verifies his sense of self by regularly surveying his "handsome sloping lawn" and "baronial" surroundings (49, 50). As he projects his gaze over the rows of identical houses, he draws comfort from the self-containment and fixity of his environment: "Like beads on a string were the houses, solid and baronial, each inhabited, each protected. Day or night he knew them and the knowledge made him pleasurably intoxicated. He was Reddinger. Reddinger, John ... He was in charge of the world" (50). This stance of ownership and surveillance frames the story; in the final scene, after he has dispatched Annie to hospital, he returns to his window and, as before, mechanically recites the names of his neighbours, reaffirming himself through this established and unchanging world. John's masculine self is clearly "an identity tenuously constituted in time, instituted

in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler Gender 140 Butler's italics).

John's affair with Annie transports him into new territory, as, for the first time, he relinquishes control, "for once ... letting a woman take the lead" (51). For John, Annie embodies an intoxicating conflation of masculine and feminine traits; initially he is particularly attracted to her more masculine qualities – her "haphazard, promiscuous life," her lack of "guilt or shame or self-consciousness" (55). Annie's "long restless rangy body" becomes the site for John's experimentation with gender configurations: her finger nails that are "never very clean" and her "tough, ungiving" flesh (50, 50, 49). Other reported episodes in the story suggest his covert attraction to the male body. He recalls his narrow escape from a transvestite with relief and disgust but his initial attraction hints at a suppressed fascination with what Butler terms "dissonant gendered features" (Butler Gender 24).

John is ultimately unable to come to terms with Annie's duality and reach beyond familiar gender identifications. Throughout the story he re-stabilizes himself by adopting a traditionally masculine role: saving her from starvation, he reflects that, "it had pleased him to feed her, to nourish her on so elementary a level" (53-4). Annie's instinct that their relationship is simply "something you're watching yourself do" is proved correct; when her suicide attempt threatens his carefully constructed world John rejects her and returns to his familiar routine of stylized repetitions (56). In The Profane Art, Oates explains how men become caught up in this kind of bind: "A man's quarrel with Woman is his quarrel with himself – with those 'despised' and muted elements in his personality which he cannot freely acknowledge because they challenge his sense of masculine supremacy and control" (35). John's response illustrates Oates's theory; by crossing the border into

apparently irrational and uncontrolled behaviour, Annie confronts John with those "muted elements" of his own identity that threaten his precarious autonomy: his suppressed desire to experiment with gender boundaries and his fascination with social taboos. The textual ellipsis between John's dismissal of Annie and his return to the window signifies his refusal to consider the implications of his lover's act. This gap solicits the reader to query his reversion to type at the end; thus through a strategically placed silence, Oates undermines the validity of his final, authoritative gesture.

Oates's invective against her male contemporaries suggests sympathies with feminist ideology, yet she remains, unlike Paley, reluctant to associate herself with one particular discourse.[21] Although she aligns certain characteristics with masculinity, she remains sceptical about essentialist views of gender difference. For Oates, the divisions between men and women do not inhere in psychological dispositions but are a product of social ideology. In a review for The New Republic in 1979 she asserts: "Though I don't believe that there is a distinctly 'female' sensibility, I know, of course, that there has been a female fate" (Review 28). In May 2005 this opinion had not changed, as she reiterated that gender identity is "primarily shaped by social conditioning" ("Postgraduate Seminar"). Gender boundaries are imposed rather than inherent: "one is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (De Beauvoir 48). As Butler notes, "we refer not only to women as a social category but also as a felt sense of self, a culturally conditioned or constructed subjective identity" ("Gender Trouble" 324). In her short story cycles Oates both represents and queries the paradigms that shape this 'female fate.' Female protagonists repeatedly find themselves simulating selves in an attempt to emulate models of femininity. In "Customs" from Crossing the Border Renée infantilizes

herself to beguile the customs officer. When the telephone rings in the middle of the night in "Love. Friendship." Judith considers the various poses that she might assume if caught eavesdropping:

> I could pretend I am curious about who is telephoning, innocently curious ... If I eavesdropped I might learn ... an important fact about my marriage ... But I lie here motionless, afraid to move. What I must never do, must never do, what I must never do ... I must never intentionally deceive my husband (15-6).

The terse dialogue and weighty silences between the genders in Oates's story cycles are markers of the boundaries that define their relationships. In the title story of Crossing the Border, Renée tries to recall old conversations with her husband but retrieves only tenuous fragments. She cannot remember whether she has mentioned that they had to travel south to enter Canada or indeed "if he had bothered to reply" (10). As the border between 'real' and imaginary conversations becomes blurred she recognizes the insignificance and inadequacy of language; in their world, words, like gestures, function only as unitary signs in the familiar rituals of marriage: "Pain took the form of silence with him. *Sorry. Sorry. Sorry. Sorry!* Euphoria: words. Excited proclamations. Apologies. Hand squeezing, forearm stroking, light airy married-lovers' kisses" (10). Abiding by these customs Oates's husbands and wives circumvent direct conflict and, collusively, construct a layer of insularity that protects them both from each other and the outside world. Oates's commentary on the fiction of Jean Stafford has particular resonance for the characters in her own short stories: "while narrative conflict between individuals is rare, an extraordinary pressure is built up within the protagonists, who appear trapped inside their own

heads, inside their lives (or the social roles their 'lives' have become), and despair of striking free" (Oates Profane 123).

As a form that builds itself upon the principle of repetition, the story cycle has established itself as a useful medium for the representation of marital ritual. John Updike, Oates's contemporary, uses the form for this purpose in Too Far to Go: the Maples Stories (1979).[22] Like Oates, Updike published the stories within his cycle independently before assembling them into a single form. In The Elements of John Updike, Alice and Kenneth Hamilton highlight the compatibility of Updike's chosen form and his fictional subject:

> As a "thing" to be reported, married love does not fit easily into the short story form ... In order to depict marriage ... it is necessary for the writer to show something of the history of the individual marriage; and that means recording the passage of time and the accumulation of memories giving marriage its historical destiny, its unique and living character. Updike has ... found a strategy for making the short story record marriage history. This involves linking stories, divided in time of writing, through the expedient of having them depict successive incidents in the history of one specific marriage (51-2).

As a form in which the components simultaneously assert their unity and individuality, the short story cycle is indeed a useful vehicle for depicting a marriage such the Maples': a union that is at once tenuous and indissoluble. In one of the early stories, "Giving Blood," Richard is perplexed by the possibility of simultaneous retention and relinquishment, separation and connection: "'I don't really understand this business of giving something away, and still somehow having it'" (56). He realizes this possibility when he finally leaves Joan. Having adjusted

to bachelorhood he recognizes that even though both he and his wife have taken other lovers, Joan will "never stop gesturing within him" (231). He does not have to choose between the safe but sterile insularity of his marriage or complete isolation.

Not all of Oates's characters achieve this insight. Neither Oates nor Updike champion insularity; they both point towards a commonality between the genders and the permeability of gender boundaries. However, Oates's fictional world usually reveals such possibilities to the reader only. As Bender notes, a paradox lies at the heart of Oates's fiction. Although identity boundaries and categories continue to fascinate her, Oates's novels and stories "afford only the rarest glimpse of the ideal self-actualizing personality" (Joyce 166). Most of her characters are destined to remain in the dark. Where Welty and Paley end their cycles with visions of openness and possibility, qualifications undercut the final story of Crossing the Border. Through the storm in "River Rising," Renée and Evan achieve a renewed unity but their communication problem remains and nothing has really changed. Both Katherine Bastian and Torborg Norman read the final story as a relatively happy ending to the Renée-Evan sequence; communication is restored on some level as Evan quells Renée's fears about the storm. According to Bastian the implications of their discourse – the recognition of their mutual vulnerability and their co-dependence – enable them to "ultimately cure their separation (temporarily?)" and thus "raze the boundaries between them" (141). My reading differs slightly here from Bastian's; whilst she concedes that this reconciliation of interests may be temporary, I would question the very validity of their reunion. Although the storm re-ignites dialogue between the couple, their interaction is contingent upon the familiarity of the roles it enables them to play. Evan in particular is comfortable in his role as the protective, rationalizing male who commands the situation and

contains his wife's hysteria. Bastian reads Renée's momentary loss of control as a means of liberating herself from her "stifling isolation" (Bastian 141): a feeling that Evan himself has secretly experienced in the park. In Bastian's reading this commonality draws them together; my reading would suggest that it is rather their reversion to a familiar script that temporarily unites them.

Society's models of masculinity form a barrier to true connection between the couple. It is perhaps for this reason that Oates offers only one story in which Evan becomes the centre of consciousness. In "An Incident in the Park" Oates reveals how he has experienced the same feelings of loss, disillusionment and fear as his bored and lonely wife: "Whatever identity Evan had possessed had been abandoned on the other side of the border … and he had never guessed, had never dared imagine, that the value of a human being might be irrevocably bound up with an entire culture" (209). Even in this story he projects many of his feelings outwards onto the madman, insisting upon the disparity between them. By representing this method of sublimation and negation this narrative casts a new light over Evan's absences and silences in preceding stories. His silences verify Oates's theory that certain facets of a man's personality remain "muted." Her analysis of masculine dilemmas reveals her sympathy with men like Evan. In 1972 she asserted: "This is the era of Women's Liberation, but I really must say that I think men have a far more difficult time, simply living, existing, trying to measure up to the absurd standards of 'masculinity' in our culture and in nature itself, which is so cruel" (Bellamy 20). In May 2005 Oates noted that "girls and women are conditioned more conspicuously" but boys have a "hard time in the playground" as they are driven from a young age to compete ("Postgraduate Seminar").

* * *

In All the Good People I've Left Behind Oates explores the possibilities of debunking gender binaries. Annie Quirt emulates other cyclic heroines such as Mary McCarthy's Margaret Sargent, embarking upon a quest for unconditioned subjectivity. In many ways the Annie who appears in the first few stories is a female version of free-spirited male wanderers like Eudora Welty's King MacLain; she seeks self-definition through sexual enterprise and displays a compulsive disregard for social boundaries. Whilst she initially shows no sign of guilt over her promiscuity, these conquests gradually emerge, as Norman notes, as a form of masochism (Norman 217). She revels in the self-loathing that accompanies these encounters, even attempting suicide after her affair with Reddinger. She veers between the stereotypical behaviours of male and female lovers, between self-containment and dependency. At the beginning of her affairs Annie adopts a number of typically masculine postures. When John Reddinger reveals his discomfort over his past indiscretions, she responds with the kind of nonchalance one might expect from the male wanderer: "'I never think about the past, Annie said lazily ... I mean, what the hell? – it's all over with'" (52). Tempering this indifference are her masochistic cries for help and bouts of hysteria and depression during which she yearns for stability and love. Even her most extreme measures are exposed as performances. In the story "Eye-Witness" Annie watches herself as she recovers from another suicide attempt in hospital, ferociously mocking her deceptive strategies with cruel self-mimicry: "Annie, you bitch: listen to your ugly whining voice, listen to your lies. You're so pathetic – pitiful – transparent" (79). Annie's lapses into masochism are, like John's attempts to forge an unconventional relationship, something she is simply "watching herself do."

It is not until "Sentimental Journey," the fourth Annie story in the cycle, that she sees her willed misery in its true light as a form of solipsism: "She had thought that contentment was an indication of self-esteem, not knowing that discontent, of the kind that raged in her, was far more egotistical" (109). In her final narrative and the penultimate story of the collection, "Walled City," she abandons these performances and retreats into self-sufficiency and isolation. In Quebec City she aims to live "without boundaries and without the need to erect them" (123). She repudiates the pattern of "stylized repetition" that locks the men and women of the other stories into gender paradigms; her affair with Philip is her last attempt at social integration.

As noted in my chapter on Welty, Josephine Donovan observes how fiction represents quest narratives with "progressive plots" that are "oriented toward events happening sequentially or climactically" (107). Annie's narrative approximates in many ways the traditional quest plot; each affair leads onto the next, her performances becoming more extreme, until she discovers a qualified freedom in solitude. When we leave Annie in her "walled city" she has turned her back upon the "artifices" of her relationship with Philip and cut her few remaining and most basic ties with society (138). In the final scene of "Walled City" she sleeps with Philip one last time, sensing as usual the "bitter, willful tension" involved in all her sexual encounters (142); this experience prompts a further retreat into self. She opts out of the "world of language" that she has always inhabited; when a couple ask her for directions she explains in French that she cannot speak English (144). In her concluding epiphanic moment she realizes that, for "many years, she had been perfectly safe, perfectly alone, without knowing it" (144). Countering this self-acceptance are worrying questions about the viability and long term effects of such

isolation. Annie's withdrawal from society signifies both a form of progression and regression: she no longer seeks definition through performance but, by refusing all forms of community, denies herself more invigorating ways of construing identity. In the initial stages of "Walled City" she accomplished little during her period of disenfranchisement. In alienating herself, Annie adopts the strategy of the archetypal Oatesian heroine. In her study of "Unliberated Women" in Oates's fiction, Joanne V. Creighton notes: "Often the frustration of women is turned inward in a conscious or unconscious quest for death. So often for Oates's women freedom seems to lie in the deadening of emotion, in the deliberate quest for nothingness" (152).

Torborg Norman admires Annie's self-discipline, but states: "She appears to have been abandoned by the author in a cul-de-sac of isolation which excludes others." This isolation is, Norman argues, "no solution" to her problems (220). Throughout the sequence Annie has followed a pattern of withdrawal pursued by many of Oates's troubled heroines. In her analysis of Oates's story collection Marriages and Infidelities, Margaret Rozga examines this pattern in Oates's revisions of Chekhov's "The Lady with the Pet Dog" and Joyce's "The Dead": "Oates's characters retreat from large open spaces to smaller spaces, bathrooms or cars, as if the confinement and/or reduction of space would simplify the world, make it proportionately more manageable, or lock out the troubling elements" (Rozga 283). This is certainly the pattern of Annie's life: she retreats to John's bathroom when she recognizes the imminent end of their affair; the hospital ward functions as a sanctuary of evasion; the walled city insulates her from compromising relationships. Similarly, when Renée longs to flee the confines of her home she finds solace, paradoxically, in the enclosed spaces of local museums and libraries. This kind of

reduction is, to quote Rozga, "also dysfunctional and, in fact, deadly ... Being alone and in a small space may provide a respite, but it does not provide a healthy sense of self" (Rozga 283, 285). Like the characters in Oates's revisionary stories, Annie runs the risk of "drifting toward boundlessness, or nonbeing" (Rozga 286): a fate that is as undesirable as that of the bounded male.

Torborg's assessment of Annie's situation captures the tenuousness of her epiphany but it cannot stand as the final word on her whole story. Rather than consigning Annie to a dead end, Oates reserves an open destiny for her heroine: a fate that she denies the couples in the more cyclic narrative structure. It is not Annie but Maxine Mandel, the rejected wife, who commits suicide.[23] In the final story Fern and Alex Enright reach a "cul-de-sac" in their relationship as they grow further and further apart without fully acknowledging or understanding their estrangement. Once the marriages have dissolved, there is no other narrative for these wives.

Oates offers a bleaker vision of separation than John Updike. In the Maples stories the pull of marital love continues to register itself after the dissolution of the marriage. In the penultimate story of Too Far to Go, "Divorcing: A Fragment," Joan Maple contemplates suicide as she struggles to rebuild her life. Richard's reaction is in stark contrast to Ted Mandel's resigned attitude to Maxine's suicide. Although he has known happiness since the separation, Richard experiences again the lure of the marital bond. For a moment he is tempted to enact a final gesture of solidarity with his ex-wife: "He wished to be out of this, this life and health he had achieved since leaving her, this vain and petty effort to be happy. His happiness and health seemed negligible, compared to the consecrated unhappiness they had shared" (234). In the concluding story, "Here Come the Maples," Richard and Joan finally divorce but the remnants of love and affection remain; divided by their lawyers in the courtroom,

"Richard inertly gravitated toward Joan, the only animate object in the room that did not repel him" (255). The title of the story establishes the mood for this final image of the Maples: by recasting the familiar phrase of the wedding day in the context of the divorce court, Updike imbues the final scene with a surprising spirit of promise.

Updike notes in his foreword that one of the sequence's added stories is merely "a fragment that cried off completion"; he underlines this resistance to closure with the title, "Divorcing: a Fragment" (Too Far 10). Updike's ending typifies his twofold view of marriage. Once the marriage has dissolved, both Richard and Joan will continue in their struggle to establish separate identities. As Robert Luscher argues, the "marriage ... becomes the book's real protagonist, since its partners essentially become subsumed by it" (Luscher "Mapping" 109). Certainly one cannot help but wonder where these characters will go next. However, the threat of non-being is countered by their mutual acceptance of the end of their marriage: a sensibility that Updike again expresses in his foreword: "That a marriage ends is less than ideal; but all things end under heaven, and if temporality is held to be invalidating, then nothing real succeeds" (10). Unlike Maxine Mandel, both Richard and Joan have continued to fulfil their sexual needs after the dissolution of the marriage: a feat that Oates's women often find difficult. As Creighton notes:

> Oates views the libidinal drive as dominant for all human beings – women and men – no matter how they may seek to suppress it. Fulfillment in Oates's works ... can only come when a man and a woman can open themselves up to the emotional and biological drives within themselves; only when they risk loss of control, loss of conscious self, do they have a chance of liberating the true self within (150).

This kind of liberation eludes many Oatesian women. Speculating upon ways of breaking the pattern of emotional withdrawal, Creighton writes: "Potential liberation through healthy sexuality is a possibility. But very few of Oates's characters – especially very few women – achieve this liberation (148). Maxine takes other lovers but eventually succumbs to the lure of non-being. Aware that the stigma of the divorcee prohibits her re-entry into social circles, she can conceive of no other space for herself.

In the final story of All the Good People, we learn that Annie has at least written herself out of the narrative of "the characteristic Oatesian woman" who "sits around waiting for something to happen, or builds an impenetrable wall around the self so that nothing can happen" (Creighton 156). At the end of "Walled City" – the last story that centres upon Annie – she has broken out of what she recognizes as the "now-familiar cycles of the ritual" of doomed relationships (137); Philip's delight that he and Judd once dated the same girl enforces the way in which she has been, in Judd's words, "*used and recycled*" (139 Oates's italics). However, she has also cut herself off from any possibility of integration. In the final story, "All the Good People I've Left Behind," we learn that Annie has reassumed her quest. She appears briefly in the first retrospective scene and her name resurfaces whenever the characters reminisce about their formative days at Ann Arbor. Annie's presence haunts the pages of this concluding story, registering itself in the title; although the couples reminisce about those with whom they have lost contact, Annie has also left these characters behind. The tantalizing glimpses of Annie in this story tease the reader as the protagonists remember Annie vividly but fail to discover what has happened to her. The characters' collective fascination with Annie reflects that of the reader; both unsuccessfully try to map her movements. As the story continues to

pursue the lives of husbands and wives, we begin to suspect that Annie has achieved her state of isolation and moved beyond the reader's grasp. At the end of the story however Fern Enright informs Ted Mandel of Annie's successful one-woman show. Our final image of Annie is through Fern's eyes where she appears as part of a group, "coming out the Brass Rail with several other people, men and women both ..." (225). This fleeting reference reassures the reader that Annie's retreat into self was a transitional period, resulting in the development of her identity as an artist.[24]

In the 2005 lecture "The Faith of a Writer" Oates observed that "woundedness" and "isolation" are "so often at the core of creativity." At the end of All the Good People Annie emerges as a self-determining artist. It is of course significant that Fern specifies that Annie is surrounded by "men and women both." Annie is no longer alienating women by focusing her attention exclusively on men. It is this fugitive image that, above all, constitutes the true climax of Annie's sequence. If we place this image within the context of the other stories and indeed Oates's work as a whole, it becomes all the more tantalizing; this vision of Annie represents one of Oates's rare self-realizing characters. In "The Myth of the Isolated Artist" Oates writes approvingly of "a few human beings, gifted with the ability to 'see' themselves as 'other,'" who are "not overly intoxicated with the selfness of the self" and who "devise works of art that are autobiographical statements of a hypothetical, reality-testing nature which they submit ... to the judgment of their culture" (74).

Through her performance as an artist Annie has broken the bonds of "selfness" by recreating herself as "other." Interestingly, her chosen method of self-representation shares many of the characteristics of her gendered performances. Through her one-woman show, she deliberately discloses to society "an identity ...

constituted in time, instituted in an exterior space through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (Butler Gender 140). However, through her art Annie asserts her agency, finding new ways to model the self and generating development through repetition. Her fleeting appearance at the end of the cycle reflects her new freedom. She ultimately eludes the form which can no longer contain her. By revealing aspects of fallacious past identities through her work, she exhibits a self-reflexivity and awareness that reaches far beyond that of her contemporaries. Unlike Maxine, she has found a way to reintegrate herself into society without relinquishing her sense of identity; as Oates writes, "In surrendering one's isolation, one does not surrender one's own uniqueness" ("Myth" 75). In a story in which sexual partners and personality traits become ever more interchangeable, Annie emerges as the most distinct identity. Her influence over the other characters as an absent presence emerges when Ted Mandel recalls her. He realizes that his latest young lover, Lisabeth, "had been only a version of Annie"; it is with "a pang of emotion" that he remembers Annie and wonders whether she "had been the woman meant for him all along" (225).

Oates uses her narrative voice to tease the reader further. At eighty-two pages "All the Good People I've Left Behind" is by far the longest story in the cycle. Guiding the reader through the shifts in location and time is the kind of authoritative voice that one is more likely to find in Oates's novels than her short stories. Oates filters all of the other stories in the collection through a single character's point of view, leaving the reader to detect and speculate upon the gaps. Throughout the collection the reader frequently sees beyond the characters' restricted and self-oriented visions. As the cyclic and sequential strains progress one uses readings of other stories to recognize how characters have become locked into mechanical

repetitions. In the final story, Oates moves between four perspectives, each of which forms a kind of commentary on the other. Each section exposes the limits of a particular consciousness. As the story advances the reader begins to exercise a high level of agency as she mediates between the four points of view. However Oates adds a third strain to the story that both reinforces and counters this high level of reader agency; through the careful juxtaposition of different perspectives and the occasional narrative act of ventriloquism for the characters, the reader senses a strong narratorial presence that the other stories lack. Initially this presence encourages the reader's burgeoning sense of agency. The reader and the narrative voice move ahead of the husbands and wives who draw upon preconceptions of other characters in their judgements. Moreover for the first time in the collection Oates's narrative voice intimates its knowledge, sotto voce, of future events to the reader. When Maxine decides to upbraid Fern over her poor posture, the narrative voice reveals the significance of her remarks in determining the future of their relationship: "Maxine … will speak to Fern one day soon about this: must speak. (But so bluntly that Fern will never really forgive her and, many years later, it is the not-quite-conscious memory of Maxine's unaccountable rudeness that will finally determine Fern's rejection of her)" (151). The use of parentheses marks the covert nature of this disclosure between narrative voice and reader. Through this ventriloquism for Fern the narrative voice liberates the reader from the characters' tunnel vision, mapping out the shape of future relationships. In no other story does the reader sense so powerfully the insularity of the characters and, as they continue to misinterpret each other, the need to 'monitor' their warped visions of each other.

The form of this concluding story makes further demands on the reader's attention; with its constant references to figures from the past, this is the story in

which cyclic and sequential strains merge, leaving Oates's active reader to untangle a nexus of potential connections. The reader's sense of control is typically double-edged. By sustaining the hiatus between reader and character Oates endows her reader with an almost godlike perspective. This knowledge does not extend to Annie who eludes the reader's eye. When the Mandels and Enrights first recall Annie, the reader feels secure in her knowledge of Annie's fate. It is only at the end of "All the Good People" that one realizes that Annie has somehow emerged from her walled city, armed once more for everyday life. The story of her rehabilitation remains tantalizingly out of reach. By disrupting unidirectional narrative strands with gaps and seemingly tangential stories Oates monitors the reader's knowledge and, in the final pages, cuts off her growing sense of omniscience.

Through her negotiation of Annie's sequence, Oates achieves the effects of both the novel and short story form within one narrative strain. The indeterminacy at the end of "Walled City" typifies the modern short story with its characteristic resistance to closure. In "The Reading and Writing of Short Stories," Eudora Welty designates "mystery" as the most important component of her favoured form ("Reading" 56). In "Defining the Short Story: Impressionism and Form" Suzanne C. Ferguson echoes this when she writes that the "moral" of the modern short story is a "hardly won proposition, whose validity remains conditional and implicit, unconfirmed by the authorial voice, giving the story both "unity of effect" and a certain vagueness of mystery" (228). Oates achieves this effect in "Walled City" through Annie's tenuous epiphany and the absence of a stabilizing narrative voice. However she chooses to enlighten the reader to Annie's future a little by concluding the cycle with an image that gestures towards resolution and stability: a climax that is perhaps more characteristic of the cohesive novel form. By embedding this image

of Annie within the cyclic structure of the final story and filtering it through Fern's memory, Oates ultimately distances her heroine from the reader and preserves the mystery around her.

* * *

Stepping beyond the textual positions of the characters, one can perceive their personal struggles in their geographical movements and locations. In both of these cycles the tensions that shape the characters' lives are commensurate with their environments. As inhabitants of a post-colonial settler country, the Canadians and Québéçois oscillate between two positions: risking isolation by asserting a unitary national identity that displaces European and American paradigms, and integrating with the international community and existing alongside their cultural models, risking forfeiture of the self. In his essay on the Canadian short story cycle Gerald Lynch notes that "the form has held a special attraction for Canadian writers" (35); he draws parities between the dynamics of the form and the attempt to "find that elusive balance between the one and the many" that characterizes Canadian life. Lynch distinguishes the Canadian struggle from the American one by suggesting that "Canadians ... traditionally have been more willing to sacrifice the gratifications of individualism for the securities of community" (Lynch 37).

Studies of Canadian experience and discourse refer repeatedly to this tension as a defining characteristic of Canadian everyday life. In Understanding Canada Ralph R. Krueger writes: "Canadians seem to be obsessed with the fear that Canada lacks a real national identity" (21). So sensitive was Oates to these identity issues that she initially planned to publish the Crossing the Border stories under a pseudonym. She was "not comfortable with writing about Canadian experience as a non-Canadian" (Postgraduate Seminar" 2005). In The Empire Writes Back Bill

Ashcroft explores the Canadian preoccupation with identity. He observes how Canadians have developed metaphors of difference with which to counter their fear of anonymity and distinguish themselves from the United States: the 'mosaic' has become "an important cultural determinant" for Canadians as a counterpoint to the 'melting-pot' of the United States (Ashcroft 36). By implementing the image of the mosaic to represent their national stance towards ethnic heterogeneity, Canadians aim to emphasize the egalitarianism of their country: by sustaining the boundaries between the disparate ethnicities that constitute their nation, they respect the differences that distinguish one group from another. Thus this image of bounded yet co-existing identities counters one American vision of amalgamating divergent ethnic groups. As Kenneth Thompson notes in his essay "Identity and Belief," the "balance" between unity and diversity has changed in American culture from one era to the next: "For the first sixty years of the twentieth century the emphasis was on processes which were thought to produce unity through the assimilation of ethnic groups ... Since the 1960s there has been a shift of emphasis to a view that celebrates cultural diversity" (19). Thus in the past forty years the image of the mosaic has become a more fitting paradigm for American culture than that of the melting-pot; Grace Paley's most recent collection, Later the Same Day, testifies to this shift as the various cultures that Faith encounters begin to reclaim their heritage.

Similarly, Ashcroft points out fluctuations in the Canadian situation that indicate a continuing unease about the nation's identity. Using the example of Canadian literature as a cultural model he discerns underlying tensions in this image of self-sufficiency:

> Canadian literature, perceived internally as a mosaic, remains generally monolithic in its assertion of Canadian difference from the

> canonical British or the more recently threatening neo-colonialism of American culture. Alternatively, it has striven for outside recognition by retreating from the dynamics of difference into the neo-universalist internationalist stance (36).

As Oates's Renée begins to mix in the circles of Canadian artists, she encounters evidence of this tension. In "The Scream" she recognizes how Canadians have become caught up in the conflict between isolation and integration: between replacing old literary models with their own – some argue that their art should "supplant" that of Chekhov and Picasso – and becoming part of the global community by insisting that their art is "international" (173). Unsurprisingly it is the former paradigm of self-containment that most attracts the inward-looking Renée: "Their wild, hopeless wishes for insularity, for a kind of cultural protective tariff that would banish competition from the outside world … was, in a way, deeply moving to her" (173).

In Visual and Other Pleasures Laura Mulvey writes that "For the Canada delineated by multinational, international finance, U.S. economic and political imperialism, national identity is a point of resistance, defining the border fortifications against exterior colonial penetration" (143). Similarly Oates's characters seek a stable core of identity as a point of resistance to their ultimate fear: loss of self. By retreating into her walled city Annie constructs "border fortifications" against further erosion of the self. In the story "All the Good People I've Left Behind," Alex Enright is driven by this fear. Interestingly, Oates uses the same image to describe his apprehension as Forrest Ingram deploys to define the short story cycle: "Since childhood he has been unable to tolerate the thought of

being one individual among many – one cell lost in a vast indecipherable tissue" (146).

Through her dialectical form Oates represents the possibility of both retaining selfhood whilst co-existing with others. Annie registers this possibility in the paintings at the provincial museum in Quebec City. She recognizes that the artists are all "derivative" but also perceives in each painting an esoteric quality that overrides their derivative properties: "the paintings had their own vitality, direct, light-filled" (129). She perceives the unique regionalism in the paintings that sets them apart from European paradigms: "the farmhouses and snowy fields and woodlands of rural Quebec must have exerted a tremendous influence over the artists, quite apart from their European models" (129). Just as Annie the artist stands both independent and integrated at the end of the collection, so these paintings belong on the international stage but stand apart as individual pieces.

Similarly each story in both All the Good People and Crossing the Border achieves meaning as an isolated narrative and as part of the cyclic and sequential structures. Stories that seem to rest on the margin of the collection – those that do not directly concern Annie, Evan or Renée for example – move to the 'centre' as specific moments impinge upon each other, establishing new thematic strands. For example in "Blood-swollen Landscape" Oates reveals what can happen when men and women are robbed of their familiar structures and routines; Martin's realisation that "the containment of his former life" has begun to "shift out of shape" prompts his shocking attack on the girl in the woods (68). Although he is a marginal character in the context of the cycle – he does not appear again in All the Good People – Martin's assault haunts the collection as an extreme reaction to the problems that all the characters face; we see him again in the hitch-hiker and the

enigmatic pariahs that Joanne encounters in "The Hallucination." These young boys trigger Joanne's uncertainties about the qualities of 'otherness' that she might possess and the compelling possibilities of self-transformation: "And her eyes – transformed weirdly by a power she would never dare take on, herself – what beauty might they have, not known to her ... [her husband] too was transformed, something quite exotic and unknowable, but there was no way of seeing him, no way in" (98). These ghostly, anonymous outsiders emerge from the margins of society and of the stories themselves to destabilize those at the centre.

The unfolding of events in "The Scream," a Renée story from Crossing the Border, re-enacts the movement from margin to centre both structurally and politically. The photograph of the emaciated Indian woman and her dead child stands out from the rest of the exhibition; it arrests Renée's consciousness and becomes the central motif of the story. As a palliative to her guilt over her affair, Renée tries to trivialize her moral lapse by absorbing the photographic representations of the truly disenfranchised: "the faces of black children in Harlem ... elderly men and women in the American Midwest ... immigrants in Quebec ... Renée might lose herself in them, in humanity" (178). When she encounters the image of an unnamed Indian woman, "holding a skeletal baby out to the photographer," she is transfixed. The image is a powerful yet paradoxical representation of deprivation; whilst telling the woman's story and providing an outlet for her grief, it also frames and binds her emotions, containing her rage and silencing her scream: it presents "her face contorted with rage or despair, her mouth opened in a wide, soundless shriek" (178). As Renée looks on, however, the image of the woman ruptures the boundaries of the photograph and her scream takes hold of Renée's mind. The Indian woman subverts her marginal position as a member of

an oppressed gender and race objectified for the white gaze, and assumes a central position in the onlooker's consciousness: "Renée stared until her vision seemed to glaze over. The woman's scream was everywhere around her: it forced the other sounds, the chattering of ordinary people, the sparrows' singing, into silence … A soundless scream. Immortal. Annihilating everything else" (178-9).

In Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination Toni Morrison documents a number of similar moments of subversion in which performances by black characters "ignite critical moments of discovery or change or emphasis in literature not written by them" (x). Morrison uses a scene from Marie Cardinal's autobiographical account of madness and recovery to exemplify these moments. In her analysis of The Words to Say It Morrison locates the moment that Cardinal recognizes the severity of her condition: the "specular even spectacular scene that convinced her that she was in danger of collapse" (viii). It is whilst watching Louis Armstrong at a concert that Marie's apprehensions finally emerge. As his music overwhelms her it elicits sublimated anxieties and tensions. The moment is similar to Renée's experience in the gallery: "My heart began to accelerate, becoming more important than the music, shaking the bars of my rib cage, compressing my lungs so the air could no longer enter them" (Morrison ix). As Morrison notes, Armstrong's music provides "tropes" for Marie's fears of boundlessness and serves as a "catalyst" to therapy and eventual recovery: the black character's artistry heals the tortured white psyche (x). Similarly, the Indian woman in the photograph overturns the text/onlooker relationship and precipitates a dramatic "narrative gearshift[]" in Oates's story (Morrison Playing xii). She is another silent, anonymous figure, who, although bound within the narrative terrain of the single

story, problematizes the relationship between margin and centre by haunting the cycle's protagonist.

* * *

Like Welty and Paley, Oates populates her cyclic and sequential stories with inscribed readers. In The Golden Apples Welty's characters practise many interpretive methodologies, some of which become models for her reader. Grace Paley's inscribed readers are so ubiquitous that critics sense a threat to their own interpretive discourses. However a closer examination of these meta-commentaries reveals spaces of entry so that, as Paley intended, "Every story is completed by the reader" (Paley Kaplan 152).

In Oates's stories the inscribed readers perform similar functions: their interpretive experiences reveal the pliability of the boundaries between reader and text. Annie Quirt personifies this fluidity; she shifts from her central position as the reader of both life and art to that of an elusive text and author in the concluding story. The inscribed texts themselves serve as thematic mirrors for the characters' conflicts. The pictures in "Walled City" reflect the central theme of Annie's life: the conflict between integration and isolation. Although Annie does not register this as an onlooker, the works of these Québéçois artists provide the answer to her dilemma by existing both as individual pieces and within a larger aesthetic framework. Annie's failure to make this connection typifies many of the readers in Oates's fictional world who are usually more limited than those who populate the stories of Welty and Paley. Oates's readers rarely make connections between themselves and the texts and fail to pursue the implications of their interpretations. Whilst reading Oates's cycles one does not generally experience interpretive processes alongside the characters. Both The Golden Apples and the Faith cycle present inscribed readers

who practise Schweickart's dialogic model of reading based upon synchronic patterns and openness. Female readers are more prolific in Oates's cycles, but neither men nor women are particularly adept at interpreting. The solipsism of Oates's insular characters obstructs their associative facilities, whilst her integrators allow social discourses to condition their readings. Most of Oates's inscribed readers seek refuge in texts, forming closed interpretations, thus remaining partially if not entirely in the dark. As extrinsic readers we must formulate the connections between text and inscribed reader: thus reader and author share a secret knowledge that often precludes the character.

Both Annie and Renée turn to art to escape the loneliness and apathy of their everyday lives. In the midst of her sinister affair with Warren, Annie immerses herself in art books at the library, seeking a sanctuary from her despair:

> [she] spent an hour or more looking through books – turning pages quickly, desperately – studying Van Gogh's drawings and Cezanne's landscapes … then paging quickly again, as if she were looking for something specific, though she could not have said what it was … Then, by accident, she discovered what she must have been seeking: her breath was drawn sharply inward when she came upon the watercolors of Nolde, beautiful, indefinable, utterly perfect. *Here*, she thought simply (118 Oates's italics).

As a reader Annie experiences a transient affinity with Nolde's "beautiful, indefinable" world, but it placates her only for a moment; she draws strength from its restorative qualities but does not attempt to discover why the pictures move her. Art serves a similar purpose for Renée. Both characters read texts in order to produce interpretations that accommodate their own lives. As she embarks upon her affair

with Karl, Renée reads texts that will relativize her guilt. She reads magazine articles on "Adultery in the Middle Class" and immediately erects a boundary between self and text, staving off her feelings of guilt:

> Reading these paragraphs in their logical unexcited order, seeing how the columns of print on glossy paper were sanely arranged ... she could see how superficial a subject it was. The mere fact that the word 'adultery' might be used in this way ... with graphs and statistics and quotations and small excited headlines ... allowed Renée to see how ordinary it was, how unthreatening. What had it to do with her? ... certainly she was superior to it all, saved from it, from *it*, by the fact of being able to read about it (71-2 Oates's italics).

The controlled graphology appeals to Renée, the form and structure of the article containing the subject matter on the page. Her reading of these articles is as far removed from Schweickart and Flynn's model of the female reader as possible; Renée's obsession with boundaries comes closer to Schweickart's description of male readers who are "preoccupied with issues of control and partition" than the "intersubjective encounter" that occurs between the female reader and the text (55). Thus whilst many of Welty and Paley's inscribed readers become model interpreters, the preordained, controlled responses of Oates's characters push the reader beyond their limited worlds. It is Oates's reader who opens up the form and makes connections between the inscribed readers and their texts, as well as between individual stories. Oates solicits a particularly active reader; she offers us no Virgie Rainey or Faith Darwin to articulate a vision of renewed autonomy or balance.

By fusing the cyclic with the sequential, Oates capitalizes on the many utilities of the "novel-in-stories" form. She uses the cyclic structure to realize the

imprisonment of those characters whose fear of non-being condemns them to a life of "stylized repetition." However, she also exploits the flexibility of the cycle form to engineer shifts in narrative voice and plot structure that challenge the either/or thinking that restrains many of her characters. By embedding a sequential quest narrative within All the Good People, she finds a way of representing the process of self-determination that frees both herself and her heroine from the pressure of a closed ending. Annie's position at the end of the cycle reflects her particular agency as she eludes the eyes of the characters and the reader. For Oates, the cyclic sequence becomes a means of securing open destinies for those rare women who find their own narrative structures and stand apart from her cast of "unliberated heroines."

4

Resistance and Reconfiguration:

Gloria Naylor's Evolving Cycles

"she was existing as she always had. Even if someone had bothered to stop and tell her that the universe had expanded for her, just an inch, she wouldn't have known how to shine alone" (Naylor The Women of Brewster Place 60).

"with each of 'em – no matter who he was – there was always a Her in his story" (Naylor The Men of Brewster Place 8).

Where Eudora Welty insists that The Golden Apples is not a novel, and Grace Paley resists formal categorisation, Naylor alerts the reader to the generic duality of her work. By introducing The Women of Brewster Place (1982) as 'A Novel in Seven Stories,' Naylor broadcasts the work's hybrid identity.[25] Although in interviews she continues to refer to her debut as a 'novel', she occasionally revises this categorization. In a recorded discussion with Toni Morrison in 1985 she distinguished The Women of Brewster Place from her other works, asserting that the text is "really interconnected short stories" (Naylor "Conversation" 582). Although critics take their cue from Naylor and usually classify the text as a novel, The Women of Brewster Place figures consistently in short story cycle bibliographies. Dunn and Morris and Nagel are in agreement that Naylor's debut qualifies as an archetype of the form.

The matrix of connections in The Women stretches far beyond the boundaries of the text itself; locations and characters recur in Naylor's later works. In "Gloria Naylor's Geography" Barbara Christian writes that Naylor has created "a geographical fictional world similar to or in the manner of Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha county" (348). Like Faulkner, Naylor envisaged this world at the start of her writing career: "the quartet was there from *Brewster Place*" (Felton 255). Together, Naylor's texts constitute a kind of macrocosmic cycle, each text achieving a similar effect to the individual narratives in a story cycle. For Naylor, her macrocosm has become a means of resisting the shadow of finality that she has come to associate with the completion of the single text. Naylor speaks of the regret that consistently accompanies the completion of a novel. When she received her first bound copy of The Women she called it a "tombstone because that's what it represents" (Naylor "Conversation" 586). Naylor's aversion to closure registered itself again in 1998 when, after completing the quartet, she expanded the boundaries of the macrocosm further. She returned to Brewster Place to tell the lives of the men who lived there.

Naylor and her critics have little difficulty defining the other components of the quartet, classifying them consistently as novels. Linden Hills (1985) and Mama Day (1988) certainly achieve the more totalising effect of the novel form; individual chapters do not stand alone, and are linked by a stricter sense of sequentiality than the stories in The Women. Naylor confirms this distinction when she tells Morrison of her trepidation before beginning her second work: "it was a while before I could actually sit down and work on [Linden Hills] because there was fear ... because this was going to be a *real* novel" (582 Naylor's italics). Evidently Naylor experienced the fear that Oates associates with writing one's first novel, and found freedom from

this in the looser form. Naylor's latest offerings see her returning to the cycle form: in 1998 she revisited her original form for The Men of Brewster Place. Critics generally refer to Bailey's Café (1992) as a novel but this reading will argue that it exhibits stronger formal affinities with the Brewster cycles than Linden Hills or Mama Day. This chapter will focus primarily on The Women, but will also examine how Naylor changes her cycle form to reflect shifts in her characters' gender politics.

Bound by the geographical borders of Brewster Place, the eponymous heroines cross the boundaries of their individual narratives, generating potential lines of continuity and community. Nevertheless each story retains its individual identity. Whilst knowledge of contiguous narratives hints at the possibility of affinity and collaboration, the individual stories achieve meaning in isolation. Compounding this self-containment is Naylor's controlled negotiation of time. Unity is created by the presence of pre- and 'postludes' entitled "Dawn" and "Dusk"; this framing device binds the stories ostensibly within the parameters of a single day and bears witness to the birth and death of Brewster Place. The lyrical narrative voice of "Dawn" describes the circumstances surrounding the building's birth, and returns in "Dusk" to comment on its demise. This alluringly neat framing device is, however, deceptive. Each individual story sets a different pace and structure: Mattie Michael's present day experience frames the primary narrative that transports her back thirty years; Kiswana Browne's story takes place within the space of one afternoon; Cora Lee's narrative juxtaposes scenes from the heroine's childhood with events of her present life that span several days. As well as placing each of her women within a distinctive narrative structure, Naylor locates them within a specific historical context. As Karen Castellucci Cox notes, each of Naylor's women represents a particular era in black history and a facet of black culture: Mattie is the "daughter of

the defeated plantation South" who embarks upon the familiar trajectory to the mythical North; Etta Mae lives according to the tenets of the Harlem Renaissance; Kiswana is "clearly a product of the Black Movement" (Cox 161). These contexts assert the individual identity of each story and illuminate the plurality of the women: an effect that Naylor consciously strove for: "One character couldn't be *the* Black woman in America. So I had seven different women, all in different circumstances, encompassing the complexity of our lives" (Ebony 123 Naylor's italics). Thus Naylor names each of the first five stories after their heroines and particularizes the women's varying gradations of colour: "*Nutmeg arms leaned over windowsills, gnarled ebony legs carried groceries up double flights of steps, and saffron hands strung out wet laundry on back-yard lines*" (Women 4 Naylor's italics).

Naylor resists homogenization of the black female experience by emphasizing the unique identities of her heroines and their stories; however she also uses the form to engage with and problematize identity boundaries. In the community of Brewster, boundaries are often unyielding; potential connections are thwarted, or solicited as a means of self-displacement rather than self-expansion. Langston Hughes's poem "A Dream Deferred" prefaces the cycle and captures the dialectic of expansion and retreat that underpins the text. The poem introduces the dream motif that transports the women beyond the boundaries of their oppression; however it also sets up the bathetic structure of these women's lives. Fears and inhibitions arrest gestures towards unity just as the deferred dream threatens to "dry up/like a raisin in the sun?" (Women n. pag.).

In Naylor's fictional world, eye contact between characters often serves as a barometer for relationship and identity boundaries. In her first cycle, the avoidance of eye contact signals the high level of denial binding the women together and

qualifying their unity. Blinded by the prejudicial "yellow mist" that surrounds "The Two," the women of Brewster Place can only track the movements of Theresa and Lorraine with "a jaundiced eye" (131); they register their suspicion and aversion to the lesbian couple by avoiding eye contact completely: "[Lorraine] noticed that some of the people who had spoken to her before had made a point of having something else to do with their eyes as she passed, although she could almost feel them staring at her back as she moved on" (133). When Mattie Michael compares her friendship with Etta Mae to the relationship between "The Two," Etta blocks any such affinity: "She looked at Etta. 'It kinda gives you a funny feeling when you think about it that way, though'. 'Yeah, it does,' Etta said, unable to meet Mattie's eyes" (141). When Ciel relates her extraordinary dream of psychic fusion with Lorraine to Mattie and Etta they break eye contact again for fear of registering this unexpected, disturbing connection in each other's eyes.

During their "Conversation," Naylor and Morrison discuss the various identity categories that inform and shape one's sense of self. Drawing from personal experience and fictional representations, they perceive clear differences between the ways that men and women construe identity. Casting her eye over literary incarnations of women, Morrison notes the prevalence of a particular female character: the woman who places "all of her value of her life in something outside herself" (584). The writers agree that such gestures of self-displacement form a tradition that is "peculiar to women" (585). Morrison notes: "it's interesting because the best thing that is in us is also the thing that makes us sabotage ourselves, sabotage in the sense that our life is not as worthy, or our perception of the best part of ourselves" (585). Most of Brewster's women are locked in cycles of self-forfeiture. Etta suffers from Paley's "him-itis," seeking self-definition through

sexual conquest, whereas Mattie searches for it in her relationship with her son. Through her compulsive mothering Mattie builds a kind of perverted symbiosis with Basil, resulting in a loss of identity for mother and son.

In her essay "Women Amongst Themselves" Luce Irigaray insists that women can only achieve fully-fledged selfhood if they experience and nurture love for their own gender:

> it is important for us to exist and love one another as women if we are to love the other – man. Society and morality act as though woman, without being a full social or political person in her own right, had to love a social person: man. How is such love humanly possible without subjective status? Now, a subjective status is constituted in relation to self and to like, the two being connected (192).

Etta and Mattie gradually register the significance of female relationships; Mattie acknowledges that she has "'loved some women deeper than I ever loved any man'" (141). However the ambiguous boundaries of friendship trouble these women. Etta's assertion that love for a man is "'still different'" betrays her need for stable categories and suggests that she will continue to ground her identity in her relationships with men (141). By portraying this unease with the power of female friendship, Naylor represents in fictional form Morrison's observation that such relationships are not considered "a suitable topic for a book ... because the world knows that women don't choose each other's acquaintanceship. They choose men first, then women as second choice" (McKay 154).[26]

Brewster Place is the ideal locus for the struggle between self-expansion and suppression. This liminal space confines its inhabitants to the margins of society, cutting them off from the prospect of social and economic progress. However

Naylor uses the space to reveal the possibility of subverting marginality. Occasionally the reader glimpses the origins of a community whose affinities usurp the bonds of historical and social precedents. One of the most analysed scenes of the cycle occurs at the end of "Lucielia Louise Turner" when Mattie induces Ciel's outpouring of buried grief after the death of her baby girl. Naylor's narrative voice depicts this collaboration as a powerful subversion of a female tradition: the silence that has sublimated the pain of history's grieving women:

> Mattie rocked her out of that bed, out of that room, into a blue vastness just underneath the sun and above time ... past Dachau, where soul-gutted Jewish mothers swept their children's entrails off laboratory floors. They flew past the spilled brains of Senegalese infants whose mothers had dashed them on the wooden sides of slave ships. And she rocked on (103).

Mattie transports Ciel beyond the paradigmatic discourses of grief into a more confluent reality suspended "above time." In their distress, Ciel and Mattie share the kind of moment experienced by Virgie Rainey when she submerges herself in the Big Black River and finds a reality beyond the reach of teleology: "Memory dappled her like no more than a paler light ... she hung suspended in the Big Black River as she would know to hang suspended" (Golden Apples 440). Like Virgie, Mattie and Ciel enter the kind of female temporal modality that Julia Kristeva envisages as "all-encompassing and infinite like imaginary space" (Kristeva 862). Through this epiphany Naylor undermines the abiding presence of historicity that asserts itself through the cycle's 'back stories' of oppression.

In Workings of the Spirit, Houston A. Baker explores how "conjure" functions as an "agency" in the lives of African-American women (91). He presents

conjuring as a powerful means of transcending the boundaries that limit the African-American woman in white, patriarchal society: "spaces that might be deemed 'separate' are dissolved in the general medium of the spirit. Rather than rigid formal categories ... African-American spirit work is ... boundless" (76). The conjuring of African-American women relies upon transmission for its power. Paraphrasing Marcel Mauss, Baker writes: "gifts remain powerfully gifts only as long as they are kept in passage, for passage forestalls the promotion of any single 'possessor' ... to a hierarchical inequality. Gift passage, like African-American spirit work, assures the benefits of spirit only to a *community*" (76 Baker's italics).

Most of Brewster's women appear only half-conscious of their conjuring abilities.[27] It is only in Naylor's later works that her women give full expression to these powers. In Bailey's Café Eve creates a quasi-mystical space to liberate the cycle's lost women from gender boundaries. In her essay on Naylor's conjure women Lindsey Tucker illuminates the omnipresence of conjure in Mama Day. From Miranda Day's communications with ancestral voices to the echoes of biblical narratives that reverberate throughout the text, the influence of conjure is pervasive. It is interesting that Tucker identifies Mama Day as the starting-point of Naylor's representation of these powers. Charting the general critical reception of the novel, she writes: "the brand of realism that had come to define Naylor's work in *The Women of Brewster Place* and *Linden Hills* had suddenly, it seemed, become contaminated with ingredients of magic and fantasy" (Tucker 143). I suggest that this discourse of magical realism originates in fact in The Women; during their transcendental outpouring, Mattie and Ciel momentarily transgress the bounds of realism as they exercise these otherworldly powers. It is important to note, however, that it is the lyricism of Naylor's narrative voice that lends this moment its

transcendent resonance. Ciel leaves Brewster shortly afterwards and when she returns in Mattie's dream the fledgling community remains united by covert fictions and denials. Mattie and Etta ignore the implications of Ciel's telepathic re-imagining of Lorraine's trauma. Together they weave a facile interpretation of the dream that centres on the symbolic meaning of Brewster's wall, blocking Ciel's psychic connection to the community.

Throughout the cycle the women encounter a number of texts that offer outlets for self-expansion. When Cora Lee takes her children to a black production of A Midsummer Night's Dream she recognizes the potential for transformation in her own life:

> The fairy queen looked just like Maybelline. Maybelline could be doing this some day ... That girl had probably had to go to college for that ... Maybelline used to like school – why had she stopped? The image of the torn library books and unanswered truant notices replaced the tears in her eyes as they quietly rolled down her face (125).

Cora's fleeting engagement with an imaginative world echoes the experience of Shakespeare's lovers as they awaken from their dream seemingly unchanged, yet dimly aware of the possibility of metamorphosis.

The performance provides Cora with an alternative narrative paradigm for her life: a model in which boundaries and patterns are permeable. However, whilst the play's imagery offers an opening onto another world, its structural principle of repetition and deferral is already familiar to Cora. In her daily life she encounters other meta-narratives that minister to her propensity for deferral whilst presenting her with the possibility of change and agency. Soap operas offer Cora a means of

both eluding and re-enacting the cyclic mundanity of her daily existence. Recent research on female viewing habits illuminates contiguities between Cora's psychosis and the genre. In her study of daytime television Carol Lopate delineates soap opera as "an infantile world," in which "the characters do not have to suffer the isolation and aloneness that is part of the adult state as we know it" (48). Lopate adds that the childlike prototypes that inhabit this world rarely "gain the power and autonomy" that constitute the "rewards" of this adult state (50). By surrounding herself with a cast of children, Cora positions herself in her own self-serving soap opera; she both re-enacts her childhood fascination with babies and insulates herself from those moments of solitude that might expose the chinks in her truncated identity. Through the construction of her own soap opera, she nurtures her infantile qualities and locks herself into a safe, familiar script. For the women of Brewster, repetition is an embattled concept; it clearly functions as a form of wilful imprisonment for Cora Lee.

As a serial form that resists closure and turns on different kinds of repetition, the soap opera emulates the short story cycle form. Although bound within one place and time, each inhabitant of Brewster Place has her own history. The story cycle reader must, like the soap opera viewer, engage with multiple narratives and histories as characters fade in and out of the current storyline: a task that Cora must often undertake on a grand scale, as she follows several soap operas: "She hated it when her two favorite stories came on at the same time; it was a pain to keep switching channels between Steve's murder trial and Jessica's secret abortion" (110).

In Soap Opera and Women's Talk Mary Ellen Brown observes that, "Incongruities of time are ... tolerated (and enjoyed) by soap opera viewers. Time is not necessarily altered to make cause-and-effect relationships clearer or more logical

but to emphasize those moments of heightened emotional intensity" (90). In Naylor and Welty's cyclic worlds an ostensibly linear structure repeatedly gives way to fleeting epiphanies. The enjoyment that the female viewer derives from these temporal "incongruities" substantiates Kristeva's notion that women experience time as "monumental" rather than teleological.

Whilst Cora's obsessive viewing signals a need for escapism, the similarities between the soap operas and her own perversely controlled existence suggest her covert agency as a viewer. With their plurality of plots and constantly deferred climaxes soap operas offer a particular freedom to the viewer. Brown notes how the female soap opera viewer cultivates an "implicatory" viewing practice, generated by her constant interaction with multiple characters:

> rather than identifying with one character through thick and thin, the reader recognizes many possibilities in character types ... In this reading practice, an audience member will involve her or himself with a character but will draw back if what happens to that character becomes uncomfortable (52).

Brown goes on to observe how this reading strategy is "audience controlled" so that the viewing of soap operas becomes "an active pleasure" (52). Cora adopts this process in her own life by minimizing her knowledge of the "shadows" who visit her bedroom and curtailing potential plots before they begin: "The thing that felt good in the dark would sometimes bring the new babies, and that's all she cared to know ... shadows didn't give you fractured jaws or bruised eyes, there was no time for all that" (114). Brown's theory of implicatory viewing practices attributes a particular agency to the soap opera addict that might initially appear surprising when related to

Cora's story. Once again Naylor hints at the potential of a heroine who appears to be going nowhere.

* * *

Motivated by the prospect of identifying "what it is that really compels a good woman to displace the self, her self," Toni Morrison experimented with new ways of conceiving subjecthood: "what I started doing … was to project the self not into the way we say 'yourself,' but to put a space between those words, as though the self were really a *twin* … or something that sits right next to you and watches you" (Naylor "Conversation" 585 Morrison's italics). Morrison advocates self-surveillance over self-displacement. She confirms that, in her new novel, it is the character Beloved who embodies this notion of a 'twin self', functioning as "the mirror" for the other characters (585). Interestingly, the words of one of Naylor's characters pre-empt Morrison's advice. In Linden Hills Mamie Tilson warns her grandson of the dangers of relinquishing his 'twin self': "'my grandmother called it selling the mirror in your soul … I guess she meant giving up that part of you that lets you know who you are'" (59). Naylor's women are not particularly adept at this kind of self-surveillance; when they perceive a facet of their 'authentic' selves in the eyes of their fellow women they either avoid registering the connection or do not pursue it. Such surveillance is left to the narrative voice.

Where Eudora Welty presents paradigmatic reading strategies through her inscribed readers, Naylor situates most of this authority in her narrative voice. Like Oates's distinctively authoritative voice in the final story of All the Good People, Naylor's narrative persona provides a stable centre that sees beyond the boundaries that limit the characters and their readings. Whilst Oates's narrative persona emerges only at the end of her cycle, Naylor's voice establishes itself as a locus of

authority from the cycle's opening. It is the narrative voice that envisages each woman as "*an ebony phoenix*" in the prelude: a powerful image that illuminates from the beginning the possibility of self-actualization and regeneration (5). Throughout the cycle it renders the passing of time with particular lyricism. In "Mattie Michael" the narrative voice conjures this process while the heroine is asleep. The shift in tense and the figurative imagery announce the presence of a distinct, narrating persona:

> Time's passage through the memory is like molten glass that can be opaque or crystallize at any given moment at will ... It is silent and elusive, refusing to be dammed and dripped out day by day; it swirls through the mind while an entire lifetime can ride like foam on the deceptive, transparent waves and get sprayed onto the consciousness at ragged, unexpected intervals (35).

As well as framing Naylor's narrative persona as an omniscient eye watching over the characters, this passage presages those moments in the cycle that freeze and expand time.

In other passages in the cycle the narrative voice adopts an explanatory tone. Its evaluation of a particular resident, Etta Mae, speaks for the self-displacing women of Brewster who seek verification in "something outside" themselves:

> Her youth had ebbed away quickly under the steady pressure of the changing times, but she was existing as she always had. Even if someone had bothered to stop and tell her that the universe had expanded for her, just an inch, she wouldn't have known how to shine alone (60).

In his study of narrative modes for presenting consciousness Dorrit Cohn offers a useful typology of narrative levels. He uses the term "psycho-narration" to describe the application of narration to a mind rather than inside it. The term spans the many indirect ways of narrating consciousness from the "plainly reportorial" to the "highly imagistic" (11). In The Women of Brewster Place Naylor adopts psycho-narration to articulate the thoughts of the self-displacing woman. Her narrative voice moves from reportage to metaphorical narration to explain choices and reactions that the heroines only half comprehend. In his study of psycho-narration in Balzac, Thackeray and Fielding, Dorrit Cohn notes the presence of "a discursive intelligence who communicates with the reader about his character – behind his character's back" (25). This "discursive intelligence" resurfaces at pivotal moments in Naylor's cycle. When Lorraine leaves Theresa before meeting her brutal death, the narrative voice transports the reader forwards to present Theresa as a haunted figure:

> Theresa would live to be a very old woman and would replay those words in her mind a thousand times and then invent a thousand different things she could have said or done to keep the tall yellow woman in the green and black dress from walking out of that door for the last time in her life (167).

The moralizing narrative persona asserts its autonomy again by identifying Theresa's mistake in letting Lorraine go: "But tonight she was a young woman and still in search of answers, and she made the fatal mistake that many young women do of believing that what never existed was just cleverly hidden beyond her reach" (167). Naylor's narrating persona manifests knowledge that Theresa is yet to learn.

One of the functions of psycho-narration is to "order and explain a character's conscious thoughts better than the character himself"; it "often renders, in a narrator's knowing words, what a character 'knows', without knowing how to put it into words" (Cohn 46). Such a technique is particularly useful in the representation of women such as Ciel Turner. In her marriage to Eugene, Ciel epitomizes Morrison's paradigm of the self-displacing woman. At the beginning of her story, she protests at Mattie's apparent disapproval of Eugene's neglect as a husband. She tries to convince Mattie that she lets him back into her life for the sake of her daughter and the promise of a fresh start. Mattie knowingly responds, "'You ain't gotta convince me, Ciel'" (92). Ciel does not reply but silently agrees: "No, she wasn't talking to Mattie, she was talking to herself. She was convincing herself it was the new job and the paint and Serena that let him back into her life" (92). The reader senses that Ciel is finally admitting to her self-delusion. However at this point Naylor's narrative voice must take over, because, as it explains:

> the real truth went beyond her scope of understanding. When she laid her head in the hollows of his neck there was a deep musky scent to his body that brought back the ghosts of the Tennessee soil of her childhood ... The feel of his sooty flesh penetrated the skin of her fingers and coursed through her blood and became one, somewhere, wherever it was, with her actual being" (92).

The narrative voice not only articulates half-realized, buried sensations for Ciel, but offers justification for her self-delusion: "But how do you tell yourself, let alone this practical old woman who loves you, that he was back because of that. So you don't" (92). The use of the second person to render these forbidden thoughts signals the

proximity between narrative voice and character consciousness, suggesting a heightened level of sympathy.

In The Signifying Monkey Henry Louis Gates, Jr. examines Zora Neale Hurston's use of free indirect discourse in her novel, Their Eyes Were Watching God. Identifying Hurston as the writer who introduced this kind of discourse to African-American narration, Gates offers a fascinating reading of the novel's polyvocality. He notes that Hurston's "narrative strategy depends on the blending of ... narrative commentary ... and characters' discourse" ("Zora" 191). Hurston's use of free indirect discourse frustrates the reader's attempt to "characterize it either as the representation of an action (diegesis) or as the repetition of a character's words (mimesis)" ("Zora" 208). This merging reaches its height as Janie moves towards self-actualization:

> As the protagonist approaches self-consciousness, however, not only does the text use free indirect discourse to represent her development, but the diction of the black characters' discourse comes to inform the diction of the voice of narrative commentary such that, in several passages, it is extraordinarily difficult to distinguish the narrator's voice from the protagonist's ("Zora" 191).

Janie's narrative is, of course, one of incremental self-realization. Her narration is addressed to Pheoby, who encourages her to share her story; she fulfils the role of the mirror or "friend" who "watches" Janie watching herself. Gates describes Janie as "a master of metaphorical narration" and demonstrates how she uses this skill to counter her apparent inarticulacy during her first marriages ("Zora" 172). Brewster's women show no such skill and it is left to the narrative voice to create metaphorical

renderings of transcendent moments such as the communal grieving of Mattie and Ciel.

Naylor deploys different narrative tactics from Hurston to figure her women's thought processes. When she enters the consciousness of her characters, she deploys some of the "indices" of free indirect discourse identified by Gates such as "intonation" and "content," but she rarely assumes the grammar and idiom of the characters ("Zora" 209). At times the disjunction between narrating persona and the character's mental language is clear. In "Etta Mae Johnson" the narrating persona adopts the rhetoric of the preacher as it ruminates upon her conflict with Mattie. The friendship between Mattie and Etta is threatened by Etta's affair with Reverend Woods. Throughout Etta's story Naylor's narrative voice parodies the preacher's self-conscious, crafted oration, comparing him to a "well-oiled machine" that "played" with the congregation (65). After criticising her friend's advances towards the Reverend, Mattie responds to Etta's accusations of hypocrisy with a restrained silence; although this is Mattie's tactic, the narrative voice steps in to endorse her actions:

> Sometimes being a friend means mastering the art of timing. There is a time for silence. A time to let go and allow people to hurl themselves into their own destiny. And a time to prepare to pick up the pieces when it's all over. Mattie realized that this moment called for all three (70).

The shift from past to present tense marks the voice's transition from merely reporting Mattie's response to appraising it as a narrating persona. With its solemn delivery and repetitive structure, this evaluation emulates the style of Ecclesiastical rhetoric deployed by preachers like Reverend Woods: "To every thing there is a

season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven ... A time to rend, a time to sew; a time to keep silence and a time to speak" (Eccles. 3:1, 3:7 Holy Bible 580). By appropriating the kind of vernacular that it parodies, the narrative voice establishes its authority over the other voices in the text. By recognizing the need for silence here, Naylor's narrative voice appears to be commenting on its own aim of both speaking for the characters and enabling them to "hurl themselves into their own destiny." Naylor herself has spoken to Nicholas Shakespeare of her need to let her characters develop an autonomous identity: "In the beginning I can put them in a place ... but I do pray for them to become independent and grow" (Interview Gloria 1989).

In some of the women's stories the explanatory, authoritative narrative persona recedes and instead the reader is presented with the thoughts of the heroine without further expansion. Naylor retains the third-person stance in her narration of Cora Lee's thoughts but replicates Cora's mental language through interior monologue: "Aw shit! Now she wouldn't know until Monday if Rachel had divorced Mack because he'd become impotent after getting caught in that earthquake. Why didn't this girl just go home and stop minding her business" (118). The absence of the narrating persona and its corrective vision indicates Cora's separation from the other Brewster women: a separation that does not signal more stable ego boundaries but rather Cora's removal from the reality of her environment. Margaret Earley Whitt's evaluation of Cora certainly suggests this: "Cora Lee lives in a dream world outside of time and season. Even her location on Brewster Place is ambiguous; Cora Lee and her seven children exist in the midst of chaos, supported by welfare and its food stamps" (41-2).

Naylor's narrative and formal poetics reveal ways of formulating connections whilst her women, like many of Oates's characters, remain primarily in the dark. Given the authority of Naylor's narrative voice it is difficult to gauge just how far these women do grow. The distance between the narrative voice and the women of Brewster Place is no more apparent than in "Dusk," the 'postlude' that follows the individual stories of the women. In "Dusk" one senses an uneasy disparity between the circumscribed fates of Brewster's women and the gloss of romantic transcendentalism generated by the narrative voice. The narrative voice tells of the demise of Brewster Place and foresees that the inhabitants' lives will continue as before. Italicization marks the shift to a different discourse in this concluding section: "*they packed up the remnants of their dreams and left – some to the arms of a world that they would have to pry open to take them, most to inherit another aging street and the privilege of clinging to its decay*" (191). However the lyrical romanticism of the prelude re-emerges as the voice visualizes the resurgence of Brewster's "daughters" (192). The spirit of Brewster Place and its community will, the voice insists, continue to thrive: "*But the colored daughters of Brewster, spread over the canvas of time, still wake up with their dreams misted on the edge of a yawn. They get up and pin those dreams to wet laundry hung out to dry ... They ebb and flow, ebb and flow, but never disappear. So Brewster Place still waits to die*" (192). Undermining this romantic conjuring is the absence of the women themselves. The narrative voice's triumphant rhetoric recalls the image of each woman as a resurgent ebony phoenix; this romantic conjuring again poses questions about the autonomy of these women. Looking back on her first work, Naylor admits, "I was romanticizing the female condition a bit" (Loris 254). Reflecting upon all her narratives, Naylor informs Michelle Loris that she habitually writes her transcendentalism into her

work: "my spiritual vision as it shapes my work is that I think the transcendence of the human spirit, the power of the human spirit, moves throughout these books, and my hope is that which is transcendent within us will outweigh that which is bestial" (257-8). The presence of the narrating and ventriloquizing persona of The Women of Brewster Place marks the limits of the self-displacing woman who does not know how to "shine alone." Self-actualization continues to elude the women and it is left to the narrating persona to articulate their potential. Whilst the reader undoubtedly senses the presence of Naylor's transcendental spirit in the final pages, she can only speculate on the fates of the women themselves. This uncertainty confirms Naylor's aversion to closure not just in the lives of her characters but in her own fictional form.

In 1996 Naylor expressed her resistance to closure when she told Loris: "I have always been a great beginner and never finished much of anything" (254). In their divergent readings of the cycle's ending, critics focus primarily upon the final story rather than the 'postlude'. Like many story cycle writers, Naylor uses the final story to gather together some of the themes and motifs of preceding narratives. Whilst each of the first six stories discloses only fragments of the women's deferred dreams, Mattie's dream constitutes the main action in "The Block Party": a vision in which old friends return to Brewster Place and the women attempt to rehabilitate their community after the violent deaths of Ben and Lorraine. Anchored in both everyday reality and misleading fantasy, Mattie's dream maintains the cycle's precarious balance between harmony and disunity, transcendence and resignation. The dream's ideal of replenished community is highly qualified by the collusive fiction of denial that the women continue to weave around the figures of Theresa and Lorraine. Before Mattie's dream begins, the narrative voice informs us that, in their reaction to the deaths, the women are once again united by a specious silence.

Although all of them have dreamt of Lorraine's rape, "only a few admitted it" (175); the daughters of Brewster Place have been "unable to be comforted by bewildered mothers who knew, and yet didn't know, the reason for their daughters' broken sleep" (176).

The narrative commentary in "The Block Party" illuminates the high level of denial shaping Mattie's premonition. The dream constantly threatens to erupt into the stuff of nightmare: "Dark faces distorted into masks of pleasure, surprise, purpose, and satisfaction – thin masks that were glued on by the warm air of the October sun" (180). The dream sequence offers no escape from cyclic structures and immobilizing repetitions. Cora Lee is pregnant again and Kiswana continues to stand apart in her incomprehension of the other women; she fights against their determination to continue dancing and only participates in the demolition at the end.

Most critics read the demolition of the wall as a cathartic and collaborative act of rebellion, qualified only by its status as a product of Mattie's imagination. Margaret Earley Whitt writes: "In Mattie's dream, all the women contribute to tearing down the wall, smashing through the barrier that cut them off from possibilities: no one is left out" (55-6). She notes how the green smoke rising from the bricks recalls the colour of Lorraine's dress, representing a gesture of inclusion towards the dead woman's spirit (55). For Whitt, Mattie's vision of recalcitrance is fundamentally a unifying gesture. Although the act undoubtedly unites the women, providing an outlet for their collective rage, it is nevertheless triggered by a communal desire to obliterate the memory of Lorraine and Ben's deaths. It is only when Mattie realizes that the bricks are stained with blood that she starts to demolish the wall. Whilst one might read the demolition as a protest against white patriarchal

ideology and a life of boundaries and oppression, one might also view it as one final act of denial.

It is interesting that Donna Deitch's 2001 film production of the cycle departs most radically from Naylor's text in its representation of the ending. Deitch ignores many of the ambiguities surrounding the block party in an attempt to secure the kind of closure generally demanded by the viewer. In her film the party takes place in reality; there is no qualifying dream-frame. The attack on Lorraine occurs during the party and the viewer does not discover whether she lives or dies; instead, she and Theresa leave the scene in an ambulance. Thus the collective attempt to erase the memory of Lorraine is not recorded. Ciel returns but only to assure the viewer that she has survived and that those women who leave Brewster remain tied to the community. She does not relate her own dream of connection with Lorraine. The film ends with the demolition of the wall, which becomes a triumphant, unifying act of protest and an assertion of community.

In her cycle, Naylor leaves the reader to ponder how closely the women will re-enact Mattie's dream; will the repetition of events such as Ciel's return "open up potentialities" or will Mattie close down new readings as she did in her dream? (Ricoeur 76). The cycle's postlude is similarly conflicted. However, by insisting that the spirit of Brewster will continue to flourish the narrative voice concludes the cycle with, at the very least, a gesture towards continuity.

* * *

Naylor's aesthetic of continuity remains the strongest impetus behind her writing; her most recent work returns to her first fictional location, turning the quartet into a quintet. In The Men of Brewster Place Naylor returns to her original form, framing independent, linked stories with a metaphorical day, only inverting the

original frame by beginning with dusk and ending with dawn. Again, each story has its own time frame and linearity is disregarded; Basil's main narrative unfolds after Mattie's death, Eugene's following narrative recounts events that occurred whilst she was alive.

Naylor's narrative tactics in The Men of Brewster Place signal a less proprietorial approach to these characters. She grants both Ben and Eugene narrative privileges over their own stories. Ben's vernacular performs the duties of the lyrical omniscient persona of the women's cycle, opening the men's cycle and even prefacing each individual story. Naylor's abdication of narrative autonomy seems to have arisen from a certain uneasiness regarding her original representation of Brewster's men. In 1985 she informed Morrison of her concerns about the negative portrayal of the men in her fictional debut:

> there was something that I was very self-conscious about with my first novel; I bent over backwards not to have a negative message come through about the men ... I worried about whether or not the problems that were being caused by the men in the women's lives would be interpreted as some bitter statement I had to make about black men (Naylor "Conversation" 579).

On an initial reading of The Women of Brewster Place, Naylor's concerns certainly appear valid: the women contend with, among others, a philandering preacher, a violent gang of local boys and an absconding son. In The Women Naylor's anxiety about this negative representation expresses itself in the narrative voice; it emerges from the discursive sidelines to make a case for the most aggressive men in the cycle: C. C. Baker and his gang. Before the rape of Lorraine, the voice makes one of its direct appeals to the reader's sympathy by underlining the

black man's ambivalent status; in a society that associates masculinity with autonomy and dominance yet exiles black men to a liminal space outside history, C. C. Baker's boys must find ways to counter the threat of self-cancellation:

> Born with the appendages of power, circumcised by a guillotine, and baptized with the steam from a million nonreflective mirrors, these men wouldn't be called upon to thrust a bayonet into an Asian farmer, target a torpedo ... point a finger to move a nation, or stick a pole into the moon – and they knew it. They only had that three-hundred-foot alley to serve them as stateroom, armored tank, and executioner's chamber. So Lorraine found herself, on her knees, surrounded by the most dangerous species in existence – human males with an erection to validate in a world that was only six feet wide (The Women 169-70).

This compulsion to explain Baker's behaviour emerges again in The Men when Naylor tells his story. However her representation of Baker's consciousness marks a shift in her narrative strategy. Although the explanatory narrative voice of The Women returns in Baker's narrative, Naylor also admits the reader into his consciousness with the use of free indirect discourse. She juxtaposes fragments of Baker's responses to a policeman with narrative commentary. The opening, italicized commentary resonates back to the lyricism of the postlude and prelude in The Women: "*He makes his money from petty hustling; snatching a bag or two; running messages between a lady and her pimp ... But he dreams of so much more; he dreams of escape*" (The Men122). However, the next commentaries deploy free indirect discourse, confronting the reader with Baker's vernacular: "*The most important thing in any man's life is self-respect. And how in the hell can you have*

self-respect if you're sniveling and crying over every loser who gets dumped on and taken out?"(125-6).

Toni Morrison observes that men draw self-verification from a collective codification of manhood. Shaping male relationships is an underlying consensus of what constitutes masculinity; a discursive code provides a gloss for personal problems and insecurities:

> Men can hide easier because they can always be men. They can be abstract ... and they seem to know what maleness is. They have a posture for that ... They have an idea of how to be male and they talk about it a lot. I'm not sure that they talk to each other about the other thing, personal identity (Naylor "Conversation" 571).

Morrison's speculations echo Betty Friedan's observation of the "masculine mystique" that prohibits men from talking "about their feelings" (Friedan Second 136). Clearly these abstract notions of manhood are a determining force in Baker's consciousness. Although this reasoning on the part of Baker may sit uncomfortably with some readers, others endorse Naylor's representation. Michael Awkward writes: "In a country which has, throughout its history, consistently rewarded 'manly' displays of courage and machismo, the attitudes of C.C. Baker's gang seem, no matter how repugnant, almost relentlessly logical" (Awkward 57). Through her representation of Baker Naylor registers one of the most inextricable dilemmas of black masculinity. In doing so, she illuminates the interaction of race and gender ideologies in the daily lives of Brewster's men who, like the women, struggle towards self-verification in a ghettoized space.

In The Women, Naylor grants a voice to Ben and Eugene and gives fragments of narrative to Baker and Reverend Woods. However none of the women

from her debut speak in the men's cycle. In keeping with her narratorial ownership of the original Brewster women, Naylor recalls their presence by including some of her narrative voice's descriptive passages from The Women into the prelude of The Men; however the original women of Brewster never appear as autonomous characters in the later cycle. Kiswana does not feature at all in Abshu's narrative, although she speaks with great pride about her boyfriend's social work in "Cora Lee." Naylor opens Ciel's story with Eugene's voice in an attempt to make the reader "see that that young man did care about the death of his child" (Naylor "Conversation" 580); however in Eugene's narrative, she locates Ciel in the fixed position of silent addressee, handing him full control of his story.

The absence of familiar female voices in The Men may appear surprising when we consider Naylor's primary interest in articulating the marginalized experiences of black women. To Morrison she recalls that, in writing her first work, "My emotional energy was spent creating a woman's world, telling her side of it because I knew it hadn't been done enough in literature" (579). At the beginning of The Men Ben states his desire to "tell the *whole* story"; in order to do this, he must acknowledge how each gender depends upon the other: "I don't know a man who would be anywhere without a woman. And don't know a woman who'd be anywhere without a man" (7 Naylor's italics). After recognizing the central role that women play in men's lives, Naylor unexpectedly marginalizes their role in the men's stories. The new female characters who *are* granted a voice use it primarily to chastise and belittle the men: Ben's wife attacks him for being less than "*quarter of a man*" when they fail to conceive more children (26); Keisha questions Basil's manhood and betrays him. Reverend Woods describes his wife as "perfect"; her superiority over other women is however contingent upon her tolerance of

Moreland's infidelities: she is "A wife who understood exactly where he was going; who understood the late hours; and above all, who understood the other women. As long as he was discreet, she remained silent" (109). Ironically, Annette's silence becomes her most subversive tool in her relationship with Moreland: "that silence was more effective than any arguments or screaming would have been. It weighed like a club that he used to beat up on himself, promising with all his heart that it would never happen again. And it never did – until it happened again" (109).

The absence of female discourse in The Men tells us perhaps more about the men of Brewster Place than the women. In Manhood in America: A Cultural History, Michael Kimmel observes that American men ground and assert their identities primarily through their relationships with other men: "In large part, it's other men who are important to American men; American men define their masculinity, not as much in relation to women, but in relation to each other" (7). Thus Naylor's marginalization of female voices in The Men is an illuminating narrative strategy, signalling the protagonists' need for an exclusively masculine discourse that corroborates their abstract view of women. Kimmel adds: "Women are not incidental to masculinity, but they are not always its central feature, either. At times, it is not women as corporeal beings but the 'idea' of women, or femininity ... that animates men's actions" (7). In Linden Hills, Naylor exposes the dangers of this homogenization of women through her representation of Luther Nedeed who takes it to the extreme; the Nedeed bride must be pale-skinned and be prepared to perform only one role: produce a son that will resemble his dark-skinned father, obliterating any sign of maternal influence.[28] Whilst the men of Brewster do not cultivate such extreme ideals, they collectively figure women as unsolvable enigmas, designed to complicate their lives: at Max's place they agree that, "The white man carries all the

guilt for messing up the world; the black man gets all the blame; and women are just a downright confusing issue that a hundred barbershop politicians wouldn't be able to solve" (158).

Max's place becomes the forum for the men's categorizations. In the final story Ben explains that the barbershop has become "something like a heartbeat" for the men of Brewster (157); it provides the one environment where they may congregate without the presence of women. As such, the men visit it to secure validation of their masculinity. Eye contact again serves as a marker of the characters' self-conceptions: unlike the women, the men can look each other in the eye, certain that they will find a reflection of themselves based on a mutual conception of masculinity. Max's place is "the only place for us men to get together, to look into each others' eyes and see what we need to see – that we do more than just exist – we thrive and are alive" (167). The verb "need" betrays the limits of this vision. As Morrison suggests, these men have a "posture" for "maleness." Vision is especially limited for Reverend Woods, who refers only to images of himself to assert his masculinity. Reverend Woods relies only on the mirror that reflects the physical self: "Even without the attention of the church sisters ... he had a mirror. And thanks to good eyesight – unlike that half-blind fool Bennett – he knew exactly what it showed: Him, Moreland T. Woods, ready and waiting to jump into his destiny" (100).

Again, Morrison's gender identifications resonate through Naylor's fictional world. In an interview with Robert Stepto Morrison observes that men value such public spaces: "they enjoy the barber shop [sic] and the pool room and so on" (Stepto 21). In conversation with Mel Watkins she elaborates on this, suggesting that men do not feel the pull of Home the way women do: "It's a feminine concept –

things happening in a room, a house. That's where we live, in houses. Men don't live in those houses, they really don't. My ex-husband is an architect and he didn't live there; every house is a hotel to him" (Watkins 46).

Private moments of doubt, paralysis and suppression undermine the men's collective notions of manhood. Although the men shun conversation with women, they are almost as guarded in their exchanges with each other. Whilst Naylor's women achieve a tenuous sense of community and purpose through the shared rituals of childrearing and domesticity, the men spurn these relational bonds; they haunt the periphery of the women's cycle sporadically, appearing and vanishing without any clear function. In their own cycle, Brewster's men construct less of a community than their female counterparts. They may seek self-definition by observing other men but their dialogue is clearly hampered by a mutual suspicion of the word. Their discussions remain firmly rooted in the political and social problems of the day; as Morrison suspects, personal dilemmas are never discussed. Ben tells us: "It's a thankless job, being an armchair – or barber chair – politician. The issues they solve boil down to three subjects: white men, black men, and women" (158). Whereas the women's exchanges may culminate in unexpected connections and personal revelations – one thinks of Kiswana's fractious dialogue with her mother – the men use talk as a diversionary strategy in order to evade self-examination: a realisation eventually voiced by Ben: "when you're sick and tired of being sick and tired, sometimes you get like Greasy. And if not that low or bad, then you get like us. Hoping to solve the problems of the world so that we forget – or put the knowledge on hold – that our own lives need attention" (161).

During her conversation with Naylor in 1985, Toni Morrison spoke of the "posture" of masculinity that inhibits dialogue about personal relationships. She

notes: "Only when they get very much older, then they can stop posturing" (571). Naylor dramatizes this theory in her portrayal of Ben, the Brewster male who cuts through the banter and acknowledges woman's role in male self-actualization. Evidence of these 'postures of masculinity' abounds in The Men of Brewster Place as the characters inwardly ponder, "What does it mean to be a man?" (28). Echoing Judith Butler, Michael Kimmel explores the notion of gender as performance, relating it specifically to twentieth-century notions of manhood in America. He identifies one of his "central themes" as how "masculinity was increasingly an act, a form of public display; that men felt themselves on display at virtually all times; and that the intensity of the need for display was increasing" (100). Some of Naylor's men refer to masculinity as an effect or spectacle, often using the lexicon of performance to describe familiar postures: Basil's first visit to his mother represents, for him, "a dress rehersal for the day I felt I would truly become a man" (44); in contrast to his wife's public exorcism of grief, Eugene dons "the strong-black-man mask" in order to deflect the community's condolences (91); after shooting his brother, C. C. Baker "*thanks God for giving him the courage to do it. The courage to be a man*" (129); Reverend Woods, like many alpha males before him, develops a strong masculine sensibility through his physicality, labelling himself "a magnificent specimen of a man" (100). It is not only men who observe such paradigms; Ben's great-grandmother instructs her son, "*Shut your mouth. Be a man*," believing, like Eugene, that silence and self-control signify masculinity (16). This posturing finds its most powerful expression in the words of the least authoritative man in the cycle: Greasy captures the predicament of the black men in his community with the two phrases that comprise his discourse: his pathetic assertions, "'I'm a man'" and "'I'm trying'" (165).

By emulating conceptions of manhood that foster silence, stoicism, and self-containment, Brewster's men isolate themselves from each other more than their female counterparts for whom personal identity is not a complete taboo. In the postlude Abshu stands alone as the sole bearer of hope for the men as the narrative voice describes his final moments at Brewster Place:

> And so he will leave this street to walk into a rising sun. One man against the dawning of the inevitable. One man who is determined to believe that this is the end of a battle, not the end of the war. And this one tired warrior is the best that Brewster Place has to offer the world. But one man standing is all that's needed – one manchild for the millennium – as the music plays on … and on … (172-3).

Once more Naylor writes her spirit of romantic transcendentalism into her ending with its lure of continued struggle and development. This time however, hope manifests itself in a single masculine consciousness rather than a collective feminine one.

However, the reference to Brother Jerome's music gestures towards the possibility of community for these men. Throughout the cycle Brother Jerome's blues provide the soundtrack to the men's lives; covertly commenting on each man's story, his music becomes the thread linking the individual narratives. Emanating from Brother Jerome's musical commentary is the same aura of mystery that surrounds the burgeoning 'conjuring' of Brewster's women. Jerome's ability to conjure musical paradigms of the men's lives emerges from impulses that are traditionally associated with the female psyche: intuition, empathy and fluidity. It is important to note that Jerome is the only man who does not appear in The Women of Brewster Place and is therefore the only new protagonist in The Men. By

introducing an asexual manchild into the men's cycle Naylor recognizes the need for a feminizing presence in this paralysed community. By piecing the men's narratives together through music, Jerome dismantles the boundaries separating one man from another:

> His music was telling us about our lives and he didn't even know it. Or maybe in the smallest part of his small brain he did. Maybe he heard the ... Amen brother's coming from every brick; every piece of concrete and iron railing on Brewster Place as Jerome played, filling the street with the sound of a black man's blues (37).

Although the men try to write women out of their narratives, there is a "Her" in their cycle (8). By playing "on ... and on ..." at the end of the cycle, Jerome's music resonates forwards, undercutting both Abshu's isolation and the sense of closure (173).

As a "retarded child," destined to remain forever within the four walls of his mother's apartment, Jerome appears to be the most disenfranchised man at Brewster: "there is enough light to edge the borders of his mind, the island where he lives alone with music" (33, 31). Through his music, Jerome counters his isolation and becomes the most pervasive presence in the cycle, appearing throughout Ben's prefatory narratives and in some of the stories themselves. He thus defies the boundaries of the form as well as those of the fractured male community and his limited mental faculties. In The Signifying Monkey, Henry Louis Gates writes that the phrases of the blues are "elastic in their formal properties," "stretch[ing] the form rather than articulat[ing] the form" (123). Houston Baker describes the kind of atmosphere that arises from this formal pliability: "Even as they speak of paralyzing absence and ineradicable desire, their instrumental rhythms suggest change, movement ...

continuance, unlimited and unending possibility" (Houston Blues 8). Jerome's music collapses formal boundaries and expresses Naylor's romantic transcendentalism, assuming the role of the lyrical narrative voice in The Women.

Abshu is the only other character who attempts to forge meaningful connections with his community; by teaching the boys of Brewster that "They didn't need guns and they didn't need mouths like sewers to get respect" he seeks to rewrite the discourses of manhood that motivate C. C. Baker (Men141). Although Naylor appears to place the responsibility for the future on Abshu's shoulders as he leaves Brewster, the omnipresence and perpetuity of Jerome's music reminds the reader of the tacit potential connections between the last community of Brewster's men.

Brother Jerome's subversive music runs counter to the bound narratives of Brewster's disenfranchised men. Through Jerome, Naylor challenges the gender binaries that lock masked men like Eugene into scripts of silence and denial. The community of Brewster offers even less space to Eugene than to Lorraine and Theresa. The hegemony of heterosexual ideology reveals itself in the word "*faggot*" that repeatedly ruptures Eugene's tentative narration. In Naylor's fictional world it is generally easier for lesbians to claim a homosexual identity than men. Kimberly A. Costino attributes this difference to the influence of capitalism. She notes that Theresa and Lorraine are willing to forego what Winston Alcott in Linden Hills is not: "full participation in the economic order" (45). "'How am I going to live with you when they haven't even made up the right words for what we are to each other?'" Winston asks his lover. David replies that Winston can only exist under a "'nice, neat title that you can put on your desk'" (80). Like Winston, Eugene submerges his sexual identity under the façade of the heterosexual male. Terrified of revealing his deviation from perceived sexual norms, he hides behind the veil of the

independent, silent husband and father, periodically ignoring his wife and deserting her. Costino notes that Naylor challenges these polarized notions of masculinity by developing a "spectrum of sexuality" across her 'novels': "she creates characters who fall in the liminal spaces between the two extremes of gay and straight" (41). Part of Eugene's confusion over his sexuality arises from his strong love for Ciel which seems to contradict his desire for men: "And you can believe it or not, but I loved you. I had loved you from the first time I saw you, racing past my aunt's house in Tennessee. Those long, brown legs almost flying over the dirt roads in Coral Rock, hardly stirring up dust ..." (70). Most significantly, Eugene is attracted to Ciel because of one common sensibility: "I knew I wanted you in my life when the years showed me that you could also dream" (70). Here Eugene identifies the strongest potential bond between the men and women of Brewster: the capacity to envision new realities. In The Women Mattie Michael tentatively places her friendship with Etta further along this continuum of sexuality, querying the line between platonic and lesbian relationships. In the men's cycle homosexuality is not discussed outside the parameters of Eugene's story; it exists only as a form of otherness, against which the men validate their manhood.

In Eugene's story Naylor alerts the reader to the dangers of subscribing to established gender identifications. Framed by Eugene's secret narrative of suppressed homosexuality, Chino's story is a cautionary tale. Unable to reconcile himself to his homosexuality, Chino chooses to undergo a sex change. At first sight, Chino's audacious experimentation seems to signal a desire to invert and disrupt fixed gender binaries; Eugene learns later that the radical change betrays a need to conform to fixed ideologies of sexuality, rather than confound them: "It was just easier to handle the world's contempt – as well as his own – to think of himself as a

woman loving men than as a man loving men" (79). However, as the transformation nears completion, Chino discovers that "he didn't really want to be a woman" and finds himself "caught in limbo, and left to define himself" (79, 80). He learns too late that imitating the physicality of a woman will not change his inherent status as a homosexual male. His new body becomes a site for further self-denial: "Chino's perfume and paint were nothing but a hiding place to anchor himself somewhere after having managed to put himself nowhere by running away from his true self under a surgeon's scalpel" (79). His reaction to this conflict is to become "an island unto himself; his own country; his own god" and to "spend every waking moment thinking of ways to cram his uniqueness down someone's throat" (78). Unable to speak of himself in the first person, he subjects himself to further marginalization and becomes an isolated artist, providing comfort for other men by displacing their pain with his own.

In Naylor's later works, the men become slightly easier with the grey areas of sexuality. In Linden Hills, set in the 1980s, childhood friends Willie and Lester re-enact Etta and Mattie's moment of uneasy questioning. When Willie jokes that they "'might as well have been married, as much time as we've spent together,'" Lester responds, "'the only thing we didn't do is sleep together'" (282). Willie's reaction is to cringe at the suggestion but he is unable to deny his more feminine sensibilities. His psychic connection with Willa Nedeed emerges from his prescient dreams of nameless and faceless women. In Linden Hills, the male character assumes the traditionally female role of connector. Like Brother Jerome, Willie's heightened empathy and intuition set him apart. He both nurtures and spurns these 'feminine' attributes:

A whole week in Linden Hills and he had never heard her name. But she was waiting for him, he felt that in his guts ... Willie shuddered. Christ, now he really was turning into a woman – he sounded like somebody's superstitious old aunt. Wake up, man. This is the twentieth century and that's Putney Wayne outside your window. You're free, black and twenty (273).

Ultimately Willie cuts through such abstractions. He leaves Tupelo Drive hand in hand with his friend Lester in a rejection of hegemonic gender identifications. For the women and men of Brewster such adaptations remain problematic. Although The Men of Brewster Place is Naylor's most recent work, her original fictional location remains primarily a site for resistance rather than reconfiguration.

* * *

In the world of Brewster, gender paradigms are so fixed that men and women require their own formal spaces. Affinities within and between individual narratives and communities emerge primarily through moments of covert questioning and the romantic conjuring of the narrative voice. Naylor plays on the duality of the cycle form both to challenge ideologies and realize their immobilizing effects. The permeability of boundaries remains a secret shared between the reader, the narrating persona and the enlightened few. In Bailey's Café Naylor deploys a similar formal model to represent a community that authors its own boundlessness. Published ten years after The Women of Brewster Place, the cyclic form of Bailey's Café recalls Naylor's debut. Several Naylor critics observe the formal parity between the two texts; Donna Rifkind in her review of the text writes: "Like ... *The Women of Brewster Place* the new book is set up as a series of interweaving life portraits" (28).

Dunn and Morris include Bailey's Café in their glossary but commentators on the story cycle rarely include the text in their explorations.

The owner of the café calls himself Bailey and either knows the women at Eve's place personally or is familiar with their stories. One of the many thematic threads that runs throughout Naylor's quartet of 'novels' transforming them into a macrocosmic cycle, is the dream motif; like the inhabitants of Brewster, the women in Bailey's Café are seeking solace from "broken dreams" (144). This narrative community is not, however, gender-specific. Framing these stories are the narratives of two men: Bailey himself and Stanley/Miss Maple, the cleaner and bouncer at Eve's house. Male and female narratives of disenfranchisement sit side by side and no voice is privileged as the single locus of autonomy.

Some of the characters narrate their stories in their own vernaculars, although Bailey introduces these voices and occasionally serves as surrogate narrator. In assuming this role he functions also as a meta-narrator as he gauges the compatibility of tale and teller: a process that he draws attention to, explaining his strategies to the reader. In the case of Sadie, he perceives that "I'm gonna have to bring this one on in by myself. It calls for telling straight out, the way it was. Pure, simple, and clean" (40). On the other hand, Mariam's story demands a different touch. She remains locked in silence, and so the habitually taciturn Nadine must break her own silence in order to narrate for her. Nadine initially reads Bailey's retreat from narration as male cowardice but eventually acknowledges his sensitivity to particularly delicate narrative territory: "This isn't a story that any man can tell. And the girl can't do it for herself; she's a little off in the head" (143). Eve, Nadine, and a third-person omniscient voice unite to deliver this difficult story. Bailey's instincts are proved right. Nadine adopts a form of metaphorical narration to represent the

amputation of Mariam's genitalia; she uses Eve's slicing of the plum to figure this mutilation.[29] The contiguity and collaboration of male and female voices in Bailey's Café enable Naylor to establish an open narrative community and break down the dichotomies that inhibit male/female relations in Brewster.

The rhythm of the blues permeates Bailey's Café from the beginning. The cycle's epigraph is a lullaby which introduces the blues as a medium of transmission and entry into open spaces: "hush now can you hear it can't be far away/ needing the blues to get there/ ... the blues open/ a place never/closing: Bailey's/Café." These references run throughout the cycle, appearing as titles of sections and stories. Naylor entitles Sadie's story, "Mood: Indigo," invoking Duke Ellington's jazz composition. She chooses a musical term to preface the women's stories which highlights the dualism of the form itself: the title "The Jam" prepares the reader for seven solo narrations that will merge together whilst retaining their separate identities. Brother Jerome's blues provide a fragmented, often ignored soundtrack to the lives of Brewster's men. The referential framework in Bailey's Café firmly establishes the blues as a formal trope for the entire cycle and thus becomes Naylor's fullest expression of her aesthetic of revision and openness.

The mystery surrounding both Bailey's Café and Eve's house belies the specificity of place implied by the cycle's title. Although, like Brewster Place, these liminal places cater for those marginalized by everyday society, they are open spaces that represent a kind of mystical limbo for these characters. Naylor describes the conception and demise of Brewster Place in some detail but the origins of Bailey's Café and Eve's House elude identification. Like the blues, the settings in this cycle confound the conventional markers of time. The café appeared out of nowhere one day when Bailey suddenly "found [him]self in here from that wharf in San

Francisco" (27). It is situated "on the margin between the edge of the world and infinite possibility" (76). The back of the café is an indefinable void, a "black, empty space" that defies spatial and temporal boundaries and serves as a stage for two antithetical purposes: Bailey tells us that some people use it to commit suicide, staying "out back until a certain memory becomes just too much to bear" (163); for others, the void stages the fulfilment of their dreams. Eve takes Jesse Bell there to revisit "the simple bedroom she'd had as a girl" (138); Sadie and Iceman Jones go there to dance beneath the stars (76).

The indeterminacy of these settings clouds our knowledge of their owners. Although his candid voice solicits the reader's trust, Bailey places a veil between himself and the reader by refusing to disclose his real name. Eve is robbed of a sense of origin when Godfather refuses to reveal the date of her birthday. In her review of the cycle Karen Joy Fowler aptly refers to Eve's place as a "phantasmagorical boarding house" (26); it has no fixed address but is distinguished by a garden of wild flowers that again defy time by remaining perpetually in bloom. Throughout the cycle, the motivations of its owner remain unclear. Eve helps most of the women who arrive at her door, yet rarely exhibits any sign of true sympathy; we witness her rejecting one of the most pathetic cases because "That kind of woman hated men. And there was no room available for that kind in my boardinghouse. Esther was enough" (82). Eve governs her microcosm of misfits according to her whim; altruism and economy have little influence over who stays there.

In The Women, Etta Mae Johnson lives the life of a woman who does not know how to "shine alone"; Eve's story reveals exactly what might happen when a woman has only her self to draw from. In "Eve's Song" Naylor recasts the expulsion myth of Genesis so that her Eve emerges victorious and self-governing. Naylor's

reconfiguration of western narratives throughout her fictional oeuvre is well documented. In Bailey's Café she signifies on biblical narratives, placing the women at the centre of the story and orienting their plots towards self-empowerment. By recasting these familiar plots, Naylor challenges the fixity of established narrative paradigms, just as she confounds generic boundaries through her formal innovations.[30] Cast out by Godfather, her only guardian, for discovering "what my body was for," Eve embarks on a journey semi-naked and almost blinded by the delta dust (87). As she travels from Pilottown to New Orleans she constructs her own system of survival and develops an unshakeable self-belief: "If I could get through all I'd gotten through, then I was overqualified to be the mayor of New Orleans. And much too overqualified to be the governor of Louisiana. And when I kept thinking on up the line, the comparisons were beneath contempt" (91). Significantly this autonomy emerges only when Eve must relinquish any sense of gendered subjectivity. When she arrives at New Orleans it is neither as a woman or a man: "I had no choice but to walk into New Orleans neither male nor female – mud. But I could right then and there choose what I was going to be when I walked back out" (91). Having reached her destination, Eve debunks gender paradigms by embodying antithetical models of womanhood: she performs the role of mother, saviour and madam to the other women.

The characters in Bailey's Café are more actively subversive than Brewster's resisting men and women. Naylor grounds the possibility of transcendence in the characters' actions rather than the narrative voice. She places the most revolutionary discourse towards the end of the text: "Miss Maple's Blues" completes the sequence of individual narratives and verifies the cycle's status as a vehicle for reconfiguration. In his story, Stanley confronts the dilemmas that plague Naylor's men and women

throughout her cyclic quintet: the conflict between personal aspirations and social strictures, and fixed and fluid gender identities. More than any other character, he both recognizes and cuts through established codifications of race and gender: although his name is Stanley, he also answers to Miss Maple; he dons women's clothing during the summer months merely to counter the stifling heat, but retains all other markers of manhood; whilst building up his own business as a jingle writer, he is both the cleaner and the bouncer at Eve's house; he wears dresses in public but, much to the confusion of Sugar Man, is neither transsexual nor homosexual. After his ninety-ninth failure to secure a job despite impressive qualifications, Stanley decides to please himself rather than society. He speculates that the "margin" of a company accepting a black man is "Much smaller than the margin of physical comfort that those clothes offered me" (203). At the end of the story Bailey can only classify Stanley as "one of the freest men I know" (216).

In some ways Stanley's narrative is typically masculine as it assumes the structure of the conventional, goal-oriented quest plot. His goal differs from that of the alpha male as he relentlessly pursues an identity unconditioned by the dominant ideology. He enters the café with the intention of committing suicide and ends the story on the brink of experiencing "infinite possibility" (76). Unlike King MacLain's repetitive quest plot, Stanley's journey assumes many forms as he spurns established trajectories. Stanley inherits this orientation from his father who teaches him to disregard notions of manhood that ground masculinity in the body. Like Abshu in The Men Stanley's father construes his manhood through the mastery of language, teaching his son to retaliate against prejudice with words. Stanley's father instructs his son to dismiss the "babble" of prejudice and "learn[] your own language, set your own standards," in order to "identify yourself as a man" (182). Through

language Stanley learns to counter the white man's homogenization of his race; he recalls that where he became "dizzy" tracing the lines of his mixed race ancestry, "The Americans had no problem with our identities ... they imported one six-letter word to cut through all that Yuma-Irish-Mexican-African tangle in our heritage" (171). Stanley spends the rest of his life confounding the white man's classifications.

In the Brewster cycles eye contact betrays the characters' resistance to moments of potential deviance and self-recognition. In Stanley's story it marks the dismantling of boundaries. In an extraordinary moment Stanley's father erases racial barriers by sharing his passion for the word with a Klansman, the head clerk at the freighting office. When crates of Shakespeare's works arrive, Stanley's father reports that there should be thirty-eight volumes because, "There's a separate volume for the poems and sonnets" (177). Peters recognizes the black man's superior knowledge and, for a moment, they are united by their wonder at the presence of the books. Stanley renders the moment in language usually deployed for an illicit recognition of forbidden love: "And then each looked into the other's eyes, knowing what they were doing while knowing they couldn't stop" (177). Stanley's father's creed reverberates throughout Naylor's cyclic quintet. When he confronts the men who defile Stanley's graduation gift, he tells them: "*There is no greater strength than what is found within. There is no greater love than reaching beyond boundaries to other men*" (186). Personal identity is not a taboo subject for Stanley's father.

In his review of Bailey's Café, Peter Erickson writes that, in her portrayal of Miss Maple, Naylor "breaks new ground": "The legacy from the first three novels in the quartet is a line of failed, incomplete, or uncertain male characters" (32). When Nicholas Shakespeare questioned Naylor on her negative portrayal of men she

defended her male representations in Mama Day but conceded that: "Ninety per cent of the time my conflict bearers for my major female characters are the men in their lives" (Interview Gloria 1989). Whilst this remains true for the residents at Eve's house, the major male characters in Bailey's Café perform a different function. Bailey responds to each woman's story with as much sensitivity as Nadine and Eve. As connectors, Gabe and Bailey assume a similar role to Mattie Michael. When Gabe, Stanley and Bailey assemble to bless baby George, Bailey registers his appreciation of the Jewish faith and its emphasis on community: "that's what I like the most about Gabe's faith: nothing important can happen unless they're all in it together as a community" (227). When George utters his first cry, the three major male characters in the cycle join hands in celebration: "Gabe grabbed me, whirled me around, and we started to dance … Miss Maple took his other hand and the three of us were out in the middle of the floor, hands raised and feet stomping" (225).

Accompanying this joyous moment of cross-cultural sharing are the uncertainties and questions that have come to characterize Naylor's endings. Whilst Bailey recognizes their shared history of oppression and marginalization, he is under no illusions about their relationship:

> This man is *not* my brother … This man is simply someone who doesn't have to run around trying to guess what I really think about him because I *tell* him so. And if you're finding that heart-warming and refreshing, it shows you how far the world still is from anything that even looks like peace among men (220-1 Naylor's italics).

A common sensibility unites these men however; they both refuse to "compar[e] notes on who did what to whom the most. Who's got the highest pile of bodies" (220). This resistance to competitive discourse marks a shift away from the norms

of male speech and is a fitting model for Naylor's narrative strategy; in this cycle no voice claims authority over the other.

Like The Women of Brewster Place Naylor grounds the possibility of transcendence in communal moments rather than individual stories. Although Stanley ends his journey with a clear view of his prosperous future, the fates of Eve's women remain unknown; their narratives, like the circumcision itself, are primarily about "survival" (226). As an Ethiopian Jew bringing the community together, Mariam becomes the figure of hope for the other characters; however her sustained silence and eventual death is troubling. When she cleanses herself after the birth, she enters the void to "create a running stream to bathe in"; for Mariam, the void becomes a place of death when it produces "endless water" (228). Bailey recognizes and endorses the duality of this ending as a realistic reflection of life: "If this was like that sappy violin music on Make-Believe Ballroom, we could wrap it all up with a lot of happy endings ... But I don't believe that life is supposed to make you feel good, or to make you feel miserable either. Life is just supposed to make you feel" (219).

Whilst the birth of George forges a fleeting spiritual union between the characters, Bailey insists that the café is not an environment in which to establish origins; neither he nor his customers will seę George again. Only outside the bounds of this individual cycle may we follow his story; we must read Mama Day to learn the outcome of his narrative. Thus Naylor directs us back through the macrocosm, again warding off the shadow of finality. Before he tells his final story, Bailey voices Naylor's resistance to closure by contesting his father's advice: "My old man used to say, Always finish what you start. It's a sound principle, but it can't work in this café. If life is truly a song, then what we've got here is just snatches of a few

melodies. All these folks are in transition; they come midway in their stories and go on" (219). Bailey's father's principle is equally redundant in Naylor's fictional world. Her original conception of a "quartet" of 'novels' must now be extended to a quintet to include The Men of Brewster Place. Moreover, websites on Gloria Naylor report that she "is currently working" on a new novel entitled Sapphira Wade, telling the story of the slave who brings back Cocoa in Mama Day (Erin "Gloria"). Like Brother Jerome's blues, Naylor will continue to reinvigorate her flexible cyclic form to "play on ... and on" (Men 173).

5

"Power from the in-between":

Louise Erdrich's Macrocosmic Cycle

"I don't have a central metaphor for my life. I only have chaos. I now read that there is some kind of order even in chaos, and that's comforting" (Erdrich Pearlman 155).

"The story comes around, pushing at our brains, and soon we are trying to ravel back to the beginning, trying to put families into order and make sense of things. But we start with one person, and soon another and another follows, and still another, until we are lost in the connections" (Erdrich Bingo 5).

Whenever interviewers ask Louise Erdrich to define her form, she employs metaphors that illuminate its autonomy and pliability. When in 1993 Nancy Chavkin asked her whether it would be accurate to say that her work forms "an organic whole" Erdrich replied: "It's more like a compost pile" (240). In the same interview she describes Tracks, her first manuscript, as "the old junked car in the yard front, continually raided for parts" (238). Erdrich's resistance to homogeneity and definition registers itself in the ease with which she alternates formal taxonomies in interviews. She frequently interchanges the terms 'novel' and 'story cycle', settling on neither as a definitive classification. When she wrote the first stories of Love Medicine, her debut, she "had no real theory behind the form," moving "back and forth without any real structure, just a kind of personal liking" (Grantham 16). In

discussion with her collaborator, Michael Dorris, and Laura Coltelli, she does not take issue with Dorris's description of Love Medicine as "a story cycle in the traditional sense" (Coltelli 22). In the same interview, she refers to the book as a novel, attributing this shift in formal status to Dorris's assimilating vision: "I am indebted to him for organizing and making the book into a novel" (26). She speaks of her first four books in the same way that cycle writers often speak about their stories: origins and endings are elusive and the books continue to reflect upon each other: "I don't really know when these books will begin and end, and the movement is so circular" (Chavkin "Interview" 234-5). In 2001, after the publication of three more works featuring familiar characters, she refers to her texts as "one long novel"; however she continues to place heavy emphasis on the independent identity of each work: "I think it is useful to have read the other books. But I try very hard to make each book its own book. It is its own book. But they all connect in some way" (Mudge "Louise"). I prefer to 'classify' Erdrich's work as a macrocosmic cycle, placing it alongside Gloria Naylor's quintet. Whether or not each individual text constitutes a short story cycle remains a subject for debate; however, as a whole these linked texts certainly operate as a cycle, sending the reader back and forth in the search for connections.

Most critics classify Erdrich's works as novels, whilst recognizing the independence of many of the 'chapters'. Suzanne Ferguson highlights the duality of Erdrich's texts in her essay, "The Short Stories of Louise Erdrich's Novels." She distinguishes Erdrich's early texts from paradigmatic cycles and tentatively suggests that Erdrich has created a new form. She argues that Love Medicine and Tracks "are not generically similar to those collections that are identified as 'cycles' or 'sequences', like Winesburg, Ohio ... or the like," because "the 'stories' have

become 'chapters,' and the intermittently reappearing narrators achieve independent, important lives as characters in their own narratives as well as in those of the other character/narrators" (Ferguson "Erdrich" 541). However Ferguson also recognizes the inaccuracy of the term 'novel' for texts whose individual components "rub against each other, juxtaposing different narrative voices, times frames, and styles, creating productive dissonances of signification and feeling" (541). She settles for an inclusive 'definition' that registers the dual status of the story/chapters as freestanding narrative entities and parts of a unified whole: "Erdrich's 'new' kind of story-sequence novel" (541).[31]

Erdrich critics illuminate the parities between Love Medicine and the story cycle form, although they do not always use this taxonomy. In her review of the text, Ursula Le Guin comments on the "oneness and manyness" that characterizes Erdrich's debut cycle and observes how "passion and compassion, desolation and humor all center in a perception of what it is to belong and not to belong, to be a person, to be one of the people" (Le Guin 6). The resonances with the theories of Forrest Ingram are obvious. In their studies of Erdrich, story cycle critics focus almost exclusively on Love Medicine as an example of the form. Dunn and Morris include Love Medicine, The Beet Queen, and Tracks in their "Chronology" of the composite novel but refer only to Love Medicine in their glossary of the form. James Nagel does not look beyond Love Medicine in his chapter on Louise Erdrich, "The Ethnic Resonance of Genre: Louise Erdrich's *Love Medicine*," although Erdrich had published several more 'cycles' by 2001.

Love Medicine and Tracks remain the most popular texts with critics and readers. In some ways they adhere more closely to the story cycle model than Erdrich's other works. Writing about the 1984 edition of Love Medicine, Hertha

Wong argues convincingly that the text is a "network of stories" by illuminating the "numerous connective devices, such as the repetition of the same event narrated from different perspectives" and the way that "the reader is forced to integrate, interpret, and reinterpret the narrative(s)" ("Narrative Communities" 96, 90). Tracks is the only text whose individual stories follow each other in chronological order; however, unlike some of the compendious stories in Tales of Burning Love and The Beet Queen, the more protracted narratives in Tracks, like those in Love Medicine, retain their status as self-contained pieces; thus, as a whole, Tracks and Love Medicine function more like Forrest Ingram's model of the short story cycle: a form that displays "a double tendency of asserting the individuality of its components on the one hand and of highlighting, on the other, the bonds of unity which make the many into a single whole" (Ingram 19). Whilst The Bingo Palace is divided into chapters and the stories in Tracks observe ostensibly a chronological structure, the narratives in Love Medicine arrange themselves in accordance with the temporal sensibilities of the characters. As Catherine Rainwater notes, the characters share a concept of time that is "cyclic rather than linear, accretive rather than incremental, and makes few distinctions between momentous events and daily, ordinary events" (Rainwater "Reading" 171).[32]

Viewed as a macrocosmic cycle, Erdrich's entire body of texts disrupts chronology. If one were to read them in order, one would begin with Tracks, followed by The Beet Queen, Love Medicine, and The Bingo Palace. Erdrich's later texts frustrate chronology further, as they revisit familiar locations and sidelined stories, broadening the time frame of the macrocosmic cycle. The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse reaches further back than Tracks and further forward than any other reservation cycle and Four Souls fills in one of the many gaps in

Fleur's complicated narrative that haunts the final pages of Tracks. The Master Butcher's Singing Club returns to the North Dakota of The Beet Queen but again reaches further back. The Beet Queen stretches from 1932 to 1972, whilst the later text spans the years from the end of World War One to the 1950s.

When Hertha Wong questions Erdrich on her movement between formal categories, she dismisses the need to "quibble about the form," claiming, "I don't even worry about it actually" ("An Interview" 47). Having recognized the hybrid status of her forms, Erdrich anticipates further fluctuations in their dynamics: "The forms of the work are loosening up" she informs Coltelli as early as 1985 (29). Erdrich's vision of a pliable form was fulfilled when she revisited Love Medicine and republished it in 1993, after adding three new stories: "I feel this is an ongoing work, not some discrete untouchable piece of writing" (Streitfield 15).

Speaking to Wong after the publication of The Beet Queen, Erdrich and Dorris outlined their conception of a particular formal framework. Like Gloria Naylor, they envisioned a kind of macrocosmic cycle, constituting a quartet of 'novels'. Considering Erdrich's resistance to fixed formal configurations, she spoke with relative enthusiasm about this framework, revealing her plans to incorporate an elaborate mythological scheme into the quartet:

> We really think of each book as being tied to one of the four elements ... It's the number of completion in Ojibway mythology. There are different myths, but one of them is the bear coming through different worlds, breaking through from one world into the next, from the next world into the next world. The number of incompletion is three and the number of completion is four, so four is a *good* number (45 Erdrich's italics).

One of the four elements becomes the central motif in each book in the opening tetralogy. Erdrich and Dorris confirm that the motif for Love Medicine is water, Tracks is earth, The Beet Queen is air, and The Bingo Palace is fire (Wong "An Interview" 45).

In these early interviews there are however warning signs that Erdrich, like Naylor, will eventually abandon this framework. Emerging clearly from these discussions is her resistance to closure and limits and her insistence upon the possibility of continuity. For Erdrich, publication does not foreclose the possibility of revision; as evidenced in her 1993 revision of Love Medicine, she considers the publication process merely a method of "temporary storage" (Chavkin "Interview" 232). For both her and her characters, there are no definitive versions of a story. She tells Chavkin emphatically that, "There is no quantifiable reality. Points of view change the reality of a situation and there is a reality to madness, imagined events, and perhaps something beyond that" ("An Interview" 224).

Erdrich's macrocosmic cycle currently comprises a nonet of texts: Love Medicine (1984, 1993); The Beet Queen (1986); Tracks (1988); The Bingo Palace (1994); Tales of Burning Love (1996); The Antelope Wife (1998); The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse (2001); The Master Butcher's Singing Club (2002) and the most recent addition, Four Souls, subtitled "A Novel" (2004). However, boundaries are always elusive in Erdrich's world. The publication of The Antelope Wife in 1998 complicated matters as Erdrich shifted the focus to Minneapolis, the home of a different branch of the Chippewa tribe featured in the preceding cycles. However, strong thematic links place The Antelope Wife in the macrocosmic framework: the powerful workings of history and tradition; the insuperable force of obsessive love; the interaction of the mundane and the mythical. Erdrich cannot

resist gesturing towards the possibility of continuity and connection with the other texts in the macrocosm; she includes an early, fleeting reference to one of her most prolific characters from the other novels. As the narrator of "Seaweed Marshmallows" recounts her family history, she reveals how "One Shawano man stopped with a Pillager woman" and was subsequently "lost" (35). Readers of Erdrich's opening tetralogy will recognize this woman potentially as Fleur Pillager, a character who moves freely around Erdrich's form, weaving in and out of her own and other characters' stories and disrupting genealogical lines.

The boundaries of Erdrich's macrocosm stretch beyond those works published in book form. In the February 2001 issue of The Atlantic Monthly Erdrich published a story that originally formed part of The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse. "Sister Godzilla" tells the story of recurring character Dot Adare's experience at convent school with a deformed nun. Although Erdrich decided to edit this narrative from The Last Report, she gave it a place in her larger macrocosmic form by publishing it as a short story both in the journal and on the Atlantic Online website. Speaking to Joseph Bruchac in 1987, Erdrich presents her volume of poems, Jacklight, as an integral part of her 'compost pile' of 'novels'. Like Naylor, Erdrich identifies her predilection for continuity as the shaping force behind all her forms:

> You want [the poems] to have some kind of continuity in their life ...
>
> You can see the themes that were being worked with in *Jacklight* go on into the writing in other ways ... "Family Reunion," turns into part of "Crown of Thorns" ... *The Beet Queen* takes place in that sort of butcher shop world and incorporates people who are and are not in these poems. It's a very different book but also one which I think

> flows naturally out of both *Jacklight* and *Love Medicine* (Bruchac 102).

Read as a whole, Jacklight enacts the structural principles of Erdrich's prose works; it solicits both cyclic and sequential readings. The collection constitutes three 'cycles' of poems organized according to thematic resonances and a fourth that has a direct narrative function, telling the story of a butcher's wife and the community that surrounds her. As in her story cycles, metafictional images for the reader's experience abound, capturing a form that eludes the reader whilst offering threads of connection and synthesis: in "The Lady in the Pink Mustang" the narrative voice assures us that, "There is a point in the distance where the road meets itself,/where coming and going must kiss into one" (17); in "Clouds" the voice notes that "no matter how careful I watch them,/ they take a new shape,/escaping my concentration,/they slip and disperse/and extinguish themselves./They melt before I half unfathom their forms" (44).

The thematic resonance of Jacklight continues to pervade Erdrich's more recent work. The poem "The Strange People" tells the story of an antelope who mediates between the human and the spiritual world by assuming the shape of a human being; Erdrich would draw on this myth fourteen years later when she wrote The Antelope Wife. Jacklight moves to the centre of the macrocosm with the publication of The Master Butcher's Singing Club almost twenty years later. Like The Beet Queen, the action unfolds in the "butcher shop world" portrayed in the fourth sequence of poems. Step-and-a-Half Waleski, the subject of several individual poems, is a fully-fledged character in The Master Butcher's.

Although some of the nine primary texts in the cycle achieve a more totalising effect than others, they all incorporate a cyclic dynamic. Familiar stories

such as June's final journey towards home and Sister Leopolda's attack on Marie constantly resurrect themselves in different texts and from different viewpoints; such narrative resurgence invites the reader to place and read each text within the larger frame of the macrocosm. Uncharacteristically, Erdrich distinguishes her latest work with a definite generic status through her use of the subtitle, 'a novel'. Four Souls, however, occupies a significant space in the larger, macrocosmic cycle; its narrative fills in one of the most tantalizing gaps haunting several of the more cyclic reservation texts: Fleur's marriage to John James Mauser. Despite its clearly designated generic status, the juxtaposition of multiple narrative voices and trajectories in Four Souls emulates the form and structure of the earlier, cyclic components of the macrocosm. Mauser's sister-in-law, Polly Elizabeth Gheen narrates the story of the marriage and Margaret Kashpaw takes over the narration when Fleur finally returns home. Cutting across Polly Elizabeth's account of Fleur's seduction of Mauser is the voice of Erdrich's most prolific storyteller, Nanapush, who narrates events during Fleur's absence, focusing mainly upon his tempestuous relationship with Margaret Kashpaw. Nanapush's speculation about Fleur's disappearance offers a commentary on Polly Elizabeth's story by delving into the past of its mysterious protagonist. He examines Fleur's ancestry, revealing her maternal origins to the reader for the first time. Four Souls is however one of the most unified works in the macrocosm. The story of Fleur's marriage and destruction of Mauser proceeds chronologically and few of the 'Polly Elizabeth' chapters are self-contained.

Each of Erdrich's texts has its own unique structure and she deploys different methods to create a sense of unity and to guide the reader in her search for connections. There are fewer backward glances in The Beet Queen than the other

texts; many of the stories in this text are more compressed than those in Love Medicine and Tracks, generating a more episodic structure. Nevertheless as one reads The Beet Queen one develops a greater awareness of a structural system than in these other texts. A cursory glance over the contents page reveals that Erdrich has structured the text around a particular formation; each chapter is divided into two parts, the first of which is narrated by a character, whose name forms the framing title. The second part is narrated by a third-person omniscient voice and usually focuses on a different character. Many of these second stories capture a 'still moment' in the narrative by briefly foregrounding a particular consciousness at night. The titles underscore this repetitive pattern by simply identifying the centre of consciousness and the time of day: "Sita's Night," "Karl's Night" etc. Thus these secondary stories form a kind of sub-cycle within the larger frame of the text. Not only must the reader link these nocturnal sub-narratives but she must also query the juxtaposition of the first-person story and the third-person vignette. Erdrich achieves a similar effect in The Bingo Palace in which some of the chapter titles juxtapose a character's name with the word 'luck'. By interspersing the narrative of Lipsha's self-actualization with chapters like "June's Luck," "Shawnee's Luck," and "Lyman's Luck" Erdrich signals one of the central thematic threads of the novel: the significance of chance.

Given the multiplicity of networks and structural avenues in The Beet Queen, it is perhaps surprising that Erdrich pinpoints a referential centre in the text. In an interview with J. H. Tompkins she identifies a particular image in The Beet Queen as "the real heart of the book" (Tompkins "Looking" 15): the "tiny white spider" making its nest in the "moonlit floss" of Dot's baby hair: "it seemed to vibrate, throwing out invisible strings and catching them, weaving its own tensile strand.

Celestine watched as it began to happen. A web was forming, a complicated house, that Celestine could not bring herself to destroy" (Beet Queen 176). Erdrich recalls: "Everything bounced off that little section. Somehow that's the emblem of the book" (Tompkins "Looking" 15). This double formation of a complex, centripetal web and a pliable unitary strand captures aptly the unique dynamic of a book that interweaves a sequential narrative line with a cyclic structure. By designating a specific image as the heart of the book, Erdrich demonstrates her willingness to acknowledge the presence of 'centres of meaning' for her readers. Despite her complex, shifting structures Erdrich ensures that her readers experience what Jack Mauser terms "the grounded feeling of a connection" (Tales 55). However the centres in her fictional world remain flexible; she provides her readers with multiple points of entry and return. Most critics and readers of Love Medicine identify the mystery of June's life and death as the 'centre' of the cycle, as it repeatedly entices the characters back to the same position as speculative readers. Malcolm Jones however specifies Lulu Lamartine as the "human pivot round which much of the novel's action turns" (7). Louis Owens places Lipsha Morrissey "at the center of the novel" as "the character circling gradually toward self-knowledge" (Owens Other 27).

Tales of Burning Love also distinguishes itself from Erdrich's other texts with a more schematic structure. In many ways Tales resembles a composite novel. Apart from The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse, this is only text in the macrocosm without a contents page, suggesting that each chapter is merely part of a greater whole. However several of the chapters in Tales could easily function as individual short stories. As William J. Scheick documented in 1999, "A Wedge of Shade" was first published as a short story in 1989 and has "a narrative integrity of

its own" (Scheick 118). Scheick mistakenly states that this story "has never been reprinted in any of Erdrich's books" but illuminates the narrative's connection with Erdrich's macrocosm, correctly identifying the narrator as Dot from The Beet Queen (118). Halfway through Tales of Burning Love, Erdrich sets up a relatively stable narrative pattern when Jack's wives are trapped in the car and decide to share their experiences of the man they married. Although each story observes a linear structure, the women's experiences with Jack Mauser impinge directly upon each other, generating a cyclic dynamic. Once again, Erdrich incorporates a microcosmic story cycle within the larger frame of what appears to be a novel.

Erdrich attributes this formal flexibility to her mixed blood heritage; she describes her writing style as "a mixture of the Ojibwe storyteller and the German system-maker" (Sprenger "More"). In The Novels of Louise Erdrich Connie A. Jacobs explores how Erdrich negotiates this "mixture," writing it into her characters. In The Beet Queen the reservation is no longer the central location for Erdrich's characters, but rather a shadowy presence on the text's geographical borders. German immigrants living in the small town of Argus dominate the book and Erdrich deploys a relatively systematic, linear narrative with which to tell their stories. As the only narrator in the book with Indian blood Celestine James "narrates the significant moments of her life in a more traditional Indian manner" (Jacobs 68). She constructs her own narrative around particular, pivotal events, leaving gaps for the reader to fill.

In Tales of Burning Love, Erdrich interrupts the more western, teleological narrative model with a communal storytelling cycle. Dot is the only woman with Indian blood in the wives' storytelling community; therefore the women's narratives of love and loss conform to an ordered, linear structure. As Jacobs notes, however,

their reliance upon narration as a mode of survival mirrors the American Indian culture of tribal storytelling. In The Master Butcher's Singing Club the narrative of German-American characters Felix and Eva again observes a relatively stable chronology compared to Delphine's laconic narrative, which must reach into the past to resolve itself. This circularity enables Erdrich to preserve the aura of mystery that surrounds the origins of both Delphine and Cyprian Lazarre: a mixed-blood and a bisexual who struggles to find a narrative and hovers uneasily on the borders of the novel.

These different structures lend themselves to a variety of configurations of narrators. In Tracks there are only two narrators, relating the same history from divergent viewpoints. In The Bingo Palace an anonymous third-person narrative voice punctuates Lipsha Morrissey's intimate, first-person account. A third, communal narrative voice frames the novel, opening and closing the narrative. These multiple, relativizing acts of narration establish the primacy of story in the community of the macrocosm and illuminate the mobile, chimerical nature of narrative. The instability of story is a source of both delight and frustration for Erdrich's narrators. In The Antelope Wife Klaus Shawano is afraid to tell the story of his failed friendship with Whiteheart Beads because he recognizes that the act of telling demands the sacrifice of narrative control: "if I ever begin to tell the story it will all flood out of me. It will be gone, unfixed, into the mouths of others. I'm afraid the story might stop being mine" (42).

At the end of "Raspberry Sun" in Tracks, Pauline completes her history of Fleur by contesting the community's version of events; as the old men of the community "turn[] the story over," it "comes up different every time, and has no ending, no beginning. They get the middle wrong too. They only know they don't

know anything" (31). Pauline herself cannot be entirely trusted as a narrator as she too falls prey to the mutability of story and remembers specific moments differently; recalling the rape of Fleur she sometimes credits herself with locking the men in the freezer, and yet at other times "that moment is erased" (27). The elusiveness of story is one of the few points on which both Pauline and Nanapush, the conflicting narrators of Tracks, concur. Nanapush prefaces his narrative about Fleur by distinguishing between the unknowable, unreachable story itself and the versions that one can generate only in retrospection. "There is a story to it the way there is a story to all, never visible while it is happening. Only after, when an old man sits dreaming and talking in his chair, the design springs clear" (34).

Nanapush's acknowledgement of story as an ontologically solid presence that both springs to life and vaporizes in the mouth of the teller exemplifies the doubleness at the heart of Erdrich's fiction. Similarly, in Four Souls Nanapush uses the analogy of an owl's coughball to represent what he regards as story's ineradicable ontology:

> The coughball of an owl is a packed lump of everything the bird can't digest – bones, fur, teeth, claws, and nails … A perfect compression of being. What is the essence, the soul? my [sic] Jesuit teachers used to ask of their students. What is the irreducible? I answer, what the owl pukes. That is also the story – what is left after the events in all their juices and chaos are reduced to the essence. The story – all that time does not digest (71).

Having acknowledged the "irreducible" essence that constitutes a story, Nanapush describes the process through which the community generated the narrative of Fleur's absence; it is one of mere speculation: "Fleur left the reservation. Of all that

happened day to day, all the ins and outs of her existence, we have what came of the accumulation. We have the story" (72).

Whilst Erdrich refuses to define her unique form, she both recognizes and plays upon its cyclic properties. Forrest Ingram contends that the 'doubleness' of the form proves problematic; he writes that the form "struggle[s] to maintain a balanced tension between the demands of each short story and the patterning of the whole cycle" (17). For Erdrich, this tension remains the most essential component of a form that must retain, above all else, its fluidity. Her representation of the relationship between the one and the many distinguishes her from the other writers in this thesis. As Ursula le Guin notes, "oneness and manyness" characterizes Love Medicine, a cycle that represents what it is "to be a person" and "one of the people" (Le Guin 6). Other writers use the form to express the *tension* between unitary and collective identity; only at the end of some cycles do characters such as Virgie Rainey and Annie Quirt resolve this conflict. Erdrich uses the form to foreground the co-existence of individual and communal identities in everyday, Native American life. In The Sacred Hoop, Paula Gunn Allen elucidates the differences between American Indian and western literature. She argues that the Native American writer does not tell stories to assert ego boundaries or to query the individual's place in the larger community. The American Indian writer does not write from a need to consolidate or assert identity boundaries:

> The purpose of traditional American Indian literature is never simply pure self-expression. The 'private soul at any public wall' is a concept alien to American Indian thought. The tribes do not celebrate the individual's ability to feel emotion, for they assume that all people are able to do so. One's emotions are one's own; to suggest that

> others should imitate them is to impose on the personal integrity of others (55).

In American Indian art, "the greater self and all-that-is are blended into a balanced whole"; it articulates the vision of its tribespeople who "see all things as being of equal value in the scheme of things, denying the opposition ... and isolation (separateness) that characterize non-Indian thought" (Allen Sacred 55, 56).

Similarly, in The Politics of American English David Simpson writes:

> in the native languages there is *no ego distinction*, no abstract principle of selfhood that has to be combined with various things in the world that are initially posited as alien to it. The self neither takes its definition from the world ... nor imposes itself on it; rather, a composite self-in-world is there from the start (221 Simpson's italics).

It is only fitting that the "formal structure" of American Indian ceremonies is "holistic," incorporating many different forms, and that literary forms are "interrelated" (Allen Sacred 62). The short story cycle is therefore a particularly appropriate site for the American Indian experience.

Above all Erdrich's form has become a canvas for many varieties of 'doubleness'. Only Welty's most autonomous wanderers enact or experience the co-existence of the seemingly dichotomous. For Erdrich's American Indian characters everyday living is characterized by this 'both/and' sensibility. Few of them display the need to define identity boundaries and establish origins. In The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse Agnes/Father Damien ponders the source of her resurgent musical ability: "Still, one question sometimes nagged. Had the devil in its original tempter's form returned her art, or had God?" She concludes by resisting the urge to trace her art to a specific origin, asking, in typical Erdrich fashion, "what

did it matter?" (221). When asked to clarify whether a character is one type or another, Erdrich invariably gives the same answer: he is both. Nancy Chavkin observes in 1993 that Karl Adare in The Beet Queen is described as both Christ-like and Satanic; Erdrich replies: "There is no reason to come to a final decision about whether he is one or the other. He incorporates both" (220). The writing process for Erdrich arises from a kind of double vision. Asked by Chavkin whether Sita and Russell's muteness is a "coincidence" or "a deliberate parallel," Erdrich states that, "It is both, as often is the case when some resonant incident occurs in thought and one keeps coming back to it again and again" (224). Speaking to Mickey Pearlman in 1989 she confirms that the "treks and journeys" in her work enact "both a desire to leave and a longing to return" (153).

However, Erdrich's characters are not immune to the threat of self-dispersal. Jude Miller recognizes the threat of dispersal in The Beet Queen; when he tries to immerse himself in the crowd at the parade he experiences a terrifying premonition of self-fragmentation: "All that held him together now was the crowd, and when the parade was finally over and they drew apart he would disperse, too, in so many pieces that not even the work of his own clever hands could shape him back the way he was" (315).

Many of Erdrich's characters find themselves returning home to re-establish identity boundaries. Whilst Erdrich works against closed structures formally, she acknowledges the value of enclosed spaces. Mickey Pearlman asks whether her fictional spaces are open or closed and cites Adelaide Adare and June Morrissey as examples of women who seek open spaces that ultimately become "closed, limiting and entrapping" (Pearlman 52). June freezes to death in the expanse of the snow and Adelaide suffers deeply from her wilful severance from her family. Erdrich

replies that whilst June had "headed out into that open space" she ended up "heading home ... into that wonderful and difficult mixture of family and place that mysteriously works on a person" (153). She refers also to Dot, described by Mary Adare as "a born traveller, meant to go places," who returns home after her flight in The Beet Queen (198). The only character who does not make that return journey is Adelaide who, Erdrich asserts, "flies off into ... a nothingness" that becomes "a madness for her." Erdrich contends that whilst open space offers "freedom" it is, ultimately, "nothing that someone stays in" (Pearlman 153). She endorses reconnection and expansion rather than complete dispersal even though, in the words of Lipsha Morrissey, "coming home is never simple" (Bingo 13). The lure of return emerges as one of the most activating principles of Erdrich's macrocosm, reflecting the reader's recursive experience and bringing thematic unity to her form.[33]

In Erdrich's later works questions of identity and origin begin to surface. The Antelope Wife and The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse are Erdrich's most fragmented texts and, formally, perhaps the most challenging to the reader. In his review of The Antelope Wife Mark Shechner describes the text as Erdrich's "most cryptic and unfathomable book thus far ... If in the earlier books you needed a genealogical chart to keep track of characters, in *The Antelope Wife* you need a computer program to stay on top of them all" (qtd. in Beidler 4). In typical Erdrich fashion, the text offers a paradigm for the reader's experience of its 'design': Zosie's beadwork defies the observer's pattern-making instincts: "No visible beginning or end to the design. Impossible to find the starting knot, the final tie. Unseeable the place where the needle went in or out" (209). In these later texts, it is more difficult to identify potential 'centres of meaning' than in more overtly structured texts such as The Beet Queen.

Erdrich divides both texts into parts and chapters which in themselves comprise a mosaic of set pieces, stories-within-stories and sketches. In The Antelope Wife the narrative voice changes constantly, leading the reader in several directions in quick succession. Contributing to this fluidity are the narrative voices of two dogs: Windigo Dog and Almost Soup join Cally Roy, Klaus Shawano and Rozina Whiteheart Beads in the cast of narrators. Erdrich deploys her lyrical yet unobtrusive third-person voice to narrate other stories but she also adopts a personalized voice to open and close the novel with direct appeals to the reader. Unlike the impersonal omniscient voice of Love Medicine, this narrative persona poses metafictional questions, relativizing the text's many narrative strands and inviting the reader to contemplate the very nature of story, its origins and its form. In the concluding paragraph of the text the voice draws upon the recurring motif of the beads to pose questions about the boundary between tale and teller:

> Did these occurrences have a paradigm in the settlement of the old scores and pains and betrayals that went back in time? Or are we working out the minor details of a strictly random pattern? Who is beading us? ... Who are you and who am I, the beader or the bit of colored glass sewn onto the fabric of this earth? (Antelope Wife 240).

The motif of the beads serves as an extended metaphor not only for the fluid narrative formal dynamics of The Antelope Wife but for the narrative community of the entire macrocosm. Klaus Shawano's beadwork is literally created by the hands of "relatives and friends whose tales branch off in an ever more complicated set of barriers" (27). With their endlessly shifting configurations, the beads embody the pliability of these family stories, whilst signalling the possibility of connection and continuity. Connie A. Jacobs traces the image of the beads back to the "mythic

Anishinabe story" of twin sisters competing to find the bead that will "complete their mythic design" (115). Jacobs writes that the myth of the twins "represent[s] women's rituals, and their stories are used as example stories for young girls" (116). In The Antelope Wife it is Cally, the young narrator, who takes up the mantle of her female ancestors to trace and perpetuate the design of her convoluted family history.

Both The Antelope Wife and The Last Report distinguish themselves from Erdrich's earlier works by incorporating a relativizing, self-referential discourse. In earlier works Erdrich deploys particular images as metafictions for the reader's procedures: in Tales Jack's aroma "fired old neural pathways" through Eleanor's mind that "branched into an elusive pattern of associations" (61); in The Beet Queen the reader sees her own textual experience reflected in Celestine's attempts to trace the pattern of the jumper that Mary knits for Dot. As she struggles to negotiate the "tangle of pathways across the chest, down the undersides of arms, across the shoulders" she realizes that there is "no way out" (277). She is trapped in a cycle of interlocking structures. Erdrich's readers become familiar with this sense of cyclic enclosure as they encounter repetitive narrative structures that both clarify and distort their original perception of a particular story.

In the more recent texts Erdrich openly queries the nature and origin of her form through her narration. She concludes The Last Report with some "End Notes" acknowledging the support of her family and editor and documenting the sources for the text. As usual, Erdrich stresses the mystery surrounding these sources; some characters appeared to her in dreams and some parts of the book appeared to write themselves as she was sleepwalking. Such sourcing preserves the enigma of the writing process but also stresses the fictional premise of the novel. However Erdrich counters this fictionality by including in her notes a letter from the Vatican, the voice

of patriarchal authority, to Father Damien, in which she herself is referenced as "*a certain writer local to your region*" who has "*included a quantity of first-person confessions in the body of her otherwise phantasmagoric and fictional works*" (Last Horse 358). These confessions refer specifically to Marie Kashpaw's conversation with Father Damien concerning the events of a story that was originally published in the first version of Love Medicine: her physical and psychological battle with Sister Leopolda. Thus having established herself as the creator of a fictional work, Erdrich then blurs the boundaries between text and writer, questioning the origins of her material and her own authority.

As her works have progressed her questioning of authorship has become more direct, moving from metafictional imagery to querying narrative persona to authorial self-interrogation. In The Antelope Wife Erdrich dons the mask of a narrative persona to probe the lines between tale, teller and reader. In The Last Report she sheds this disguise, openly questioning her status as Louise Erdrich, self-proclaimed author of the narrative. She experiences the same reservations as her fictional storytellers over her status as the bearer of meaning, and exhibits the same wonder at the autonomy of story: "sometimes, as I scrutinize the handwriting in those early drafts, I wonder. Who is the writer? Who is the voice? Sometimes the script is unfamiliar – the careful spidery flourish of a hand trained early in the last century. At other times – I am sure, I am positive – it is my own" (Last Horse 358).

In Other Destinies: Understanding the American Indian Novel, Louis Owens identifies some of the characteristic discourses of modern Native American fiction. He notes that the modern American Indian novel has become a tool for questioning notions of authorship. Owens's observation marks a shift away from Allen, who

perceives no tension between self and community in the storytelling practices of Native American tribes. Owens writes:

> Native American writing represents an attempt to recover identity and authenticity by invoking ... the world found within the oral tradition – the reality of myth and ceremony – an authorless "original" literature. Yet through the inscription of an authorial signature, the Indian writer places him- or herself in immediate tension with this communal, authorless, and identity-conferring source, at once highlighting the very questions of identity and authenticity the new literature attempts to resolve: "Who really spoke? Is it really he and not someone else? With what authenticity and originality?" (11).

Owens's delineation of this tension between the authored and the autonomous text strikes at the heart of Erdrich's querying in her "new" texts. However Allen's point still stands, as Erdrich seems to feel no pressure to *resolve* this tension but rather to register the many sources of her narratives.

Andrew Dix's illuminating reading of Sherman Alexie's The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven throws an interesting light on the issue of authorship in Native American culture. Dix sees a clear distinction between Leslie Marmon Silko's cyclic dramatization of storytelling and Alexie's. Paraphrasing Arnold Krupat, Dix writes that Silko's cycle "strategically resists any sense of the writer herself as a centrally authoritative or uniquely personal presence" (155). Silko's dialogism demonstrates Allen's theory; the "narrative impulse, in *Storyteller*, remains constant and culturally valued. Laguna experiences across time are still felt to lend themselves to emplotment in story form" (Dix 156). Whilst Alexie uses a similar form to Silko, the "predominant effect," Dix argues, is "one of dispersal

rather than concentration" (158). His characters, "struggle to imagine themselves acting out significant stories across time" (156). The sense of unity is compromised by the "variety of tribal voices competing to be heard" in the cycle (158). Dix identifies several of the factors inhibiting Alexie's Spokane storytellers. Storytelling is represented as "social embarrassment, autistic behaviour, even psychotic compulsion" (160). Dix writes: "in the more anxious, self-reflexive moments of *The Lone Ranger*, then, the Native American necessity now may be grasped not as escape *by* or *into* stories but rather an escape *from* stories" (162 Dix's italics).

Erdrich's storytellers stand somewhere between Silko's and Alexie's. Whilst the instability of their authority frustrates her inscribed readers and narrators – Pauline in particular aims to establish herself as an authoritative source – it also energizes them. Storytellers like Nanapush and Pauline recognize that whilst authorial ownership and formal control eludes them, these communal, authorless stories leave themselves open to revision and manipulation. By registering her own authorial ambivalence in the final pages of The Last Report, Erdrich provides a refracting meta-commentary on the dilemmas encountered by her large cast of storytellers.

* * *

"There is a spirit that pervades everything, that is capable of powerful song and radiant movement, and that moves in and out of the mind. The colors of this spirit are multitudinous ... At the center of all is Woman" (Allen Sacred 13-14).

In The Sacred Hoop Paula Gunn Allen aims to recuperate "the feminine" in the traditions of Native America. She observes: "for millennia American Indians have based their social systems ... on ritual, spirit-centered, woman-focused

worldviews" (2). She draws the same distinctions between American Indian and "non-Indian" thought as gender specialists draw between men and women. Allen's delineation of "non-Indian" thought recalls Carol Gilligan's metaphor of the hierarchy for masculine sensibilities: non-Indians believe that "a great hierarchical ladder of being exists" and that "the person who controls the events around him is a hero" (Sacred 59, 149). Many of Allen's observations on the workings of 'the feminine' in American Indian traditions are enacted by the women of Erdrich's macrocosm. Any reader of Erdrich's texts will recognize immediately Allen's paradigm of the "self-defining, assertive" and "decisive" American Indian woman (Sacred 2). Erdrich's commentary on the creation of Jack Mauser, the wandering male seducer in Tales of Burning Love, confirms her predilection for realizing free-ranging, hyper-sexual female characters. In conversation with Robert Spillman she likens Jack to Lulu – both have a "sort of scoundrelly way with the opposite gender" – and reveals that she "wanted in a way to make [Jack] a woman" ("Creative Instinct"). Above all, however, she wanted the female storytellers "to have the center of the book" so Jack remained a man, consigned to the book's borders.

Many of Erdrich's women enact the masculine urges that drive male wanderers like Eudora Welty's King MacLain and Grace Paley's Ricardo. Lulu Lamartine's eight sons of different parentage testify to a sexual appetite that rivals King's. Through his seductions King aims to consolidate his position as the alpha male and conquering hero; he seeks to subjugate the woman and thus maintain the strict division between self and other. Sexual experiences with Lulu culminate in the dissolution of these boundaries. She releases Beverly Lamartine from the bounds of gender when they make love after his brother's funeral: "She hung on to him like they were riding the tossing ground, her teeth grinding in his ear. He wasn't man or

woman. None of that mattered ... it hardly mattered who was what." In typical Erdrich fashion, this moment assumes a paradoxical doubleness as Beverly also senses that "he was more of a man than he'd ever been" (Love Medicine 120).[34] This sexual union dismantles those markers of gender that alienate men from women, whilst simultaneously affirming Beverly's physical sense of masculinity. In Erdrich's fictional world one might retain one's gender identity in the process of shedding the hegemonic ideology that posits man as conqueror and woman as conquered.

Although Erdrich's representations of gender are characteristically fluid and complex, in some texts gender binaries are clearly at work. She explicates and plays on gender difference more in Tales of Burning Love than any other text in the macrocosm. The composite novel draws attention to the dynamism of specifically female forces, shaping the action. Eleanor, Jack's second wife, begins her particular tale of love and loss by naming her mother as her narrative's point of origin:

> All of our love stories begin with our mothers. For although it is our fathers, we are told, whose love we seek, it is our mother whom we imitate. If she was a huntress then we beat him through the woods ... If she was a temptress we are standing in the clearing as he emerges, slowly removing our clothes. A whiner? We draw him toward us through quick tears (209).

In Narrating Mothers: Theorizing Maternal Subjectivities, Hertha Wong writes that Native American women "have long been associated with the continuance of tribal tradition, both through childbearing and through transmission of cultural values in stories" (174). However she also observes that it would be facile to align Erdrich exclusively with this female oral tradition. Erdrich herself has

stressed how her father's stories, as well as those of her mother, left an "indelible" print on her mind (Wong "Interview" 39). The role of mothering is not confined to the female characters in her novels. As Wong points out, Nanapush mothers "most consistently" in Tracks, not only caring for Fleur and Lulu, but shaping their minds with his endless fund of stories (185). It is therefore perhaps surprising when Eleanor singles out "our mothers" as the founders of women's love narratives; her distinction between paternal and maternal roles indicates Erdrich's intention to structure Tales upon a specifically feminist aesthetic. Erdrich announces the centrality of the women in the title of the book. "Tales of Burning Love" is also the title that frames Part Three of the text: the women's narratives. It is only after the women have shared their stories of love and loss and denounced the latent rivalry that they can achieve fully-fledged subjecthood; through their storytelling they enact Luce Irigaray's model of achieving identity in terms of "self" and "like."

Indeed Eleanor can only resume her love affair with Jack after she has shared her story with his other wives. By enabling each of Jack's four remaining wives to take centre stage and tell her story, Erdrich circumscribes his position in the narrative framework: as the connecting force of the women's tales, he stands at the centre of the text, but his silence excludes him, exiling him to its margins. At no point in the novel does Jack tell his own story; rather he becomes the site of signification for the women. As such, he occupies a vexed position similar to Eudora Welty's King MacLain: the would-be wanderer silenced and contained by the voices of the female community and the omniscient third-person narrative voice. Thus Erdrich undermines Jack's centrality and he finds himself in a narrative no-man's land, a ghostly presence: a status that he enacts in the present day narrative in which he stages his own death.

For most of the novel Jack pursues a self-designated master plot, displaying the kind of mentality that Carol Gilligan identifies as an archetype of masculinity: the "wish to be alone at the top," figured by the image of the hierarchy (Gilligan 62). The narrative voice informs us that Jack is motivated by his desire to reach "the top of something, the place we all want to get" (Tales 159). In his 1984 study, Reading for the Plot, Peter Brooks explores "the dynamic aspect of narrative – that which makes a plot 'move forward'" (xiii). He identifies masculine ambition as one of the forms of desire that activate this process:

> Ambition provides not only a typical novelistic theme, but also a dominant dynamic of plot: a force that drives the protagonist forward ... ambition provides an armature of plot which the reader recognizes, and which constitutes the very "readability" of the narrative text, what enables the reader to go about the construction of the text's specific meanings (39).

By blocking Jack's ambition plot and displacing it with the women's cyclic storytelling venture, Erdrich forecloses this narrative avenue for the reader and Jack; it is precisely at this moment that the western reader must relinquish familiar structures in the search for meaning. The reader must cease reading Tales as a quest narrative in which the individual finds self-definition through assertions of difference. Similarly Jack must relinquish his goal to establish himself as the one at the top by recognizing his existence as part of the many. As Brooks writes:

> Ambition is inherently totalising, figuring the self's tendency to appropriation and aggrandizement, moving forward through the encompassment of more, striving to have, to do, and to be more. The ambitious hero thus stands as a figure of the reader's efforts to

> construct meanings in ever-larger wholes, to totalise his experience of human existence in time, to grasp past, present, and future in a significant shape (39).

June's timely spectral appearances and the wives' cyclic storytelling session undermine Jack's attempts to mould past, present and future into a structure that he can control.

Brooks's delineation of ambitious heroes of the nineteenth century resonates clearly with Erdrich's portrait of Jack Mauser. Brooks describes these heroes as "'desiring machines' whose presence in the text creates ... narrative movement through the forward march of desire ... Etymology may suggest that the self create a circle ... around itself, mainly in front of itself, attempting to move forward to the circumference of that circle and to widen it, to cast the nets of the self ever further" (40). Jack literally enacts this process of self-amplification when he conceives the name for his building company: "Mauser and Mauser, Construction. Jack twice. There was no other Mauser, no partner, just himself. He had doubled his name because he thought the title looked more stable, as though there were generations involved" (150).[35] Jack displays the same preoccupation with origins as King MacLain; it is this desire to author beginnings that motivates Jack's multiple marriages. Ironically it is by ignoring one half of his genealogical heritage that Jack limits himself to the unidirectional master plot identified by Brooks. Able to recall only amorphous images of his Ojibwa mother, Mary Stamper, Jack disregards his Native American origins, claiming only the German-American identity inherited from his father: "Since the Ojibwa part of Jack was inaccessible, he was a German with a trapdoor in his soul, an inner life still hidden to him" (153). It is only when Jack accesses this buried, relational Ojibwa sensibility that he may continue his love

story with Eleanor. Through her negotiation of Jack's quest plot Erdrich illuminates the dangers of the compulsion to designate the self as origin without recuperating one's maternal heritage.[36]

June is the vehicle through which Jack contacts his buried Ojibwa self. In the closing paragraph of the novel Jack finally recognizes "The depth of what he felt about Eleanor" (452). At the same moment he responds to June's spectral presence, engaging with the narrative of his dead wife for the first time. It is only by acknowledging his treatment of one wife that he is able to "bear the pain of coming back to life" with another (452). From the beginning of the text, June's haunting prevents Jack from pursuing the only plot that motivates him: by pulling him into the past, she cuts through his projected narrative of self-improvement and development. By instigating a shift from a linear, end-determined vision to a relational, cyclic one, June reshapes the dimensions of Jack's narrative and sets the standard for the reader of Tales of Burning Love: a text that, despite its much-documented proximity to the novel form, ultimately enacts a cyclic dynamic by finally returning to June, a pervasive presence in the macrocosm.

Jack himself anticipates the qualification of his commanding position as author of his own destiny. When two of his wives meet for the first time and start crying, Jack identifies himself as the cause of their shared pain: "Mauser had been irritated but comfortable with their weeping. *Over me*, he thought" (78 Erdrich's italics). His position as prime motivator of their experience is destabilized however as their weeping gains force and a relational, shapeshifting current begins to emerge from their act of sharing:

> It wasn't as though they had decided to stonewall him, but rather, that they couldn't be bothered … to so much as register the sound of his

voice, for they were transforming, reconfiguring themselves ... The weeping had fused unseen connections, circuits had clicked into place, their stories matched cadence by cadence ... he knew that he was in the car with something else, a different shape, alien, brilliant, ultra-female, something he didn't want to look at ... Jack knew he was lost (78-9).

The tension between Jack and his bonding wives is captured by Carol Gilligan who describes what happens when the masculine collides with the feminine and the hierarchy and the web impinge upon each other:

> these images create a problem in understanding because each distorts the other's representation. As the top of the hierarchy becomes the edge of the web and as the center of a network of connection becomes the middle of a hierarchical progression, each image marks as dangerous the place which the other defines as safe (Gilligan 62).

Jack's unease is hardly surprising.

The transformational abilities of the wives place them in the company of the macrocosm's more elusive shapeshifters like Fleur and Sweetheart Calico. These women embody the kind of power that Sherwood Anderson merely gestures towards in his Winesburg women. In Four Souls, Margaret Kashpaw, one of Erdrich's most formidable heroines, identifies women as the agents of transformation:

> To sew is to pray. Men don't understand this. They see the whole but they don't see the stitches ... We women turn things inside out and set things right. We salvage what we can of human garments and piece the rest into blankets. Sometimes our stitches slur and slow. Only a woman's eye can tell. Other times, the tension in the stitches

> might be too tight because of tears, but only we know what emotion went into the making. Only women can hear the prayer (176).

Jack is not the only character in Erdrich's fictional world to be disoriented by female transformational power. His unease is echoed in The Antelope Wife by Cally, the young girl who cannot fathom Sweetheart Calico:

> I don't know how to take this, don't know what to make of it, have never known and do not now want to know a person like Sweetheart Calico. For she alters the shape of things around her and she changes the shape of things to come. She upsets me, then enlightens me with her truthless stare. She scatters my wits (106).

The metamorphic powers of these unreadable, shapeshifting women mirror the dynamics of Erdrich's form. In his hesitant account of Fleur Pillager's history in The Bingo Palace Lipsha Morrissey speculates on her rumoured immortality; she appears to embody the spirit of continuity that characterizes Erdrich's ever-expanding form: "Rumour is, there's no limit to her life" (128). Sweetheart Calico's "truthless" gaze both enlightens and further mystifies those who try to read her. All of Erdrich's unreadable women exhibit this power both to reveal and conceal and to crystallize the onlooker's thoughts whilst simultaneously fragmenting them. Like Welty's androgynous wanderers, these women confound boundaries defining centre and margin; as objects of signification June, Fleur and Sweetheart Calico stand at the centre of the macrocosm and yet as predominantly silent, absent characters they haunt its margins. Colin Channer achieves a similar effect with figures such as Wilfredo who pass through his cycle as elusive, shaping presences rather than fully-fledged characters. Channer states: "Some characters in Passing Through are designed to be felt to a greater degree than they are seen or heard" (Appendix 336).

The stories involving Erdrich's women become landmarks in the reader's consciousness as the shapeshifters continue to be "felt" more than "seen or heard." The laconic narrative of June's life and mysterious death is a focal point for the communities in the macrocosm. In an interview with Laura Coltelli Michael Dorris describes Love Medicine as "basically ... the story of the reverberation of June's life" (21). The word "reverberation" captures the powerful boomerang effect of June's story. After her death she becomes a magnetic point of return for her lovers – Gordie Kashpaw, Gerry Nanapush and Jack Mauser – and her son, Lipsha Morrissey. In "Crown of Thorns" Gordie perceives June in the "black and endless" look of the deer he kills on the road. Her gaze, like Sweetheart Calico's, disconcerts the onlooker; it both penetrates Gordie – it "stare[s] into some hidden place" – and "block[s] him out" (Love Medicine 221).[37]

It is significant that June takes the form of a deer to ensnare Gordie with her spectral, enigmatic gaze. Sweetheart Calico assumes the forms of antelope and woman at will, literally enacting the possibility of mediation between seemingly bounded worlds. It is in her volume of poetry, Jacklight, that Erdrich first draws from the myth of the antelope people to query boundaries. In "The Strange People" a doe tells the story of her metamorphosis from antelope to woman after a man has wounded her. Like Sweetheart Calico, the doe resists the man's attempts to bind her. She seduces him and ends the poem by "crawling back into my shadowy body," where she can "dream of the one who could really wound me" (Jacklight 69).

Erdrich prefaces the poem with a description of the antelope people transcribed by Frank Linderman. This description projects the reader of the macrocosm forward to Klaus Shawano's obsession with Sweetheart: "*The antelope are strange people ... They appear and disappear; they are like shadows on the plains. Because of their*

great beauty, young men sometimes follow the antelope and are lost forever. Even if those foolish ones find themselves and return, they are never again right in their heads" (Jacklight 68).

In Tales of Burning Love Jack tries to control June's spectral activity by blocking out the images that haunt him: "Wife one. That was June Morrissey. Freeze frame. Don't think about her. Back in order" (106). This resistance breaks down when he submits to the guilt associated with her death: "Why was he being punished? *Because of her? That oil-field woman? June? What I did or what I let her do?*" (108 Erdrich's italics). Although Jack himself never makes the connection, he experiences feelings of impotence whenever he finds himself in conflict with the elements. Forever mindful of the circumstances of June's death, the reader registers her presence in the novel's numerous references to the snow that constantly threatens to freeze the characters. At the beginning of "The Hitchhiker," the third-person narrator notes that the "TV meteorologist" refers to the latest lollapalooza as "she": "She was the sudden, frontal, take-no-hostages drop attack of the low-pressure system that caused such impressive damage. She was the lingering depth of cold that killed" (187). Whether or not this parallel between June and the menacing female blizzard is deliberate, one immediately senses the threat posed by Jack's enigmatic first wife who positions herself in the recesses of the characters' minds.

By resisting petrifaction, June channels her Indian heritage. According to Paula Gunn Allen, "Stasis is not characteristic of the American Indians' view of things ... The tribal systems are static in that all movement is related to all other movement – that is harmonious and balanced or unified" (Sacred 56). As a free spirit navigating the borderland between life and death, June defies Jack's attempts to petrify her into a static, contained image. Her mediation between this world and

the ghost world verifies the belief of her ancestors that the spirit continues on into the next life, often assuming a different form. Allen examines many of these tribal tenets, including the belief in "transformation of objects from one form to another, the movement of objects from one place to another by teleportation ... communication with animals, plants, and non-physical beings ... the compelling of the will of another, and the stealing or storing of souls" (Sacred 22-3). Again Allen associates this sensibility specifically with Native American women: "The male principle is transitory; it dies and is reconstituted. The female principle, which is immanent in hard substances (like the earth, minerals, crystals, stones), wood, and water, is permanent; it remains ... He is what comes and goes, she is what continues, stays" (267). Fleur Pillager embodies this female principle, dismantling boundaries but retaining her essential self: "She laid the heart of an owl on her tongue so she could see at night, and went out, hunting, not even in her own body"; "She takes the future of others and makes it her own, sucks it in through a hollow reed, through a straw, a bone" (Tracks 12, Bingo 128). As a ghost June achieves the same kind of power that the more mythic Fleur and Sweetheart Calico practise while still alive. Having lived a narrative of containment she forges her strongest connections with the people in her life as a ghost, finally claiming Lipsha as her son.

Like Welty's autonomous wanderers, Erdrich's shapeshifters resist containment, redirecting many of the macrocosm's constituent narrative strands. However Erdrich privileges none of these women with a narrative voice; they stand at the centre of other people's stories but never tell their own. Rather than limiting the agency of these women, however, their silence becomes the most significant index of their power. In his study of Gustav Flaubert Jonathan Culler locates the lure of Flaubert's prose in its silences: "It is precisely the silence of the text, the

blankness of a self-sufficient narrative surface, that makes one's interrogation often seem somewhat gratuitous and therefore the more fascinating" (Culler Flaubert 214). This self-sufficiency characterizes each of Erdrich's elusive, metamorphic women; they embody the magnetism of the unreachable stories that provoke tellers like Nanapush.

Erdrich's fugitive women clearly designate their position as silent, self-sufficient texts. In "June's Luck" in The Bingo Palace Erdrich offers a glimpse into June's past to reveal how she consciously construed her elusiveness; when her mother's boyfriend rapes June she "escaped into a part of her mind" where she vowed to remain, forever out of reach: "*Nobody ever hold me again*" (60 Erdrich's italics). June's resolution sets the pattern for her narrative behaviour throughout the macrocosm. Her will to escape containment defies even the hands of death which, like her many readers, fail to hold June in her entirety: in the opening section of Love Medicine the third-person narrative voice claims that "Even when her heart clenched and her skin turned crackling cold it didn't matter, because the pure and naked part of her went on" (7).

The self-designated, reverberating silences of Erdrich's women differ greatly from the muteness of some of her men. In her comprehensive study of Erdrich's first six 'novels', Connie Jacobs identifies Nanapush as "the only traditional male who speaks with his own voice." She argues that Lipsha, Erdrich's only other highly vocal male, articulates competing discourses as "both the inheritor of the old ways and reflector of the price of acculturation" (66). However it is important to note that the two most sustained male voices in Erdrich's macrocosm belong to men who embody the spirit of continuity that motivates her female wanderers and characterizes her form. Those who turn their backs on their heritage and emulate

more western models of manhood remain, for the most part, silent. Nector Kashpaw narrates only one story in Love Medicine; Jack Mauser and Lyman Lamartine – the inheritor of Nector's role as the reservation bureaucrat – narrate none. Both Lipsha and Nanapush use their storytelling abilities to secure the preservation of tribal customs and traditions. Therefore it is only those men who embrace their tribal identity and wish to serve as connectors who exercise discursive power in Erdrich's fictional world.

Silence eludes definition; it signifies either void or plenum. For women like June and Fleur, silence is a means of ensuring their position at the centre as compelling narrative subjects that ignite relational sensibilities among the inscribed readers: June's spectral activity intensifies Lipsha's and awakens Jack's desire for connection and understanding. For men like Jack, Gordie, and King and Russell Kashpaw, silence signifies a denial of self. Jane Tompkins identifies this macho reserve as a common trait of the western hero and highlights its dangers. In West of Everything she attributes the white hero's resistance to speech to:

> a desire for complete objectivization. And this means being conscious of nothing, not knowing that one has a self ... By becoming a solid object, not only is man relieved of the burden of relatedness and responsiveness to others, he is relieved of consciousness itself ... primarily, consciousness *of* self (Tompkins's italics 56-7).

Similarly in Phallic Critiques Peter Schwenger notes this masculine resistance to subjectivity, observing, like Ben Knights, the masculine alignment of consciousness with femininity: "Any consciousness of manhood (besides mere self-congratulation) implies a female element, a place just outside of manhood from which to view its contours" (31). By shying away from language, Erdrich's alpha

males circumvent consciousness and, like Welty's King and Oates's Reddinger, lock themselves into the paradigm of the bounded, non-relational male.

In her essay, "Blurs, Blends, Berdaches: Gender Mixing in the Novels of Louise Erdrich" Julie Barak examines Erdrich's use of a "gender role available to her through her Native American background – that of the berdache" (51). Barak defines the berdache as a figure who, although ontologically male or female, assumes the dress and mannerisms of the opposite gender and embraces its values, conflating masculine and feminine sensibilities in everyday life. Because of their hybrid status berdaches "were freed from the restrictions of the usual, feared and respected for the powers granted them by their difference" (Barak 53). Barak's essay predates The Antelope Wife, in which Erdrich recognizes explicitly the kind of power exercised by such figures; she makes a fleeting reference to a berdache when she describes the figure chosen by the community to rename Blue Prairie Woman: "This namer was nameless and was neither a man nor a woman, and so took power from the in-between … The namer walked like a woman, spoke in a man's deep voice" (14). All of Erdrich's self-defining characters recognize and harness the power that arises from "the in-between." In her essay, Barak notes how Erdrich's autonomous characters fit the model of the berdache to varying degrees. Fleur, June, Lulu and Sweetheart Calico are ultra-feminine yet they are also controlling, courageous, independent and hyper-sexual. By embracing his mothering skills as well as his storytelling faculties, Nanapush wields more power than the cycle's younger generation of alpha males: one thinks of King Kashpaw's meaningless violence towards his wife and Gordie's eventual descent into alcoholism.

Barak's helpful study of gender conflation in Erdrich's fiction also predates The Master Butcher's Singing Club, in which one particular character takes power

from her "in-between" status to engineer the plots of the other characters. Step-and-a-Half is the itinerant junk collector who haunts the outhouses of Argus, recycling the community's unwanted scraps. She first appears in old photographs in the guise of 'Minnie', Delphine's absent mother, in a "blur of movement" that "made her look so lively" (66). As Step-and-a-Half, the junk collector she is presented as a magnetic, physical presence capable of constant motion and a prowess suggestive of masculine physicality: "She was intimidating. The name Step-and-a-Half was hers because the length of her stride was phenomenal. She loved the night and could be seen, her beanpole figure in a trance of forward movement, walking the town streets and checking back porches" (83). Like Sweetheart Calico, she bewilders other characters with her mobile, unfathomable gaze: "Her gaze had at first seemed powered by a sharp, cryptic hatred, but now suddenly she shifted, looked at Delphine with an unreadable expression of melancholy" (83-4).

Step-and-a-Half is, like Fleur, June and the antelope wife, a shapeshifter, predicting the narrative patterns of other characters' lives and directing their plots. When she informs Delphine enigmatically that, "'They're digging their own graves'" she anticipates Delphine's discovery of the Waldvogel boys' scheme to bury themselves alive and predicts Markus's near-brush with death (208). It is only at the end of the novel that Erdrich fully reveals Step-and-a-Half's influence over the network of relations in Argus. It is she who discovered Delphine as an abandoned baby and left her with Roy Watzka, forging a father/daughter relationship based upon secrets and lies. When Step-and-a-Half rescues Delphine she sets the precedent for the series of near-misses that will characterize the baby's life: "She had heard its one cry before it sank the incremental inch that covered up its mouth. And it was always, she thought, watching Delphine grow up, exactly the margin by which

the girl escaped one dirty fate after the next" (382). Step-and-a-Half exploits her peripheral, 'in-between' status as insider and outsider to shape the course of other characters' narratives.

As Erdrich's texts become increasingly self-referential, her characters start to function as literalisations of the discourses that pervade the earlier texts. They literally embody the forms of doubleness that occur in the opening tetralogy. By successfully breastfeeding his baby daughter in The Antelope Wife, Scranton Roy physically enacts the male mothering instincts implicit in Nanapush's relationship with Fleur and Lulu. In The Master Butcher's Singing Club Step-and-a-Half functions as a kind of meta-author, recasting and manoeuvring plots. As a recycler, her storytelling tactics mirror Erdrich's methodology. When she reflects on these strategies, Step-and-a-Half's use of imagery recalls Erdrich's own metaphors for her forms: "Now, when she looked at the streets around her and all the people, she saw them from a junker's point of view ... She knew them not from what they wore or the façade they showed to the world, but from what they tossed out ... She knew them by their scraps, and their scraps told their stories" (380). This recalls Erdrich's description of Tracks as "the old junked car in the yard front, continually raided for parts" (Chavkin "Interview" 238). The final image of The Master Butcher brings to mind Erdrich's delineation of her macrocosmic form as a "compost pile" (240): "Step-and-a-Half hummed in her sleep and sank deeper into her own tune, a junker's pile of tattered courting verse and hunter's wisdom and the utterances of itinerants or words that sprang from a bit of grass or a scrap of cloud or a prophetic pig's knuckle ..." (388).

Other characters are less adept at exploiting their in-between status. Karl Adare and Cyprian Lazarre fail to finds a space in which to claim their bisexuality

and resign themselves to skirting communal margins. Towards the end of The Beet Queen Karl reflects upon his life of invisibility and anonymity: "as I sat there and the shadows gathered and the lizards scraped along the tiles, I made less and less sense ... until I made none at all. I was part of the senseless landscape. A pulse, a strip, of light. I give nothing, take nothing, mean nothing, hold nothing" (318). This sense of dissolution and non-being is however preferable to some of the performances which other characters force themselves to deliver. Although Karl "shut [his] eyes against" this feeling, he emerges from the darkness with a powerful sense of "sweetness" that compels him to return to Dot (318). Despite his secrecy, Karl's liminality does not prohibit him from forging true connections with other human beings.[38]

In her non-reservation novels, The Beet Queen and The Master Butcher's Singing Club, Erdrich reveals the damaging effects of hegemonic paradigms of gender and sexuality. Living in the town of Argus the characters in these texts experience the weight of social pressures more than those living on the reservation. Those who choose a bound gender identity find themselves locked within straitened plots. In The Beet Queen Russell Kashpaw and Sita Kozka's impaired bodies are physical manifestations of their short-sightedness. Both characters subscribe to hegemonic gender ideologies and end the novel impotent and isolated. Russell and Sita assert their gender boundaries by performing trite postures of masculinity or femininity. At the beginning of The Beet Queen Sita establishes her pattern of behaviour for the rest of the cycle when she uses her sexuality to re-establish herself at the centre of a friendship triangle. Aware that Mary has usurped her place as Celestine's best friend, Sita takes drastic action by putting her femininity on display:

"My breasts were tender. They always hurt. But they were something that Mary didn't have ... I took off my undervest and cupped my breasts in my hands" (35).

Having returned from his "latest war" in Korea, Russell Kashpaw rapidly degenerates, living only for the opportunity to be paraded as a symbol of masculine heroism (Beet Queen 111). Celestine's description of the parade ritual satirizes the machismo associated with Russell's sacrifice: "Now he must wait until some statehouse official scores the other veterans, counting up their wounds on a paper tablet, and figures out who gave away the most flesh" (111). When the parade finally takes place, Dot's narration emphasizes Russell's passivity: "Russell's strapped into the wheelchair with harnesses that look like they are part of his uniform. All his medals are pinned on, a bright patch that spills down his chest" (330). The use of "spill" underscores Russell's impotence and conjures images of a decrepit, degraded old man.

Like Ran MacLain, Wallace Pfef secures his position in society by denying his homosexuality and indulging the community's appetite for romance narratives. He uses a picture of a young girl as a prop in his performance of heterosexuality, claiming that she is his "'poor dead sweetheart'" (The Beet Queen 159). Taking its cue from Pfef, the community spins a plot of heterosexual romance around the picture; they conclude that no woman from Argus could ever take the dead girl's place, releasing him from the pressure to marry: "'She has too strong a hold on him. He can't forget her', they say" (160). Through the picture, Pfef generates what Judith Butler terms "the illusion of an interior and organizing gender core," thus gaining entry into a "cultural field of gender hierarchy and compulsory heterosexuality" (Gender Trouble 136, 139). Although Pfef's performance secures his position in the community, he is destined to remain forever "dissatisfied" (Beet

Queen 161). He is still creating illusions at the end of the novel when he rigs the Beet Queen vote to placate Dot and place her in the false position of the town's beauty queen.

Erdrich's stance on gender identity is characteristically open. A family discussion in The Antelope Wife articulates one of the questions at the heart of her fiction: is gender an essential identity category or a performance grounded in social conditioning? When Grandma Mary suggests that, "'As a species,' women are 'less apt to commit a crime,'" her granddaughter Cecille replies: "'Women aren't a species, Grandma Mary, we're a gender'." Zosie and Frank, both members of the older generation, agree with Mary that women are indeed "'a separate species'" (Antelope Wife 205). In The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse Erdrich dramatizes the complexities surrounding this debate. She reveals that Father Damien, the white priest who lives on the reservation and appears fleetingly in the opening tetralogy of the macrocosm, is in fact a woman. When Agnes DeWitt discovers the corpse of the 'real' Father Damien, she steals his clothes and assumes his identity, arriving at Little No Horse under the guise of the priest. Throughout the text she strives to maintain her masculine identity and speculates upon the effects of prescribed, socialized notions of gender. Her meditations on her transformation form a kind of meta-commentary on the gendered doubleness of Erdrich's characters. Fleur, June and Nanapush achieve autonomy through their disregard of easy gender boundaries; Agnes/Father Damien consciously melds the masculine and the feminine every day. Like these earlier characters, Agnes retains an essentialist notion of her gender identity whilst rejecting socialized norms.

Erdrich's narrative voice recognizes the work of hegemonic gender ideology in the early pages of The Last Report. Before her transformation, Agnes falls in love

with Berndt Vogel. Both characters sense the inevitability of their sexual relationship but the narrative voice makes a clear distinction between their preparations for this experience. Berndt must draw on other intense experiences to gear himself up: "Having dragged army caissons through hip-deep mud ... having seen his best friend suddenly uncreated into a mass of shrieking pulp, having lived intimately with pouring tumults of eager lice and rats plump with a horrifying food, he was rudimentarily prepared for the suffering he would experience in love" (18). In contrast, women are qualified for this experience from an early age: "She had also learned her share of discipline and in addition – for the heart of her gender is stretched, pounded, molded, and tempered for its hot task from the age of two – she was a woman" (Last Report 18). Erdrich's choice of verbs here is highly suggestive of social conditioning. As soon as Agnes assumes the raiment of a masculine self she notices a distinct shift in the kinds of social interaction available to her. Travelling towards Little No Horse alongside Kashpaw she observes that:

> Even now, the driver treated her with much more respect as a priest than she'd ever known as a nun ... As Agnes, she'd always felt too inhibited to closely question men. Questions from women to men always raised questions of a different nature. As a man, she found that Father Damien was free to pursue all questions with frankness and ease (61-2).

When Agnes draws up "*Some rules to Assist in My Transformation,*" she begins the process of gender construction that Judith Butler identifies in Gender Trouble: she will become a man through a "*stylized repetition of acts*" (Last Report 74 Butler 140). She instructs herself to emulate masculine modes of speech: "*Ask questions in the form of statements,*" "*Make requests in the form of orders*" (74).

Thus Agnes makes the same distinction between male and female styles of communication as Jennifer Coates in her examination of language and gender. Coates writes: "men pursue a style of interaction based on **power,** while women pursue a style based on **solidarity** and **support**" (136 Women, Men Coates's emphasis). By asserting the unitary self rather than her relational self Agnes hopes to forge an authentic identity as a man.

The text itself does not sustain such rigid notions and performances. It is in fact Agnes's doubleness that enables her to win the trust of the community. Both Kashpaw and Nanapush marvel initially at the priest's influence over their people. When Agnes becomes the first outsider to make a connection with Kashpaw's disturbed wife Quill, he reflects: "This young priest possessed a surprising power, one he seemed unaware of, which made it all the more effective. The young priest had calmed Quill and made her happy. His mere presence had affected the change" (Last 101). Despite her rules and resolutions, Agnes's buried relational self emerges, enabling her to form deep spiritual bonds with both Quill and her daughter, the silent Mary Kashpaw. Through her disguise, Agnes discovers how to elicit "power from the in-between."

In The Last Report, Erdrich presents the reservation as the perfect environment for this slippage between genders. The narrative voice describes the reservation as "a place still fluid of definition, appearing solid only on a map," whose "boundaries came and went" (75). Both Kashpaw and Nanapush discover Father Damien's secret early on and see no reason to act upon it; Nanapush reveals his knowledge to Agnes only to distract her during a chess game. Whilst writing her article on the community for her superiors, Agnes notes how the Ojibwe incorporate

the fluidity of the land into their society by adopting a language system that does not register gender boundaries:

> *the place of the noun in the Ojibwe mind ... is unprejudiced by gender distinctions ... Yet there occurs something more mysterious. Alive or dead. Each thing is either animate or inanimate, which would at first seem remarkably simple and sensible, for in the western mind the quality of aliveness or deadness seems easy to discern. Not so. For the Anishinaabeg, the quality of animation from within ... is not limited to animals and plants. Stones, asiniig, are animate, and kettles, akikoog, alive as well* (257).

The community has devised a language that does not function as a stable system of signs but adapts in accordance with personal interpretation: "*Amid the protocols of language, there is room for individual preference, too. Some old men believe their pants are animate.* Nanapush had sometimes chastised his baggy trousers" (257-8 Erdrich's italics). Performances of gender are futile and unnecessary in such a community.

As Agnes reflects upon the apparent success of her physical transformation, she reaches a clearer understanding of gender conditioning. She realizes that her former identity as a woman and a nun constituted as much of a performance as her current disguise: "Between these two, where was the real self? It came to her that both Sister Cecilia and then Agnes were as heavily manufactured of gesture and pose as was Father Damien. And within this, what sifting of identity was she? What mote? What nothing?" (76). Countering the threat of non-being however are moments of re-engagement with an essential female self. Developing her theory of gender as performance, Judith Butler writes:

That the gendered body is performative suggests that it has no ontological status apart from the various acts which constitute its reality. This also suggests that if that reality is fabricated as an interior essence, that very interiority is an effect and function of a decidedly public and social discourse, the public regulation of fantasy through the surface politics of the body (Gender Trouble 136).

Erdrich's representation of Agnes's experience does not entirely support this view. She punctuates Agnes's performance of masculinity with moments of destabilization when her pre-socialised female identity emerges from the deeper strata of the self: "There would be times that she missed the ease of moving in her old skin, times that Father Damien was pierced by womanness and suffered" (65). For months she prays for the cessation of the "useless affliction of menstrual blood" yet when her period finally vanishes, she experiences "a pang, a loss, an eerie rocking between genders" (78). When Agnes's lover, Father Wekkle, implores her to leave the reservation and marry him, he reminds her: "'You are a *woman*'" (206 Erdrich's italics). Agnes responds by insisting, "'I am nothing but a priest'" (207). However her protracted response to her separation from Wekkle does not fully verify this claim. As she struggles to recover from the loss of her lover her womanhood re-asserts itself: "Her womanness crouched dark within her – clawed, rebellious, sharp of tooth" (209).

When Father Wekkle returns years later Agnes recognizes exactly why she banished him; even the passionate love affair through which she expressed her essential womanhood has fallen prey to social ideologies of gender: "The difficulty was that Father Wekkle subtly condescended to her. He was unaware of it, but in all worldly situations, where they stood side by side, he treated her as somehow less" (303). In calling her Agnes he merely reinforces this essential "womanness" that he

cannot know or understand; she feels fiercely protective of the "irreducible part of herself that only she was meant to possess. That Agnes ... That stone made translucent by pressure. That was absolutely hers" (303). In the final paragraph of The Last Report, Erdrich captures Agnes's both/and status beautifully. When Agnes finally dies, Mary Kashpaw transports her body onto the lake. Even in the process of dying, Agnes maintains her in-between status: "As the dark water claimed him, his features blurred. His body wavered for a time between the surface and the feminine depth below." However "the feminine depth below" is her final resting place (351).

Agnes eventually attains the kind of power that distinguishes Erdrich's most autonomous shapeshifters, retaining her essential gender identity whilst rejecting socialized identifications. She also reflects the reader's excursion through Erdrich's macrocosm. Agnes inhabits the fringes of the reservation, looking in and trying to unravel its network of histories, narratives, rumours and legends. When Father Damien/Agnes dies, Father Jude Miller decides to stay on the reservation and continue the enquiry into its history; where Sister Leopolda was the subject of Father Damien's report, Father Damien now becomes Father Miller's subject.

The Last Report acts as a kind of frame for the entire macrocosmic cycle, transporting the reader further backward and forward than any of Erdrich's other individual texts. It casts a backward glance over all the preceding cycles involving the reservation. As one progresses through the text, one senses a narrative impetus towards completion; the text ties up some of the loose ends of the other cycles, revisiting old narratives and filling in gaps. Erdrich acquaints the reader with details of Lulu's time at boarding school; she provides some of the background story of Fleur's improbable marriage to John Mauser and reveals the destiny of her mysterious son Awun Mist, a mere shadow in the earlier cycles. The text continues

the narrative of Jude Miller, the Adare baby who was separated from his brother and sister in The Beet Queen. In typical Erdrich fashion, however, the metafictional questioning in the "End Notes" works against this movement towards closure.

Like all of Erdrich's texts, The Last Report yields images and narratives that embody her founding aesthetic of continuity. Fittingly, one of the most resonant images describes an Ojibwe custom: "So it was that Father Damien was introduced to the endless Ojibwe visit, in which a get-together produces a perfectly convincing reason to seek another, and then that visit another, and so on" (89). Such a dynamic drives Erdrich who continues to exploit the in-between formal status of her story cycles. Like Gloria Naylor before her, Erdrich confesses wholeheartedly: "I hate the process of finishing anything" (Chavkin "Interview" 244).

6

Anticipation and Retrospection:

Postmodern Variations on the Form

As the lines between genres become ever more permeable, how helpful are distinctions between the novel, short story cycle, and story collection? This composite chapter will examine postmodern incarnations of the story cycle form, some of which are commonly identified as novels or short story collections.

Sandra Cisneros: The House on Mango Street, Caramelo and Woman Hollering Creek

"I have gone away to come back" (Mango 110).[39]

In the introduction to the 1999 edition of The House on Mango Street Sandra Cisneros explains the methodology behind her form. She reveals how her original conception of the text's generic identity shifted as the narrative began to assume its own dynamic and shape: "I thought I was writing a memoir. By the time I had finished it, my memoir was no longer memoir, no longer autobiography. It had evolved into a collective story peopled with several lives from my past and present, placed in one fictional time and neighbourhood" (xi-xii). As she continued to write she developed a clearer vision of what she insists was an unfamiliar form; her description of this vision reads exactly like a definition of the short story cycle:

> I knew I wanted to tell a story made up of a series of stories that would make sense if read alone, or that could be read all together to

> tell one big story, each contributing to the whole – like beads in a necklace. I hadn't seen a book like this before ... I would discover these novels later: Gwendolyn Brooks's Maud Martha, Nellie Campobello's Cartucho ... (xvi-xvii).[40]

Cisneros certainly aimed for the kind of duality that has become associated with the story cycle form: "I wanted to write a collection which could be read at any random point without having any knowledge of what came before or after. Or that could be read in a series to tell one big story" ("Do You" 78). In describing her methodology Cisneros uses an image that has become one of the defining metaphors for the story cycle form. She tells Pilar E. Rodríguez Aranda: "I had no idea how these pieces were going to fit together. I was making all these little cuentitos, like little squares of a patchwork quilt, hoping that they would match, that there wouldn't be a big hole in the middle" (74-5). She arranged them in an order "so they would be clear and cohesive" but, like Erdrich, recognized that "in real life, there's no order" (Aranda 74). In retrospect, Cisneros states that she wrote Mango Street naïvely, calling her sketches "lazy poems." She explains: "each of the stories could have developed into poems, but they were not poems. They were stories, albeit hovering in that grey area between two genres" ("Do You" 79). In 1988 Julián Olivares speculated on the generic status of Cisneros's debut, asking: "Is *Mango Street* a novel, short stories, prose poems, vignettes?" ("Sandra" 160). At no point in his article does Olivares use the term short story cycle or sequence.

Just as Cisneros insists on the originality of her formal vision, Latina writers and their critics have claimed the genre as their own. Like many contemporary writers of dual ethnic identity, they see in the form the potential for expressing a communal sense of marginalization and for emulating the oral tradition central to

that community. In Breaking Boundaries: Latina Writing and Critical Readings, Eliana Ortega and Nancy Saporta Sternbach claim:

> Latina writers have not only occupied new literary spaces, they have also created new genres. The majority of Latina literature has tended to be poetry, but recently they have developed a genre of their own, still to be defined and still emerging, which specifically articulates Latina experience. It draws on the Latina as storyteller and situates the speaking voice in a genre somewhere in between poetry and fiction, blurring the line between the short story and the novel, between conversation and literary discourse (17).

In a footnote Ortega and Sternbach cite Cisneros's Mango Street as an example of this genre.

Thematic concerns place Cisneros firmly in the company of female short story cycle writers: the tension between the unitary and the communal, the ambivalence towards home, the function of storytelling, the querying of boundaries. Some of the lengthier titles of Cisneros's individual vignettes remind one of Paley's titles with their explanatory, deceptively simple tone that appears to deliver the story before it has been told: titles such as "Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice on Tuesdays" and "There Was an Old Woman She Had So Many Children She Didn't Know What to Do" strike a similar note to "In This Country, But in Another Language, My Aunt Refuses to Marry the Men Everyone Wants Her To" and "This is a Story about My Friend George, the Toy Inventor" from Later the Same Day. Although Cisneros does not draw formal parallels with Paley's work, she names Paley as one of her favourite writers (Cisneros "Interview").

Although Cisneros claims that, prior to writing Mango Street she "hadn't seen a book like this before," she acknowledges that formal paradigms began to influence her as her narrative took shape. She took as her model Jorge Luis Borges's Dream Tigers stories: "I liked how he could fit so much into a page and that the last line of each story was important to the whole in much the same way that the final lines in poems resonate ... I wanted stories like poems, compact and lyrical and ending with a reverberation" ("Do You" 78). The resonances with Paley are again clear: one recalls how the closing image of Faith's heart, "lit up in stripes," like a "black and white barred king in Alcatraz" reverberates back through "A Subject of Childhood" and how Mr Darwin's sudden "explosion of nausea, absolute digestive disgust" refracts back upon "Faith in the Afternoon" (Disturbances 145, Enormous 49). Similarly, Cisneros usually places her most arresting images in the final paragraph in order to jolt the reader's attention or inject the story with a renewed intensity: one thinks of Esperanza's signature image of herself as a "red balloon ... tied to an anchor" in "Boys & Girls"; the poignant picture of Sally's ceiling, "smooth as wedding cake"; the image of Angel Vargas who "dropped from the sky like a sugar donut ... and exploded down to earth without even an 'Oh'" in "There Was an Old Woman" (Mango 9, 102, 30).

James Nagel devotes a chapter to The House on Mango Street in his study of the form. The cycle also appears in Dunn and Morris's annotated list of composite novels and their chapter on "Rites of Passage," in which they explore cycles that "feature ... a narrator-protagonist as the focus and significant element of interconnection" (49). Esperanza's journey towards adulthood constitutes the main narrative line in The House on Mango Street. Her voice narrates all forty-four of the vignettes, whether they concern her own story or that of a neighbour, family member

or friend. In her study Susan Garland Mann examines a number of cycles that emulate and reshape the conventional structure of the *Bildungsroman* and, more specifically, the *künstlerroman*: the narrative charting the maturation of the artist. Mann makes no mention of Cisneros's cyclic narrative of maturation but her observations on this sub genre of the short story cycle are pertinent to The House on Mango Street. Mann writes: "Frequently with these cycles, subordinate characters surface for only a story or two and then disappear entirely with no explanation being necessary" (9). Cisneros usually disperses these sub-narrative threads throughout the text, so that they form microcosmic cycles that the reader must assemble herself. Characters like Marin and Alicia make the same kind of narrative leaps as Selina, Dotty and Ginny in Paley's Faith cycle. Marin first appears as the eponymous heroine of her own vignette, dancing by herself, waiting for "a star to fall, someone to change her life" (27). She does not resurface until "Geraldo No Last Name," forty pages later, where she no longer dances alone but with men whom she barely knows.

Mann notes that many cycle writers have used the form to explore the process of maturation through the representation of a "composite personality" (10); the personality traits of the primary, foregrounding consciousness are shared by other characters who appear in seemingly tangential stories that do not focus exclusively on the protagonist. Mann cites Hemingway's collective of heroes from the cycle In Our Time as an example of the maturing composite personality. Nick Adams, the recurring protagonist, appears in the first five stories but figures only "irregularly" after this (Mann 10): "His presence is felt, nonetheless, because other protagonists ... bear a close family resemblance to him" (10). Cisneros creates a similar composite personality with Esperanza and the women of her neighbourhood. The resurgent theme of Esperanza's narrative – the longing for escape from Mango Street and its

boundaries – weaves its way into stories concerning her friends and neighbours. In "Sally" Esperanza paints a sympathetic portrait of her friend and the problems arising from her beauty. In the final paragraph Esperanza asks Sally if she ever experiences the urge to spurn the boundaries of home. "Sally do you sometimes wish you didn't have to go home?" (82). Although she poses the question to Sally, Esperanza is clearly using her friend's narrative of oppression to express her own desire for self-definition: "You could close your eyes and you wouldn't have to worry what people said because you never belonged here anyway" (83).

Cisneros's female-centred cycle differs from Hemingway's male-oriented cycle in that her protagonist's voice unifies the stories; Esperanza the character disappears periodically but Esperanza the writer is ever present. As narrator, Esperanza insists on the potential individuality of her female friends and neighbours. A single image, often appearing in the title of a new character's story, particularizes the women who share a common narrative of oppression and silence: one thinks of "Rafaela Who Drinks Coconut & Papaya Juice on Tuesdays" or Minerva who "Writes Poems." Hemingway's men are a more concentrated collective, bound together not by a stable, empathic narrative presence but an inescapable alienation that, according to Joseph DeFalco, typifies Hemingway's representation of a "whole race of contemporary men who have encountered irrational elements in their environment and have been forced to deal with them" (26).

Cisneros's comments on her methodology emphasize the centrality of the relational aesthetic. Channelling other voices did not compromise the single narrative line of the *Bildungsroman*. Indeed when the memoir paradigm gave way to the "collective story," Cisneros was able to access and articulate buried facets of the self. Doubts and questions expressed themselves through a plurality of voices:

> Mango Street ceased to be my story. I arranged and diminished events ... to speak a message, to take from different parts of other people's lives and create a story like a collage. I merged characters from my twenties with characters from my teens and childhood ... I asked questions I didn't know to ask when I was an adolescent" ("Introduction" xvii-xviii).[41]

Cisneros's experience recalls Paley's response to her shift from poetry to prose: "When I was able to get into somebody else's voice, when I was able to speak in other people's voices, I found my own" (Perry 107). Indeed Cisneros attributes her admiration for Paley to the way that she has managed to find a distinctive voice that addresses a "world reader" (Cisneros "Interview").

Like most cycles, the tension between the one and the many informs both the formal and thematic dynamics of Cisneros's text. Throughout the cycle Esperanza insists on her status as a self-determining individual, as she grapples with a sense of displacement in her community. Her strongest connection is with the "four skinny trees" that, like her, "do not belong here but are here" (75). She aims to distinguish herself from the many silenced women of Mango Street and become "the one who leaves the table like a man" (89). In order to resist the security of a purely positional identity, she must emulate the trees "whose only reason is to be and be" (75). These self-determining impulses express themselves in Esperanza's desire for a home of her own. Like other cyclic heroines, she must first reconcile her conflicted feelings towards her community. Esperanza is surrounded by a variety of plots in which home either binds or grounds the self. The text is populated with women for whom home represents enclosure: Rafaela, who is "getting old from leaning out the window so much, gets locked indoors because her husband is afraid Rafaela will run

away since she is too beautiful to look at" (79); Sally, who leaves her tyrannical father only to marry a man who forbids her to look out of the window; Louie's "girl cousin" who "can't come out ... but ... stands in the doorway a lot, all the time singing" (23-4). Characters like Mamacita, however, show Esperanza that home can function as a powerful metonymy for one's identity. Brought to Chicago by her son, Mamacita is unable to function away from home and "still sighs for her pink house" in Mexico (77). Although Esperanza rejects such rigidity, recognizing finally the possibility of a "home in the heart," Mamacita's homesickness prefigures the bond that will eventually draw Esperanza back to Mango Street (64).

When Lucy's aunts come to stay in "The Three Sisters" they make predictions about Esperanza's future. Reminiscent of the fates in Greek tragedy, they prophesy that she will "go very far" but place great emphasis on the return home: "When you leave you must remember to come back for the others. A circle, understand? You will always be Esperanza. You will always be Mango Street. You can't erase what you know. You can't forget who you are" (104, 105). Louise Erdrich has noted that most of her itinerant heroines eventually return, seeking re-engagement with known, closed spaces. The Aunts' image of the circle suggests completion and a return to an essential, inescapable self. However the reader senses that, for Esperanza, re-engagement constitutes a further step towards autonomy; as Andrea O'Reilly Herrera suggests in her essay "Chambers of Consciousness," "Esperanza's projected mental return to Mango Street is spiral rather than circular" (196). Esperanza will make the same kind of return as Virgie Rainey in The Golden Apples. Virgie, like Esperanza, becomes the subject of communal projections into the future; Virgie's Sunday School class "think of her in terms of the future – she would go somewhere, somewhere away off, they said then, talking with their chins

sunk in their hands" (Welty Collected 291-2). Although Virgie comes back to Morgana she returns with a new way of seeing that enables her to re-integrate whilst maintaining her "separateness" (460). One can foresee Esperanza achieving the same kind of balance when she returns to Mango Street, whether physically or imaginatively through her writing.

In contrast, the concept of home remains a pernicious one for Hemingway's cyclic hero. In the Nick Adams stories the domestic home is a dark, emasculating space: in "Now I Lay Me," a story published after In Our Time, Nick recalls how he and his father returned from a hunting trip to find that his mother had cleaned out the memorabilia of his father's former hunting days, negating the significance of their experience that day. In "The Doctor and the Doctor's Wife" home is represented as the suffocating domain of a mother whose biblical philosophy has little bearing on the reality of the world occupied by father and son. At the end of the story Nick chooses to accompany his father back to the woods rather than return home.[42] Nick experiences similar longings to the young Esperanza; both characters yearn for a space beyond the strictures of social paradigms where they can simply "be and be." For Esperanza this space is a home of her own, whereas Nick seeks the anonymity of the natural world. For Esperanza the return home no longer signifies a threat to self; Nick's return to Michigan in "Big Two-Hearted River" is fraught with anxiety. He does not re-engage with his community but camps out in the forest where he finds a transient equanimity.

Although Esperanza emerges at the end of the cycle as the one who will step beyond the barriers of Mango Street, her narrative destiny is shaped by a collective of women: both the aunts and Alicia predict her narrative of escape and return and Aunt Lupe foresees Esperanza's open destiny, telling her that her writing will "keep

you free" (61). Although these women speak to Esperanza separately, they resemble the female storytelling communities of Louise Erdrich and Grace Paley, shaping the form with their speculative narrative paradigms.

* * *

Cisneros's debut has begun to establish itself as an exemplar of the short story cycle form. Her second prose work blurs the line between collection and cycle. The main difference between The House on Mango Street and Woman Hollering Creek is that the latter does not feature a unifying protagonist. Only the final two stories feature recurring characters, although "Tin Tan Tan" serves more as a prelude to "*Bien* Pretty" than a story in its own right; the sketch consists of fragments of letters from 'Rogelio Valesco', a pseudonym donned by the lover of Lupe, the heroine of "*Bien* Pretty." However, Cisneros observes in her characterization the structure of "recurrence and development" that Ingram associates with the story cycle form; the similarities in these stories between voice and situation are such that new characters and voices appear familiar even when appearing in new contexts. These resonances set up a network of connections that operates both within and beyond the bounds of text.

The structure of the collection compounds this sense of continuity. Cisneros again observes the trajectory of the *Bildungsroman*, dividing her collection into three parts that deal respectively with childhood, adolescence, and adulthood, so that each section forms a microcosmic cycle of its own. The second section comprises only two short stories narrated by different characters. The first and third sections are longer and feature characters and narrators whose behaviours are so similar that they, like the women of Mango Street, form a composite protagonist. Changes in voice do little to distinguish the characters, especially in the first section. It is often difficult

to know where one personality ends and another begins; only when the narrator is addressed with a different name does the reader realize that she is engaging with a new centre of consciousness. Indeed, readers who are familiar with Cisneros's debut may well presume that the narrator in the opening stories is Esperanza. Like Paley, Cisneros does not always identify her narrators but provides textual evidence to suggest that we have returned to the world or consciousness of a familiar character. We cannot be sure that "My Lucy Friend Who Smells Like Corn," is the same Lucy who befriended Esperanza in "Our Good Day." It seems likely, however, that her sister Rachel appears in both collections. In "Our Good Day" Esperanza narrates that, "Rachel is skinny enough to get on the handlebars" of the bike (Mango 16). In "Eleven," the second story in Woman Hollering Creek, Rachel wonders if the teacher picks on her because she is "skinny" (7). In "Mexican Movies" the reference to little brother Kiki signals a possible return to Esperanza's consciousness. The familiar tone of the story seems to verify this connection.

Stories in this collection resonate forwards as well as backwards; Cisneros, like Erdrich, capitalizes on the elasticity of her forms to create a macrocosmic cycle whose boundaries remain permeable. "Mericans" features narrator/protagonist Michaela, "the awful grandmother" and "Auntie Light-Skin": characters who reappear in Caramelo, Cisneros's composite novel that charts the life of narrator/protagonist Lala. In some of the stories the narrator retains her anonymity so that the reader cannot be sure whether she has entered a new consciousness. As the stories progress, one becomes less concerned with such rigid identifications. Just as the individual women begin to move beyond fixed gender roles, so the reader disregards the need for strict character boundaries. The acceptance of plurality

emerges as the prevailing theme of these narratives and sets the standard for the reader.

The third and longest section marks a break away from the kind of world we encountered in Mango Street as Cisneros takes her protagonist/narrators into adulthood. Most of the narrators in this section are named and there is no evidence to suggest that they are Esperanza, the young girl who came to terms with her duality and longed most for a home of her own. Cisneros develops a different kind of composite personality in this final cycle. Some of the women are victims of adultery and violence, whilst others are, ostensibly, more independent; they reject the security of marriage for the excitement of playing the 'other woman'. However one dominating sensibility unites these women: the desire for "passion in its purest crystalline essence" (Woman Hollering 44). These women who come from a variety of cultural backgrounds are merely at a different stage in the same journey.

All the women in the final cycle display symptoms of the "him-itis" that affects Faith Darwin and her friends: they share an appetite for the ideology of romance and a fascination with mythological heroes. The narrator of "Eyes of Zappata" is a more vengeful version of Morgana's Snowdie MacLain. She falls in love with a revolutionary who visits her only at intervals between impregnating young girls across the land; her outrage is tempered however by the irresistible thrill of participating in the myth that surrounds her lover. Even the more worldly heroines in Woman Hollering Creek prioritise romance at the expense of self-determination. Although some of these women avoid marriage, they do so for exactly the same reason as other heroines long for it: a thirst for romance. In "Never Marry a Mexican," Clemencia states that she is "too romantic for marriage" and

explains that, "It's because I believe too much in marriage" that she doesn't seek a husband (69).

In 1981 Janice Radway carried out a study on female readers of romance. In "The Readers and Their Romances" Radway identifies those conventions of the genre that draw readers back to romance narratives: the genre's "characteristic preoccupation with what is typically termed 'a love-hate relationship'"; the creation of "conflict to keep the romantic pair apart until the proper moment" (Radway 589). The significance of these characteristics emerged when the readers consistently "placed heavy emphasis on the importance of *development* in the romance's portrayal of love" (589 Radway's italics).

The stories in Woman Hollering Creek set up these structures and conventions only to subvert them. Most of the stories dramatize the turning point when the heroine rejects fictional paradigms and adjusts her notion of romance in accordance with her burgeoning sense of autonomy. In the title story, Cleófilas marries in the hope of experiencing the unbridled passion that is replicated daily in the telenovelas. Continual abuse from her husband forces her to admit that he is not "the man I have waited my whole life for" (49). Like most other female cycle writers, Cisneros presents female community as an outlet for self-expansion. Throughout the story Cleófilas senses an affinity with the legendary hollering woman who haunts the creek near her home. Woman Hollering's cries articulate the frustrations of the heroines in all three sections of the text; she therefore claims the title of the entire cycle. Cleófilas's identification with Woman Hollering blocks connection with the other women in the village who are mystified by her fascination with the myth. Her affinity with the legendary woman furnishes a more fruitful, unexpected kinship with a woman from a different culture altogether. Felice is a

friend of the nurse who sees Cleófilas's bruises, inflicted by her husband; she fulfils the role of fairy prince when she rescues Cleófilas, exercising a kind of autonomy that is completely alien to a woman defined primarily by her status as daughter and wife. When Felice arrives Cleófilas regards her mainly as a curiosity; she anticipates how she will make her brothers laugh when she tells them about this husbandless Texan woman who drives a pickup. However Felice is the only person in the story who shares Cleófilas's fascination with Woman Hollering. By commenting on the legend she encourages Cleófilas's interest in alternative narratives and reawakens her interpretive faculties.

Felice offers a different reading of the holler when she explains how, for her, it calls forth irrepressible feelings of joy: "Can you imagine, when we crossed the *arroyo* she just started yelling like a crazy … Who would've thought? Who would've? Pain or rage, perhaps, but not a hoot like the one Felice had just let go. Makes you want to holler like Tarzan, Felice had said" (56). It is the sound of Felice's hoot that unleashes the "gurgling" from Cleófilas's throat, "a long ribbon of laughter" (56). This collaborative laughter cuts across the cultural boundaries and creates a space for Cleófilas beyond the hackneyed narratives available to her: the "grisly" stories of battered wives that fill "the pages of the dailies" or the romance in which the heroine is "capable of 'defying the hero,' softening him, and showing him the value of loving and caring for another" (Woman Hollering 52, Radway 581).

Almost all the heroines in this cycle emerge from their truncated romance narratives with a revitalized sense of self. In her essay on closure in Woman Hollering Creek, Rose Marie Cutting argues that the ending of "*Bien* Pretty," the final story, brings completion to the entire collection as it "helps solve" the collection's primary conflict between the "desire for romance and sex" and the

"desire for autonomy" (Cutting 69). This reading exemplifies Gerald Lynch's theory that the final story in a cycle "bring[s] to fulfillment the patterns of recurrence in a cycle" (Lynch 40). In "*Bien* Pretty" Lupe is further along the road to autonomy than many of the other heroines. We learn however that she shares a past with her predecessors; when she has fallen in love she has gladly relinquished her identity to her lover. However, her status as an artist enables her to query actively the paradigms of romance ideology. As Cutting notes, Lupe takes the stance traditionally assigned to men as she projects her gaze upon the bodies of her male subjects. Her paintings recast and subvert myths, reversing the roles of legendary figures such as Princess Ixta and Prince Popo; thus they provide a commentary on moments in the other stories in which the women eventually see beyond the myths that tie them to their lovers.

"*Bien* Pretty" certainly offers the most prolonged statement on female identity and affirms the text's cyclic properties. However, other narratives demonstrate effectively the tension between ideological paradigms and self-definition. One of the stories in the final section enacts the possibility of plurality both in its form and subject matter. "Little Miracles, Kept Promises" juxtaposes fragments of prayers, offerings and letters from a variety of sources. Some are cries for help with financial problems, others are prayers for a cure, and several express with new voices the dilemmas and frustrations of the cycle's composite personality. These fragments represent the different stages that the heroines pass through in the individual stories. Barbara Ybanez from San Antonio appears already to have reconciled her need for romance with her new autonomy; she prays for a "man man" who is not "ashamed to be seen cooking or cleaning or looking after himself," explaining that, "I've put up with too much too long, and now I'm just too intelligent,

too powerful, too beautiful, too sure of who I am finally to deserve anything less" (117, 118). Teresa Galindo retracts her original supplication for "a guy who would love only me" having found that, once inside the romance narrative, she misses her independence: "So what is it I am asking for? Please, Virgencita. Lift this heavy cross from my shoulders and leave me like I was before, wind on my neck, my arms swinging free, and no one telling me how I ought to be" (122). The final letter is one of thanks; the Virgencita has granted Chayo her wish and relieved her of the burden of a suspected pregnancy by revealing that she has a "thyroid problem in my throat" (127).

In her letter to the Virgencita, Chayo expresses her determination to resist the models of womanhood embodied by her mother and grandmother. Having escaped their fate, she asserts her desire to remain childless. The letter not only records Chayo's self-acceptance but also her recognition of the multifaceted identity of the Virgencita de Guadalupe. She admits that has been unable to pray to the Virgencita in the past because of associations with her mother; for years she was the symbol of "self-sacrifice" and "silent suffering" (127). Karla Sanders explores these associations in her study of Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine. She notes that Marie Lazarre Kashpaw lacks any sense of self and so identifies with the Virgin Mary, a strong, female, religious figure: an identification that results in the need to "embrace Sister Leopolda as a maternal figure" (Sanders 134). Sanders observes that this association of the Virgin Mary with maternity subjugates Marie and offers her only one kind of grounding. Marie's eventual rejection of the Virgin Mother is a rejection of "the symbolic, the abstract ideal of womanhood, not the real person ... not a human bond" (136).[43] For Cisneros's Chayo, communion with the Virgin Mother is viable only when she perceives the multiplicity of this iconic figure: "When I could

see you in all your facets, all at once the Buddha, the Tao, the true Messiah, Yahweh, Allah, the Heart of the Sky ... the Lord of the Near and Far, the Spirit, the Light, the Universe, I could love you, and, finally, learn to love me" (128).

Whilst Cisneros uses the final story of Woman Hollering to comment upon recurring discourses and themes, she also places such paradigms throughout the cycle, encouraging the reader to look forwards as well as back. Chayo and Cleófilas both write themselves out of limiting, preordained structures, by rejecting their immediate communities and forging unexpected connections that open up a plurality of identities, discourses and narratives.

* * *

Critics and readers of Cisneros have posed fewer questions about Caramelo's generic status than her other texts, classifying it unreservedly as a novel; it is three times the length of Mango Street but its formal characteristics are fundamentally the same. The text is composed of eighty-six vignettes, all of which tell the stories of Lala Reyes, her family and her ancestors. Cisneros divides the text into three parts, each devoted to the story of family members from a particular era. The first part narrates the events of Lala's childhood and the second regresses to the time of the Mexican Revolution and picks up the narrative of Soledad Reyes, 'the Awful Grandmother'. Lala prefaces each part with an explanation of her next move, setting the scene and preparing the reader for a temporal shift or change in narrative gear. Owing to these explanatory frames, the text makes fewer unexpected narrative leaps than Mango Street. Lala's detours into the past emerge from a need to explain the present-day behaviour of particular family members: thus the quest for cause informs the structure of the text. However cyclic properties cut across the text's sequential impetus. Lala's search for cause does not always drive the narrative in a linear

direction. In one of her footnotes to her grandmother's story she explains, "*Because a life contains a multitude of stories and not a single strand explains precisely the who of who one is, we have to examine the complicated loops that allowed Regina to become la Senora Reyes*" (115).

The individual vignettes are, for the most part, self-contained. The first section is filtered through Lala's impressionistic childhood eye and most resembles the cycle form; multiple characters make fleeting appearances, weaving in and out of the main narrative line at random. Cisneros introduces the first part of the text with a note on its fractured form, explaining how she has melded threads of remembered narratives with pure fiction: "The truth, these stories are nothing but story, bits of string, odds and ends found here and there, embroidered together to make something new. I have invented what I do not know and exaggerated what I do to continue the family tradition of telling healthy lies" (n. pag.). Perhaps the most fitting formal taxonomy for Caramelo is Dunn and Morris's term, 'composite novel'. Dunn and Morris suggest the term as a replacement for Ingram's but, as I argued in my introduction, these taxonomies serve different purposes. In The House on Mango Street narrative boundaries are firmer. Unlike some of the vignettes in Caramelo, the integrity of the individual stories and sketches is always apparent. Dunn and Morris justify their use of a more totalising formal model by noting that whilst "a novel is usually structured by plot, a linear narration involving causation, it can be structured alternatively, or by association – that is, by juxtaposing events, images, themes, and/or characters in some sort of coherent pattern" (5). Cisneros employs both associative and causal structures in Caramelo. The caramel rebozo shawl that is passed down to Lala from her grandmother is the text's central associative image; like the beadwork in The Antelope Wife it serves both as a symbol of female

community and a paradigm for the aesthetic design of the narrative itself: "it was as if all the mothers and daughters were at work, all one thread interlocking and double-looping, each woman learning from the woman before, but adding a flourish that became her signature, then passing it on" (93). Lala, like Erdrich's Cally Roy, learns to read the shawl's symbolic meaning and, having yearned for independence, finds her own place in this composite design: "Each and every person connected to me, and me connected to them, like the strands of a *rebozo*. Pull one string and the whole thing comes undone" (389).

Cisneros's 'novel' features other conventions identified by Dunn and Morris. They observe that some composite novels "contain frame-pieces or interleaving that, while they might be titled, are not really able to stand on their own" such as "Prologues and epilogues, forwards" and "framing vignettes" (9). The prefaces in Caramelo are a perfect example of such 'frame-pieces'. Dunn and Morris note also the prevalence of metafictional discourses in the composite novel form: "the process of fiction making" has become a "principle of organization" for many composite novel writers in order to establish "interconnections" (16). Such composites may feature a narrator who communicates the difficulties of storytelling to the reader. In Caramelo storytelling becomes the central theme as Lala repeatedly stresses the elusiveness of absolute truths: "After all and everything only the story is remembered, and the truth fades away like the pale blue ink on a cheap embroidery pattern" (n. pag.).

In the second part of the 'novel' Lala constantly arrests her rendition of her grandmother's story to debate the direction of the narrative with its protagonist. Like Erdrich's storytellers, Lala and her grandmother soon discover the tendency of narrative to proliferate beyond the teller's control. Soledad finds it particularly

difficult to stay within the boundaries of the narrative as deviant threads present themselves; she must settle for telling Lala, "that story is another story, inside another story, inside a story" (122). Lala herself chooses to interrupt her own narrative with her grandmother's story, placing it inside her own. She learns that every story is part of greater whole and lines between tale and teller are fluid. When Lala returns to her own present-day narrative the reader learns that 'the Awful Grandmother' has transgressed the most insurmountable boundary of all: her death pre-dates the storytelling session with Lala. When she reported her history, constantly contesting her granddaughter's rendition, she did so as a ghost. These spectral narrative interruptions attest the strong bonds of this woman-centred storytelling community.

Cisneros queries through her narrator the line between story and experience, imagination and reality. In the opening stories Lala alerts the reader to the capricious mechanism of memory, pondering the origins of the familiar stories that evoke and characterize her childhood. Driving along a mountain road, she recalls, "Once a truck fell off and rolled down the canyon in slow motion. Did I dream it or did someone tell me the story? I can't remember where the truth ends and the talk begins" (20). Echoes of Erdrich are clear. Lala articulates the same questions and doubts that crowd the endings of The Antelope Wife and The Last Report on the Miracles at Little No Horse. Running counter to this narratorial anxiety are the footnotes to the vignettes that, like Paley's footnotes, lend a sense of documentary realism to the text; they provide historical facts about the places the family visit and the cultural influences of the time.

Cisneros's fictional world resembles that of Louise Erdrich in its presentation of storytelling as a potentially unifying but precarious act. Whilst the threads of old

narratives enable Lala to ground her identity within the alluring boundaries of community and history, the elusiveness of 'the truth' and the pliability of story belie the possibility of a stable centre and origin. In her prose works Cisneros uses cyclic structures to represent heroines who mediate between community-authored narratives and individual impulses and visions. Cisneros infuses her composite novel with a postmodern suspicion of narrative and its sequential structures, thereby undercutting the strong storytelling tradition that binds together communities like the Reyes family. However, unlike Sherman Alexie's alienated, displaced male storytellers, Lala accepts this uncertainty and will perpetuate the storytelling tradition, adding her own design. All three of Cisneros's prose works represent the co-existence of the communal and the personal. Cisneros's use of the story cycle form places her in the community of female American writers who resist the imposition of genre in order to subvert hegemonic ideologies. By constantly reshaping her form with shifting levels of unity and dispersal, she continues to open up narrative lines for "the ones who cannot out" (House on Mango Street 110).

Susan Minot: Monkeys

"after a while, one saw that only bits got recognized, never the whole person, some bits by this person, other bits by that, but one was never completely connected up with another person, one was never altogether recognized, except, she supposed, by oneself" (Minot Folly 272).

Like Eudora Welty, Susan Minot resists strict categorisations of her forms but is emphatic in her rejection of the term 'novel'. When she initially sent three of the nine stories that comprise her debut work, Monkeys, to E.P. Dutton, the editor offered her a contract for a novel. She refused to work to such a restrictive formal model and the word 'novel' was replaced by the less specific 'work of fiction' (O'Malley 14). Since its publication in 1986, reviewers have continued to classify Monkeys as a novel, although they often qualify this categorisation by recognizing the independence of each 'chapter'. In The New Republic Anne Tyler refers to the text as a novel, but notes that each of the nine stories "could stand alone" (34). Indeed the Sunday Times review that appears on the front cover of the 1999 Vintage edition praises Monkeys as, "An astonishing first novel, wise, tragic, elegant and funny" (Review 1986).

Where the professional reviewer sees the text through the lens of established formal paradigms, it is the student reader who celebrates its departure from more familiar structures. Documenting her response to Monkeys in an Internet review, Lauren Murphy, a student of Mater Christi in Dublin, describes her delight in the text's accessibility and duality. One of the "things" she "liked most" about Monkeys was that "each chapter is one part, one episode, one event in the Vincent family life."

In particular Murphy enjoyed the freedom that the form offers her from the ramifications of plot: "A reader can open the book at practically any chapter, begin reading, and by the first few paragraphs, have the basic outline of what was happening" (Murphy "Monkeys"). The self-containment of each "chapter" does not prohibit the growing intimacy one feels with the characters in a novel. Murphy observes that although each chapter tells only "one mini-story at a time," the reader "begins to feel an affinity with these characters … as the story goes on, you can see how each of the children develops into their own character" (Murphy "Monkeys").

Minot's resistance to formal definition emerges repeatedly when she speaks about any of her fictional works. Like Welty she insists that she is, first and foremost, a short story writer who conceives narratives in snapshots. She tells Anne O'Malley: "I try to get at what it's like to be alive and can only do it in these little small flashes" (11). In Minot's fictional world her characters often articulate this way of seeing. At the end of Folly (1999), one of Minot's most unified works, Lilian Eliot reflects that the most significant experiences of her life compress themselves into moments: "slivers into which I pack my greatest feeling" (231). Even when Minot refers to her texts as novels, she emphasizes their potential for fragmentation. In an interview with Dave Weich she describes Folly as "a series of vignettes all put together to tell a larger story" (Minot "Back"). Evening (1998), another 'novel', is "made up of a lot of very little short stories." Rapture (2002), generally referred to as a novella, began as "a very, very short story" of "Four pages" (Minot "Back").

Short story cycle critics have queried the easy categorisation of Monkeys as a novel by stressing the independence of each story. Maggie Dunn and Ann Morris include Monkeys in their annotated list of 'composite novels' and James Nagel devotes a chapter to the text, going so far as to cite Monkeys as a "classic example of

the contemporary short-story cycle" (80). On reading Monkeys one senses immediately that each story was written as a separate entity. In several of the stories, the narrative voice reintroduces the Vincent family, briefly detailing a history with which the reader of previous stories is familiar. Such repetition has become a target of criticism for reviewers; in The Times Literary Supplement Katherine Bucknell complained: "It is mildly annoying to be told more than once, in so slim a volume written in so spare a style, that there are seven children in the Vincent family ..." (78). Superficially, this re-grounding signals Minot's desire to preserve the integrity of each individual story whilst placing it within a larger formal frame. However reiteration serves other purposes for Minot. The seemingly unnecessary repetition of the hierarchy of Vincent children, the 'monkeys', establishes familial position as the primary constituent of identity for the characters. Moreover it creates the surface impression of regimented order and ritual, inscribing the reader in the atmosphere that surrounds the Vincent children. The family's movements are dictated by a regime of scheduled visits and traditional outings such as the annual Thanksgiving trip to Motley and the summer break in Maine.

Through his analysis of the individual stories Nagel presents a convincing argument for the text's cyclic status. He examines how the meaning and focalisation of particular stories shift when one reads the narratives as single, self-contained entities rather than as part of an integrated whole. Concerning the story "Allowance" Nagel observes: "In context, the crux of the matter is the disintegrating relationship between Mum and Dad; in isolation, the central focus is on Gus" (90). One can apply this argument to several of the stories in Monkeys. When one reads "Accident" as a short story, one focuses almost exclusively on Sherman's car accident, his alcoholism, and the despair caused by the death of his mother. When

one reads the story within the wider frame of Monkeys the unexpected reference to Mum's death assumes primary significance, overshadowing the story's more immediate action. This contingency of meaning upon form is undoubtedly one of the short story cycle's defining characteristics, setting it apart from a collection of short stories that offers, at the most, thematic linkage.

On closer reading Nagel's categorisation of Monkeys as a "classic" short story cycle seems a step too far. Despite her determination to reproduce the original content of the stories, Minot reorganized the order of the stories to create a more unified, organic form. In Monkeys the narratives follow a linear structure, although they were published in a different order altogether. One suspects that the evolution of her form was perhaps more deliberate than that of Welty's The Golden Apples. Her methodology suggests that Monkeys is an "arranged cycle" rather than a "completed" one; as such, the threads of connection are more immediately apparent.

In Monkeys Minot works within stricter boundaries than many other cycle writers by representing a single family of recurring characters. Together the Vincents form a particular kind of collective personality. Dunn and Morris use the term "collective protagonist" to describe groups of characters such as Hemingway's home-resistant males, who inhabit story cycles and, whilst they may never meet, exhibit similar traits (Dunn 63). A different kind of "collective protagonist" forms when characters are already part of a group; no particular character emerges as the protagonist and narrating and focalising privileges are shared. They note that "extended family" serves as protagonist in Go Down, Moses and that Love Medicine presents the tribe as a collective protagonist (66). Whilst it is inevitable that certain characters will emulate each other, the sense of collectivity stems from their status as part of a group. It is this kind of collective protagonist that Minot presents in Monkeys. However the

tension between collective and individual sensibilities grows ever more apparent as the traits of the individual monkeys gradually reveal themselves. Minot sets up Sophie, the second oldest Vincent, as the potential 'protagonist', handing her narrative control of the opening story. Nevertheless, the reader never forgets that these characters are part of a family.

In keeping with the relatively high degree of unity in Minot's text, spatial boundaries are firmer in her cycle than in Welty's. Although Welty locates five of her seven stories in Morgana, one senses that Ran MacLain's consciousness is far removed from that of Katie Rainey or Cassie Morrison. Eugene MacLain forges his most profound connection with the taciturn Spaniard and Virgie experiences a deep affinity with outsider Miss Eckhart. The Vincent family moves around the text as a collective, creating a pervasive sense of enclosure and containment. Secrets and lies are the only means of differentiating the self. Sophie realizes that the family is a "bunch of snoops" and that "if you wanted to save anything you had better hide it," so she makes "cubbyholes in her desk, good for barricading" (Monkeys 86). The scheduled changes in location only enforce the sense of containment. This spatial and temporal unity distinguishes Minot's text from Welty's which, I would argue, serves as a more useful paradigm of the *cycle* form.

In no other cycle in this thesis are the bonds between the constituent protagonists more pronounced. Minot, like Welty, prefaces her cycle with a list of central characters. This register of the Vincents has a slightly different effect to the list of Morgana's "Main Families." Both lists mark the borders of the cycle's central community – Miss Eckhart and the black families do not figure in the list of Morganan families – and provide a means for the reader to keep track of some of the relationships in the stories. There appears to be little need for a cast list of the

Vincents. As previously noted, Minot reminds us repeatedly of the Vincent hierarchy. However the register, like Welty's list of Morganans, gains in significance as the stories progress. Minot entitles her list "The Family" and includes the middle names of the children, most of which replicate old family names, stressing the continuing agency of genealogical heritage. The irony of this precision becomes more pronounced as we encounter multiple narratives of infidelity, alcoholism and the longing to escape. There is more than a suggestion that the seventh monkey, Miranda, is not in fact a Vincent.

In my chapter on Welty I used Armine Kotin Mortimer's terminology to note the presence of "second stories" in The Golden Apples: the cycle abounds with fragments of narratives that solicit the reader's speculation. We do not know why or even if Miss Eckhart hits her mother, whether she was raped, or whether many of the younger characters are the biological children of King MacLain. Similarly, Monkeys is replete with second stories. Silences, interruptions and ellipses inhabit and punctuate each story, unsettling the surface impression of unity and transporting the reader back and forth. In her essay, Mortimer writes that the second story "may remain quite hidden or erupt full-blown into the first story" (276). Where Welty's embedded narratives typify the "hidden" second story, Minot offers the reader hints that, from the opening narrative, threaten constantly to "erupt." Indeed the title of the opening story, "Hiding," serves in retrospect as a clue to the presence of covert narratives and closely guarded secrets. Minot's form is more concentrated than Welty's and she presents a smaller cast of characters. Most of the second stories stem from the same source: Mum's infidelity and Dad's drinking. Hints are scattered throughout the text for the careful reader, setting up future events and opening up stories of deviance that have been camouflaged or suspended.

Mrs Vincent's ghost story of the spurned woman who commits suicide is a rather obvious kind of second story, in that it is overtly presented as a narrative in itself; it gains retrospective significance when Mrs Vincent dies in what appears to be an accident after her lover rejects her. Thus a strategically placed second story signifies upon the central mystery and defining event of the cycle: Mrs Vincent's 'accident'. Neither the monkeys nor the reader learns the truth about Mum's death. However the text seems to sustain the reader's speculative connection between these narratives when the third-person narrator reports in passing that Sherman, one of the Vincent boys has "certain theories about the accident, and about the family" which he hides from his sisters (113). As the cycle progresses, Mrs Vincent's infidelity sets off a chain of second stories. One of the most pointed clues to a second story involves the parentage of Minnie, the seventh monkey. Mrs Vincent gives birth to Minnie shortly after her affair with Mr Kittredge. As she nurses the baby, she draws attention to the resemblance between Minnie's hands and those of Mr Vincent, as though attempting to extinguish immediately any second story: "She uncurled the fiddlehead fists and showed them to everyone lolling around. 'You see?' she said. 'Her father's hands exactly'" (73).

Minot herself states that Monkeys "is made up of nine short stories that tell an overall story" (Minot "Back"). Some of the individual narratives in The Golden Apples shape themselves around pivotal events: Easter's resuscitation, Eugene's liberating elevation through the air. However it would be difficult to reduce the cycle to one "overall story." Mrs Vincent's death is the pivotal point of the 'overall story' in Monkeys; the loss of Mum reverberates throughout the sequence, impinging poignantly on the opening stories that emphasize her centrality to the

children's lives. Anne Tyler refers to this event as "The thread that draws the stories into a novel" (36).

Like the death of June Morrissey in Louise Erdrich's macrocosm, Mum's absence becomes a point of return for the remaining characters, unifying them in their quest for recovery and order. She is an absent presence, haunting the children. Whilst watching the cats "mov[ing] about the house soundlessly" Sherman remarks, "'It's like they're Mum'" (134). Whereas June's death opens up new narratives for the characters – Lipsha discovers his heritage and Jack finally engages with his buried, relational self – Mum's death almost closes the narrative down. Minot's representation of death is more akin to Virginia Woolf's in To the Lighthouse than Louise Erdrich's. Having established Mrs Ramsay's centrality in the first part of the novel, Woolf devotes only a single parenthetical sentence to her death and explores its repercussions in the remaining text. Similarly the death of Mrs Vincent credits only an incidental reference: "The girls never stop talking, worrying about their boyfriends, worrying about Dad, always having fits – especially since their mother died" (109). Like the children, the reader can only gradually assemble clues to the cause of this crucial event, but must immediately confront its effects.

Fluctuations in the narrative voice register the monkeys' shifting identity boundaries as each child tries to differentiate herself from the collective. In many story cycles the narrative voice weaves in and out of a range of focalising minds, alternating between third and first-person narrative stances. However the writer's prose style usually imprints itself on those descriptive passages punctuating the expeditions into a character's mind. In The Golden Apples Welty's dense, lyrical style characterizes her third-person narration of five of the seven stories. In her cycles Louise Erdrich enters the consciousness of a multitude of characters but her

exuberant, poetic prose distinguishes her third-person narration. In Monkeys, the narrative discourse often adopts the inflections of the characters' discourses; Minot's lucid, zero degree style signals her strong identification with the children and again intensifies the sense of enclosure within this world. As Anne Tyler notes: "Susan Minot reproduces the clarity and deadly accuracy of a child's speech" in her own narration. Tyler observes how even the more sophisticated expressions reflect how "children can sometimes toss off an amazingly graceful phrase" (36). In "Accident," the pivotal story that breaks the news of Mrs Vincent's death, the narrative voice uses the present tense for the first time, reflecting the panic that takes over the house after the sudden loss of its central figure. This synthesis between the narrative discourse and the language of the primary characters provides a further dimension of unity.

Although Minot penetrates sporadically the minds of the five oldest children, only Sophie, the most insightful of the girls, narrates a story in the first person; her voice opens the cycle in "Hiding." Sophie's consciousness is also the primary focal point in "Party Blues," the story in which she confronts her alienation from the other Vincent girls: "Things were a certain way and Caitlin and Delilah were that way along with them. If she had been dropped down in the jungle Sophie would have felt more at home" (77).[44] This sensibility establishes Sophie as the potential female wanderer of the cycle. Like Annie Quirt, Virgie Rainey and Alice Munro's Del Jordan, she senses her otherness and, to a certain degree, resists Home and Family. As noted previously, the individual narratives within a story cycle assert their independence by illuminating the possibility of change in repetition. Sophie evidently believes in such a possibility. In "Party Blues" she moves around the house performing a familiar ritual, actively seeking signs of change. Although she

doesn't expect anything to have altered, she senses that "there was always a feeling of possibility. Things might be different. You might find something you'd forgotten about" (86).

In this story Sophie is aware only of a sense of "dissatisfaction" but cannot place its source (81). Like Annie and Virgie she shows signs that she wishes to assert herself as a unitary subject. Just as the young Annie tries to quell these tendencies by losing herself in love affairs, Sophie seeks refuge from her deviance in her relationship with Duer: "she kissed and kissed, trying to kiss it away, to kiss herself into some calmness, or peace of mind" (81). As often occurs in Minot's cycle, fictional meta-narratives enact the latent desires or fears of the characters. At the end of "Party Blues" Sophie lies in the arms of Duer, wondering why "something was still wrong" (89). She suddenly recalls a story that her mother used to tell her that mirrors her unease. The story concerns some schoolchildren who go to Paris on a trip with their teacher: "In the middle of the night, Miss Clavell wakes up. 'Something is not right!' she says. That was the feeling. Miss Clavell checks the long row of beds with a flashlight and when she gets to the last bed, finds it empty. One of the little girls is gone" (89). Whilst Sophie relates to Miss Clavell's fear, she also connects with the child who ran away from the group.

By privileging the perspective of the family's potential 'outsider', Minot opens up a possible path beyond the official family-centred narrative. Like many of the potential escape routes in this cycle, this avenue is, at least temporarily, closed down. Unlike the other cyclic heroines, Sophie is the character who remains at home after her mother's death. She resembles Cassie Morrison more than Virgie Rainey by the end of the cycle. It is she whom the other girls blame for forgetting to buy shaving cream for her father's Christmas stocking.

As the stories progress, the narrative discourse distances itself from the monkeys' minds, settling into the role of the omniscient narrator. This narrating persona offers glimpses of the Vincents in the future, indicating knowledge stretching beyond the boundaries of the cycle. In "Wedlock," Caitlin, Sophie and Delilah playfully discuss plans for their weddings; the narrative voice undercuts their hilarity by stating that, "None of them would be getting married for a long time" (139). This hiatus between the narrative discourse and the children foreshadows the process of fragmentation as the monkeys cease to exist and function as a collective protagonist.

* * *

Whether they are collections, cycles or composite novels, all five of Minot's fictional works centre on gender politics and insist upon the differences between men and women. In the fragmented title story of Lust (1989), a short story collection, Minot isolates a single sentence from the narrative's short, terse paragraphs: as the young narrator contemplates her unsatisfactory affairs with boys, she suddenly halts her account and writes: "It was different for a girl" (7). This sentiment echoes throughout the collection of stories; the line itself resurfaces several narratives later in "The Man Who Would Not Go Away": "The woman cried, 'But it's different for a woman!' All hope seemed gone from her voice" (145). In "Rapture" the division between masculine and feminine sensibilities informs the structure of the text as it shifts continually from one perspective to the other, juxtaposing masculine and feminine readings of the same events.

Monkeys remains Minot's most powerful representation of gender difference. It is with great economy that she portrays the tensions within the Vincents' marriage. The circumscribed focalisation and fragmented form enable Minot to hint at

divisions without openly dissecting them. All the marriages and sexual relationships in Monkeys are unhappy. A single exchange at Thanksgiving between Uncle Charles and Aunt Ginny reveals the tensions within that particular family dynamic; when Uncle Charles tells Aunt Ginny to "'shut up,'" the conflict registers itself in their son's face: "all his features flattened out, stiff, into a mask" (38).

Minot's fiction is riddled with the kind of bounded males that inhabit Joyce Carol Oates's cycles: men who posit themselves as "the Self Against All Others." Mr Vincent rarely participates in family activities; the repetition of "he just stands" in the opening pages of "Hiding" anticipates his position for most of the cycle (2, 3). Mr Vincent's stance recalls images of Virginia Woolf's Mr Ramsay: "It was his fate, his peculiarity ... to stand, like a desolate seabird, alone" (Woolf 61). Minot illuminates the differences between Mum and Dad beautifully when Mum returns excitedly from a visit to the outhouse claiming that she has seen a silver fox. Dad's blunt dismissal of Mum's story –"'No such thing'" – reflects the kind of approach that Schweickart and Flynn associate with male readers (Monkeys 62). He is interested only in "getting the facts of the story straight" (Schweickart xxv). This controlling sensibility finds expression in assertions of physicality. Dad delivers his blunt dismissal whilst "thumping at a flimsy mattress" (62). In contrast, Mum, the text's primary creative force and storyteller, narrates her story, true or not, "as if it were an atmosphere or an experience" (Schweickart xvi): "'It streaked across my path ... As silver as the Silver Orient'" (62, 63). Similarly, when Sophie speculates in hushed tones that the crockery she finds on the beach might be "from the Indians," Dad immediately quashes her romantic notion and replies that it is "probably debris" (13). Dad's dismissal of Mum and Sophie's creative narrative impulses echoes Mr Ramsay's predilection for "facts uncompromising" (Woolf 8). Dad's declaration

that there is "No such thing" as a silver fox serves the same purpose as Mr Ramsay's final judgement that "'it won't be fine'" the following day; both men close down the rhetoric of possibility and romance that sustains their wives and children (Woolf 8).

The other men in Monkeys share this separatist, unyielding vision. Pa, the children's senile paternal grandfather, intimidates his family with vicious imperatives and abrupt negations of stories that have escaped his memory. Photographs of a young Pa reveal that before his illness he kept a tight rein on his emotions. "You never saw Pa smile ... except in one picture the Vincents had at home, of Pa with the senator ... In the picture, his grin is closed, like a clown's" (32). Mum's lover, Mr Kittredge, is a wandering male like King MacLain who has multiple extra-marital affairs and travels the world, sending Mum postcards and "strange items from strange lands" (64). However the narrator's blunt revelation that "He made bombs" undermines this exoticism (63).

Whereas Dad discredits Mum's fanciful narratives with his obsessive need for facts, her stories achieve great significance within the dynamics of the text itself. Her ghost story of the spurned lover becomes a meta-narrative for her own rejection by Mr Kittredge and leaves a hint for the reader of her possible suicide. Like many female characters in short story cycles, Mrs Vincent appears to function as the stable centre for the other characters; she is the model of the relational self, holding the group together. However the unspoken theories surrounding her death and the affair with Mr Kittredge raise questions about her contentment in this role. In "Hiding" Minot presents Mrs Vincent's acts of mothering as a series of performances: the children "make her do a spin" on the ice and she performs a tap dance for them, "staring straight at Dad" who ignores her (9, 11). Key moments expose her endless maternal enthusiasm as a sham. Surreptitious glimpses of Mrs Vincent in isolation

reveal her deep unhappiness: Sophie spies her "lying on her side, facing the wall … her shoulders … shaking up and down" (86). Moreover the Vincent girls learn to read their mother's face and distinguish between forced and authentic excitement. They discover that their mother is having an affair because her eyes are "lit with a brightness" that only appears when she witnesses something magical (62): when she sees the silver fox, when she listens to her sister Grace's "New York stories," living vicariously and "giggling now and then in an odd, excited way " (62).

Mr Vincent is less proficient at the performance of parenthood. However he carries out several rituals to verify his status as father. The children know that when he comes downstairs bearing his golf putter, they will be called upon to act as spectators: "Around the breakfast table there was a gentle craning of necks as the invisible ball rolled over the straw carpet. When Dad unfroze, it meant the ball had stopped, so they could stop paying attention" (47). The mask slips more readily from Mr Vincent than his wife, as he is often under the influence of alcohol. Disembodied from his surroundings, he reverts to his pre-paternal self: "Dad glanced around the table. Perplexed, he saw six children, six hopeful faces looking back at him. Down at the other end was a woman in a pink dress. What did they want?" (49). In the opening story his wife and children gleefully hide from him when he leaves the house. When he returns, he enquires if anyone is home but refuses the role of seeker in the family ritual. He settles easily in front of the television to watch the game.

Like Joyce Carol Oates, Minot recognizes how hegemonic gender paradigms alienate men and women, masking underlying commonalities. Both Mr and Mrs Vincent construct fraudulent selves in order to sustain the fixed structures of Family and both find the means to elude these constraints, albeit temporarily. By

circumventing direct conflict and participating in a collusive silence, Mr and Mrs Vincent fail to articulate this common resistance to familial boundaries. Characters in the cycles of Welty, Paley, and Erdrich share this ambivalence towards the concept of home and collective identity; as a consequence these writers create relatively open forms in which leaps in time and space facilitate the need for escape. Minot uses the form in a similar way to Oates; her cycle represents imprisoning repetitions. Her cycle is a relatively closed narrative space where reprieves are only transient. The chronological organization of the stories and the unwavering focus on one particular family enacts the claustrophobia of a collective life in which narratives of deviance must remain covert. However in the closing images of the cycle there is a sense that destinies are finally opening up. In the final story, "Thorofare," the Vincents scatter Mum's ashes a year and a half after her death when their father has remarried. As they leave the scene the sense of claustrophobia lifts for the first time in the cycle: "Up the ramp they went, in single file, feeling something lofty in their procession … following at one another's heels, no one with the slightest idea, when they raised their heads and looked around, of where to go next" (159). This closing sentence captures the precarious freedom that accompanies the Vincents' farewell to the primary shaping force in their lives; the image of the monkeys proceeding upwards in single file gestures towards a time when they will perhaps reconcile the demands of the positional and the personal and learn to exist alone and together. Where Mrs Vincent differentiated herself primarily through her imagination, Sophie may finally be able to pursue her own second story to the end.

Toni Morrison: Paradise

"Except for a crack here, a chink there everything in Ruby was intact" (Morrison Paradise 112).

"I think one of the interesting things about feminine intelligence is that it can look at the world as though we can do two things or three things at once – the personality is more fluid, more receptive. The boundaries are not quite so defined" (Morrison Moyers 270)

Readers and critics of Toni Morrison refer to her texts as novels almost universally. However, strong affinities with the story cycle form emerge repeatedly from the welter of commentaries on her narrative technique. Critics continue to examine Morrison's negotiation of repetitive structures, her disruption of sequentiality, and the hermeneutic function of her fictional silences. Linda W. Wagner compares Morrison's debut, The Bluest Eye, to William Faulkner's story cycle Go Down, Moses, noting that it shares "many of the difficulties" of Faulkner's text, "in which separate chapters appear to be independent of any main narrative line" ("Toni" 195). In "Memory, Creation, and Writing," Morrison explains the formal methodology behind The Bluest Eye. Her terminology resonates clearly with that of the short story cycle writer:

> As I began developing parts out of pieces, I found that I preferred them unconnected – to be related but not to touch, to circle, not line up – because the story ... was the story of a shattered, fractured perception resulting from a shattered, splintered life. The novel turned out to be a composition of parts circling each other, like the

galaxy accompanying memory. I fret the pieces and fragments of memory because too often we want the whole thing ... Chapter and Part designations, as conventionally used in novels, were never very much help to me in writing. Nor are outlines. I permit their use for the sake of the designer and for ease in talking about the book. They are usually identified at the last minute (388).

In "*The African-American Voice in Faulkner's* Go Down, Moses," John Carlos Rowe compares the form of Beloved to Faulkner's story cycle. Where Faulkner uses the form to juxtapose what Susan Donaldson calls "contending narratives," Morrison deploys it to centralize and privilege suppressed stories. Rowe writes:

> Although in the popular imagination, Toni Morrison will continue to be hailed as a "novelist," she strikes me as a storyteller who understands the need for communal and collective tellings that will transcend the limitations and bourgeois ideology of the novel. Like *Go Down, Moses, Beloved* is not a "novel," but a collection of stories, less separated than those in Faulkner's sequence, to be sure, but nonetheless stories that cannot be read apart from their disparities. The difference between *Beloved* and *Go Down, Moses*, however, is that the stories of *Beloved* belong to Sethe, Paul D, Sixo, Denver, Stamp Paid, the Cherokee, and that runaway servant, Miss Amy Denver of Boston, and other victims who are redeemed in part and in passing by their abilities to tell the stories of their oppression and thereby imagine alternatives to it (Rowe 94-5).

In The Bluest Eye Morrison uses the names of the seasons to divide the text into four main parts but marks the boundaries of sub-narratives only with textual gaps. Of all her fictional works Tar Baby and Song of Solomon, her adaptation of the male quest narrative, bear the closest resemblance to the conventional novel; numbered chapters mark narrative boundaries. In Beloved and Jazz narrative lines become more fluid; Morrison uses only gaps to mark textual divisions. Paradise, the text that followed Jazz to complete what Jill Matus calls a "loose trilogy," marks a shift in formal strategy (Matus Morrison 155); it is the first of Morrison's texts to identify 'chapters' with individual titles rather than a date, number or a mere gap in the text. By framing each section of the text with the name of a female character, Morrison signals its *potential* status as a single, self-contained narrative entity.

All of Morrison's texts are composed of multi-layered, elliptical narratives that test the skills of the most dexterous reader. This is especially true of Paradise, in which Morrison represents a wider range of characters than before; as Matus notes, "the focus on any particular character [is] diffused" (Matus Morrison 156). As well as expanding her cast of characters, Morrison melds cyclic and sequential structures. In his review of Paradise Richard Eder writes: "To read Toni Morrison is to advance upon an Olympic wrestling master, we draw confidently near, only to be hurled onto our backs and set in the opposite direction" (Eder 2). In an interview with James Marcus, Morrison states that she structures her books to reflect the circular workings of consciousness: "Our minds are always moving back and forth, planning, remembering, regretting" (Morrison "This Side"). Her alinear, cyclic structures offer an alternative to the narratives that dominate popular culture: stories whose structures do not represent the temporality of our everyday lives: "People's anticipation now more than ever for linear, chronological stories is intense because

that's the way narrative is revealed in TV and movies. But we experience life as the present moment, the anticipation of the future, and a lot of slices of the past" (Morrison Marcus "This Side"). Further affinities with the structural dynamics of the story cycle arise in an interview with Nellie McKay. In response to McKay's comment that her books tend to haunt the reader, Morrison, like many story cycle writers, acknowledges the influence of the oral tradition of her work: "I am very happy to hear that my books haunt. That is what I work very hard for ... because I think it is a corollary, or a parallel, or an outgrowth of what the oral tradition was ... The point was to tell the same story again and again" (McKay "An Interview" 146).

The nexus of cross-references in Paradise is particularly challenging; Morrison locates tantalizing segments of story within the frame of more contained narratives. Throughout the individual stories of the Convent women's lives, she disperses references to Ruby's ongoing quarrel over the Oven's motto, drawing the reader back into the burgeoning narrative of communal unrest. In "Seneca," the fourth 'chapter', a white family from Arkansas stops in Ruby for directions and sets off again despite warnings of an impending blizzard; the reader does not learn of their destiny until "Lone," the eighth 'chapter', where the midwife reports that the buzzards fed on a "family feast of people lost in a blizzard. Arkansas plates" (272). In "Grace," Dice tells Gigi about the two trees that "grew in each other's arms" near a lake in Ruby, Oklahoma (66). Gigi never finds the landmark but, four stories later, Deacon shows Consolata the tree, resurrecting the image and answering a diverted question in the reader's mind. Several residents of Ruby visit the women in the Convent when their own lives stray from the town's script of communal conformity. Morrison presents these transgressive journeys only in flashes, scattering them

throughout the personal histories of the Convent women. The reader must reassemble these narrative fragments into a cohesive story.

Like Naylor in The Women of Brewster Place, Morrison binds individual female histories within the frame of a single day that, in one way, signals an end for these women. The opening and closing 'chapters' of Paradise describe the present-day action of the massacre at the Convent where a group of ostracized women has built its own community. This narrative frame is more plot-driven than Naylor's lyrical pre- and postludes; through it Morrison establishes a suspended sequential structure that haunts all the individual stories. Linda Wagner notes that whether Morrison "misdirects" or "frames," she always "moves with steady direction towards her finale" (203). Paradise is no exception. It is this movement towards a designated climax that distinguishes Morrison from cycle writers such as Eudora Welty. The reader may suspect that Welty will end The Golden Apples by returning to Virgie's relationship with Miss Eckhart, but she can never be sure. Morrison's opening 'chapter' however demands closure.

In many ways, Paradise bears the closest resemblance to Louise Erdrich's composite novel, Tales of Burning Love, in which the cyclic narrative community of the women works against Jack Mauser's narrative. Like Erdrich, Morrison arrests the unidirectional impetus by incorporating a cyclic structure into the text: an open narrative community, in which individual stories of struggle and renewal impinge upon each other, functioning both alone and together. In placing the women's histories within the frame narrative of masculine violence and destruction, Morrison creates a formal paradigm for the women's ability to take, in Louise Erdrich's words, "power from the in-between." By embedding a cyclic dynamic within a sequential

one, Morrison presents a counter-model to the structures of Ruby, a town obsessed with boundaries.

The formal and thematic similarities between Paradise and Gloria Naylor's debut are striking. Each of the Convent women's narratives bears her name as a title. Like the women of Brewster and Eve's roomers in Bailey's Café, Morrison's women arrive at the Convent seeking refuge from the strictures of a phallocentric, white society. Their isolation is compounded by their proximity to Ruby, an all-black community that, in its attempts to define itself beyond these boundaries, succeeds only in replicating them. Constructed and controlled primarily by the men of the town, Ruby's community fosters an exclusive notion of blackness and shuns the women of the Convent whose racial origins are, in some cases, ambiguous. Indeed Morrison does not always deem it necessary to specify the racial identity of these women who have rejected the hegemony of race and gender ideologies. The text opens with the line, "They shoot the white girl first," but never states directly which of the women is white (Paradise 3).

The men of Ruby act upon the same preoccupations that motivate alpha males like Jack Mauser and King MacLain. Deacon and Steward Morgan, the twin leaders of the town, seek control of the community through self-reduplication; they must regulate Ruby's population by replicating their own racial purity and eliminating any possibility of diversity: a threat that they associate directly with Consolata, the African-Brazilian Convent ringleader, and her protégées.[45] As Patricia Best recognizes, "everything that worries them must come from women": the temptation of adultery and the potential consequence of blurring the racial boundaries (217). For the Morgan twins the women of Ruby must subscribe to an ideal of womanhood that they witnessed as young boys: nineteen beautiful, nameless,

smiling "Negro ladies" laughing and posing for a photograph (109). With their ambiguous origins and gestures of self-ownership, the Convent women embody the men's fear of female sexuality with its potential to disconcert boundaries. They represent a "new and obscene breed of female," threatening the paradigm of the nineteen ladies "scheduled to live forever in pastel shaded dreams" (279). For Zechariah Morgan, the founder of Ruby, women represent the threat of dispersal. Patricia speculates that he named himself after the "Zechariah who had visions ... The one who saw scrolls of curses and women in baskets" and who saw "the result of disobedience" (192):

> The punishment for not showing mercy or compassion was a scattering among all nations, and pleasant land made desolate. All of that would fit nicely for Zechariah Morgan: the curse, the women stuffed into a basket with a lid of lead and hidden away in a house, but especially the scattering. The scattering would have frightened him ... He would have been frightened of not knowing a jawline that signified one family, a cast of eye or a walk that identified another. Of not being able to see yourself re-formed in a third- or fourth-generation grandchild (192).

The collective memory of the Morgan twins forms the foundation of Ruby's official history. As Elizabeth Kella notes, Steward and Deacon obsessively recount the story of Ruby's construction, securing its status as the community's "master narrative" and excluding other ways of seeing (212). The men of the town distrust and ostracize Lone the midwife because her vision circumvents the mechanisms of history and memory: "She knew what neither memory nor history can say or record: the 'trick' of life and its 'reason'" (272). The reading strategies of the town's leaders

serve as a warning to Morrison's reader. Whilst the younger residents view the Oven's motto as an open text, freighted with plural meanings, older citizens attempt to elicit one prescriptive interpretation and foreclose all others. Patricia Best is the town's most active reader; she assigns herself the role of town historian and attempts to transcribe the story of Ruby's past. However, she finds that fragments of covert narratives and threads of gossip impinge on her reconstruction of the master narrative, belying the reality of her neat genealogical networks and sequential plots of communal reconstruction. These discontinuous stories require a different kind of reader: "The town's official story, elaborated from pulpits, in Sunday school classes and ceremonial speeches, had a sturdy public life. Any footnotes, crevices or questions to be put took keen imagination and the persistence of a mind uncomfortable with oral histories" (188). Patricia burns her apocryphal history when she begins to query the line that Ruby draws between official history and gossip, oral and written narrative, and reading and writing. Such moments of renewed vision are paradigmatic of the story cycle, a site for the dissolution of binaries. Patricia's realisation also resonates with Morrison's politics: Morrison tells James Marcus that she "tend[s] to distrust either/or solutions" (Morrison "This Side").[46]

Like Welty, Morrison illuminates the limits of the community's master narrative through a form that privileges cyclic, 'spatial' time rather than teleology. In Welty's The Golden Apples Virgie enters the water and frees herself of the shackles of memory. In Naylor's cycle Mattie relieves Ciel of the burden of history by encouraging her to express her maternal grief. Similarly, the women in Paradise conjure an elevated reality functioning beyond the separatist discourses and selective memory of Ruby. In Naylor's cycle moments of spiritual transcendence are transient

and elusive. Morrison's women engage fully with these powers to create an open community that fosters self-definition and renewal.

Both Naylor and Morrison use the cycle form to destabilize the notion of borders; indeed Naylor claims that the experience of reading Toni Morrison alerted her to the possibility of breaking generic boundaries: she realized that "the barriers were flexible; at the core of it all is language, and if you're skilled enough with that, you can create your own genre" (Naylor "Conversation" 568). In Morrison's Paradise the disenfranchised women give full expression to their conjuring skills to develop new ways of conceiving the self. Like Eve's Place in Bailey's Cafe the Convent becomes a quasi-mystical space where personal and communal epiphanies form a counter-hegemony to the rigid hierarchies of Ruby. Consolata inherits her mentor Mary Magna's gift of "seeing in[to]" another person by stepping into her body (247). This erasure of corporeal boundaries is a physical enactment of the relational discourses that bind these women together. Both Naylor's Eve and Morrison's Consolata conjure visions for their protégées that offer the chance of renewal. Where silence continues to bind several of Eve's women, the four women at the Convent respond uninhibitedly to Consolata's conjuring.

Before the attack on the Convent takes place, Consolata tells the women of a paradisaical, boundless space where "gods and goddesses sat in the pews with the congregation," "sidewalks met the sea" and "fish the color of plums swam alongside children" (263-4, 263). In response to this vision, the women begin the cathartic process of self-signification; they begin to fill in the templates of themselves that Consolata has drawn, fully realizing hidden stratifications of the self. In these final scenes Morrison represents in fictional form the process of self-surveillance that she discussed with Naylor in 1985: "what I started doing ... was to project the self not

into the way we say 'yourself,' but to put a space between those words, as though the self were really a *twin* ... or something that sits right next to you and watches you" (Naylor "Conversation" 585). This questioning, relativizing twin self performs a different function to the self-validating reduplication that gratifies Ruby's twin leaders. When Seneca leads Pallas through the Convent for the first time, the new arrival senses that "she might meet herself here – an unbridled, authentic self, but which she thought of as a 'cool' self – in one of the house's many rooms" (177). Discussing the influence of William Faulkner in 1985, Morrison revealed how she herself learned to practise this method of self-definition by reading herself as a writer: "the effort is to write so that there is something that's going on between myself and myself – myself as writer and myself as reader" (Morrison "Faulkner" 298). Patricia Best emulates this practice of self-observation when she readdresses her replication of Ruby's master narrative and acknowledges the need to reach beyond the "sturdy public life" of the town's official history (188). Similarly, the convent women see beyond familiar stories when they fill in the templates, rereading and rewriting their past lives; they register and contemplate sabotaged aspects of themselves until, "unlike some people in Ruby, [they] were no longer haunted" (266). Through their shared storytelling the women experience the kind of initiation endorsed by Luce Irigaray; they achieve a "subjective status" that is "constituted in relation to self and to like, the two being connected" (192).

* * *

Morrison's negotiation of structural and thematic repetition suggests further identification with the methodology of the story cycle writer. The possibility of change through repetition haunts her narrative as it does Louise Erdrich's macrocosm. Linda J. Krumholz identifies this structural dynamic in her analysis of

Paradise: "the novel ... contains numerous doublings of scenes, characters, and points of view that generate a constant process of repetition with a difference for the reader" (21). Where the rigid ideologies of Ruby reveal the problematics of mechanized recurrence, the stories of the Convent women enact the possibility of growth through repetition. Inspired by Consolata's Edenic vision, the women repeat their stories to each other, this time including the "Half-tales" and the "never-dreamed" parts of their histories, expanding on stories already familiar to Morrison's reader (264). They re-enact each other's experiences until they are "exhausted and enraged"; although they vow never to submit to their "loud dreaming" again, they know that they will relive their stories, poring over the ambiguities and complexities of each other's pasts and vocalizing many of the reader's questions (264): was Seneca deserted by her mother? Who is the father of Pallas's baby?

For these women repetition "opens potentialities that went unnoticed, were aborted, or were repressed in the past" (Ricoeur 76). By commenting on each other's stories the women collectively register the fluidity of narrative and probe the boundaries of memory and history. Morrison exploits her form to illuminate how repetition "puts the seal of temporality on the entire chain of concepts constitutive of historicality – heritage, handing down, taking over, history, co-historicizing, fate, and destiny – and brings historicality back to its origin in temporality" (Ricoeur 76-7). This "chain of concepts" forms the basis of the mechanized master narrative that the men of Ruby vow to hand down to their children.

In his examination of the story cycle Forrest Ingram compares the form's basic dynamic to "the moving parts of a mobile." He explains: "the interconnected parts of some story cycles seem to shift their positions with relation to the other parts, as the cycle moves forward in its typical pattern of recurrent development" (13).

This describes aptly the kind of narrative community that Morrison's convent women have generated, in which the significance of individual stories shifts in accordance with the reiteration of other, linked narratives. This process of narrative reconfiguration mirrors the reader's activity as fragments of sidelined stories unexpectedly resurface with renewed significance in the light of new narratives. In contrast, most of Gloria Naylor's women do not perceive the possibility of change in repetition; for them it functions primarily as a safeguard against change.

Gloria Naylor undercuts the triumphant demolition of Brewster's wall by framing it with the qualifying context of Mattie's dream. Morrison places no such boundary around the Convent women's collective catharsis; their recreation of themselves is an act of collaboration that confirms both their sense of solidarity and individual identities. Unlike Naylor's women, the Convent women register their autonomy through eye contact, finally seeing into each other for the first time. Through Consolata's conjuring the women are able to "look at each other," and Consolata herself finally removes the "dark glasses" that throughout most of the text have shielded her "awful eyes" (262, 265). In the postlude of The Women the absence of the women themselves problematizes the narrative voice's romantic gesturing. In Paradise Morrison furnishes the reader with confirmation of the women's rebirth. In the final section of "Save-Marie" the women return to haunt the people of their past. The reader cannot be sure what form these women now take: did they survive the massacre or do they now inhabit borderland territory, mediating between one world and the next? Such questions become, like the race of the women, irrelevant.

Foreshadowing these appearances by the women are the spectral encounters that take place earlier in the text. As J. Brooks Bouson notes, the appearance of an

unidentified man wearing mirrored sunglasses anticipates Consolata's recovery of hidden facets of the self. Observing the physical similarities between Consolata and the man – they both have green eyes and "tea-colored hair" – Bouson suggests that this masculine presence represents the "core part of Consolata's identity – the deity within or beloved part of the self" (Morrison Paradise 252 Bouson 209). The mirrored glasses and Consolata's sudden sense of disembodiment support this reading: as the man approaches her she feels "light, weightless, as though she could move, if she wanted to, without standing up" (252).

These opportunities for self-surveillance are not exclusive to visionaries such as Consolata. Dovey Morgan, wife of Steward, has a similar experience in her repeated encounters with her "Friend," a stranger to whom she finds herself relating "Things she didn't know were on her mind" (92). Dovey's acceptance of her Friend as "hers alone" suggests that she subconsciously registers this presence as a physical embodiment of submerged aspects of her identity: the self that queries the argument over the Oven's motto and believes that "Specifying it, particularizing it, nailing its meaning down, was futile" (92, 93). She intuits and accepts that "once she asked him his name, he would never come again" (92). It is of course highly significant that both of these reflexive selves take the form of men, undermining Ruby's strict polarization of gender identities. Through their own spectral appearances the Convent women destabilize the boundaries between life and death; they resist definition and containment and, like Erdrich's shapeshifting women, function as an absent presence in a community that, according to Patricia, has conveniently written death out of its history: "'anybody who died did it in Europe or Korea or someplace outside this town'" (199). In the final story Billie Delia remembers the women and

internally voices the question that Ruby's men are trying to dismiss; she ponders not if but "When will they return?" (308).

By editing death out of their master narrative, the men of Ruby declare their separation from the historical climate of mainstream, post-Vietnam America; they perpetuate the original conception of their community as the one rather than simply one among many. Although Soane and Deacon Steward's sons die in Vietnam, the community makes few references to the war and its consequences. Morrison deploys a number of voices and techniques to challenge this willed alienation from America's public history. When asked which of the men in the text she most identified with Morrison replied: "the one that is closest to my own sensibility about moral problems would be the young minister, Richard Maisner [sic]" ("Salon Interview"). Misner insists that Ruby's isolation is untenable; the town cannot sustain its myth of an exclusive, self-perpetuating history: "'We live in the world,'" he tells Patricia, "'The whole world ... Isolation kills generations. It has no future'" (210). For Misner, Ruby's self-imposed boundaries are illusory. He refers to America's history as a barometer for developments in Ruby; he equates the incipient anarchy of men like K.D. with the bewildered anger of the African-American community following the murder of Martin Luther King, Jr.: "It was as though something valuable had been pawned and the claim ticket lost. That was what Destry, Roy, Little Mirth and the rest were looking for" (117). Morrison's narrative voice verifies Misner's corrective vision; it counters Ruby's negation of America's public history by repeatedly specifying the year and month in which the present-day action takes place: July 1976, America's Bicentennial. As Katrine Dalsgard notes, this context compounds the tragic resonance of the massacre at the Convent; it

becomes "a tragic inversion of American ideals" such as harmony, inclusiveness and social responsibility (Dalsgard 9).

Whilst Ruby does not directly register the social effects of Vietnam, the town is nevertheless tainted by the uneasiness pervading post-war America. In 1976 the men of Ruby are wrestling with the same dilemmas as those returning from the war: the destabilization of masculine norms and the grapple to re-establish firm identity categories. Grace Paley's observation that men returning from Vietnam were "adrift" is equally applicable to the men of Ruby who, sensing changes in their community, begin to seek new means of asserting their authority (Hulley "Interview" 45). The Convent women become the target of this masculine frustration; as autonomous subjects who "chose themselves for company" the women seem to justify the masculine fear of redundancy (276). By attacking these women, the men reclaim a masculine identity that they feel has been discredited.

Morrison registers the parallels between America's disillusioned veterans and Ruby's angry young men indirectly. Soane Morgan recalls that, "during the war … anger smallpoxed other places" while "Ruby thrived"; however she also senses the burgeoning frustration and unrest behind the clenched fist painted on The Oven (102). Soane queries the source of such anger in a town where "There were no whites (moral or malevolent) around to agitate or incense them" (102). By subtly soliciting the reader to draw these parallels Morrison debunks Zechariah Morgan's founding ethos of self-isolation. As Morrison tells Elizabeth Farnsworth: "isolation … carries the seeds of its own destruction because as times change, other things seep in, as it did with Ruby. The 50s, that was one thing; the 70s, that was another, and they refused to deal with the changing times" (Morrison

"Conversation"). In contrast, the conjuring Convent women are, to quote Morrison, "examples of the 70s" (Morrison "Conversation"); theirs is a community of flux.

By refusing to specify the racial identities of some of the women, Morrison aimed to "flag raise and then erase it, and to have the reader believe – finally – after you know everything about these women ... that the one piece of information you don't know, which is the race, may not, in fact, matter. And when you do know it, what do you know?" (Morrison "Conversation"). Whilst Paradise raises questions about the relevance of racial difference, the text appears to sustain political readings of gender difference. It is the "blessed malelessness" of the Convent that excites Pallas and draws the women of Ruby to its doors (177).

Kristin Hunt observes that gender difference expresses itself in relationships with the land. In their pursuit of the American dream, the town's leaders view the land only as a commodity. Morrison informs us early on that the land claimed by the nine founding "eight-rock" families belonged originally to the Arapaho tribe. The origins of Ruby are rooted in Native American culture. When Zechariah Morgan sees a mysterious figure kneeling on the ground he decides to settle there. Whilst the men of Ruby lose sight of this culture, female citizens such as Anna Flood learn to read the land and its history: when she hears the "Wind that scoured cold stone" she feels a connection to the past, remembering that it is "The same wind that once lifted streams of Cheyenne/Arapaho hair" (Paradise 186). As Hunt notes, the Convent women's relationship with the land around their home emulates that of the Arapaho tribe; they "do not concentrate on owning their space and therefore do not attempt to establish strict boundaries" (Hunt 125).

Even those women who do not visit the Convent display a common need for a space beyond the discursive boundaries of the town; Dovey Morgan creates her

own paradise with her private garden. Although a collective of men runs the town, the women form their own network through which they express silenced, unsanctioned opinions and desires. The frenzied horticultural activities of Ruby's women testify to the presence of suppressed creative energies demanding expression:

> Exchanging, sharing a cutting here, a root there, a bulb or two became so frenetic a land grab, husbands complained of neglect ... The women kept on with their vegetable gardens in back, but little by little its produce became like the flowers -- driven by desire, not necessity (89-90).

Whilst the men safeguard and recite the town's official history, the women speculate on its gaps, reading the silences between the master narrative's lines. Reflecting on the argument over The Oven's motto, Dovey Morgan realizes that the conflict is "fueled in part ... by what nobody talked about: young people in trouble or acting up behind every door" (83): a theory that she shares only with the community's women.

Morrison refuses to relinquish hope for Ruby and its alpha male leaders. Final glimpses of Deacon Morgan present him breaking through norms of masculinity. After the massacre, Deacon claims responsibility for the deaths but Steward remains resistant to change. When Steward shoots Consolata, Deacon steps beyond the duplicated vision that has consolidated the twins' authority as town leaders: "for the first time in twenty-one years the twins looked each other dead in the eyes" (291). No longer seeing a reflection of himself in his twin, Deacon surveys himself clearly for the first time, mirroring the women's act of seeing into each other.

Until the massacre Deacon has resisted dialogue for the same reasons that Jane Tompkins identifies in West of Everything: to relieve himself of the burden of consciousness that prompts the women and the younger men of Ruby to question the

town's history. Guilt over his rejection of Consolata haunts him after her death but also releases him from the bounds of masculine silence. In her 'death' Consolata fulfils a similar role to June Morrissey in Tales of Burning Love. Deacon realizes that, before engaging in dialogue with Richard Misner, "All of his intimate conversations had been wordless ones with his brother or brandishing ones with male companions" (301). As noted in my reading of Naylor, Morrison has expressed suspicions about the limits of male dialogue. When Deacon confesses his remorse to Richard over disregarding "the needy, the defenseless, the different," he establishes the roots of a new masculine narrative community; he finally authors his own story rather than repeating the old one of exclusion and isolation (302). Thus Morrison illuminates the possibility of releasing the self from the shackles of gender identity: a possibility embodied by Deacon's confessor. In his attempts to reshape the community with a more balanced ethos, Richard Misner practises and promulgates the kind of sensibility typically associated with women. Steward Morgan scorns Misner and his new "notions of manhood" that emphasize relationship and communication: "backtalk, name changes – as if word magic had anything to do with the courage it took to be a man" (95). It is precisely Richard's "word magic" that galvanizes Deacon's rejection of the 'either/or' thinking that continues to govern his brother," the owner of "the only locked door in Ruby" (90).

Although Morrison will always be regarded primarily as a novelist, her texts defy categorisation. The framing 'chapters' that chart the main narrative line of Paradise rely upon each other for meaning and completion but the fluid dynamics of the intervening stories place this text in the cyclic worlds of Welty, Naylor and Erdrich. The final, elusive movements of the women confirm that "scattering" can be a form of empowerment (Morrison Paradise 192).

7

"Terminal Uniqueness":

The Contemporary Short Story Cycle and the Plural Self

Elissa Schappell's Use Me and Melissa Bank's The Girls' Guide to Hunting and Fishing

"He said to me once, when I was young, 'You gotta have an outline. Once you have a plan …' A very fatherly thing to say, I guess, not much of a surprise" (Schappell "Beatrice").

For contemporary American women writers the short story cycle remains a powerful site for the tensions that continue to shape women's lives: forging a unitary, self-determined identity whilst retaining a relational self; subverting the pressure of entrenched gender paradigms; resisting the lure of conventional plot lines and structures.

Melissa Bank, Elisa Schappell and Emily Carter follow in the footsteps of mid-century writers like Katherine Anne Porter, using the form to recast the quest narrative of the traditional *Bildungsroman.* In their debut works these writers have constructed unique incarnations of the form to enact new ways of achieving self-determination and to express the postmodern threat of fragmentation in a world that appears to offer women more identities than ever before.[47] Again, the influence of Alice Munro is worthy of note here. In both of her story cycles Munro recasts the traditional structure of the *Bildungsroman* by using her multi-layered form to

incorporate disparate yet co-existing conceptions of identity. The title of Munro's first story cycle, Lives of Girls and Women, belies the very notion of the unitary self.

Responses to contemporary adaptations of the form testify that the terms 'short story cycle' and 'short story sequence' are yet to gain wide recognition as generic categories. Reviewers of Elisa Schappell's Use Me (2000) and Melissa Bank's The Girls' Guide to Hunting and Fishing (1999) deploy one of two strategies in classifying these texts: they either briefly acknowledge their hybridity, or place them unreservedly in the category of short story collection or novel. In a Guardian interview with Melissa Bank, "A Polished Act," Simon Hattenstone proclaims the unity of The Girls' Guide and rescues it from its blurred generic status, declaring boldly: "A [sic] Girls' Guide is undoubtedly a novel" (Bank "Polished"). As always with hybrid texts, one must question whether reviewers insist on their unity and their status as novels merely for commercial or cultural convenience; readers are perhaps more likely to be drawn to debut texts that are located firmly within familiar generic borders. Writing for The Washington Post Book World Liesl Schillinger places The Girls' Guide in the only other available category familiar to its readers, heralding Bank's debut as "One of the most satisfying, effortless story collections to come around in a long time" (Schillinger "Review"). Other critics, less eager to label new texts, are more accurate in their descriptions; they draw attention to the text's generic duality but do not use the term 'short story cycle.' Mark Koplik, from Writers Online, describes Bank's text in terms that align it with the form: "*The Girls' Guide to Hunting and Fishing* ... is neither a novel, nor a conventional collection of stories, but a sequence of stories involving a single character and arranged chronologically" (Koplik "Review").

Reviewers of Elisa Schappell's Use Me deploy similar terms. The blurb of the Perennial edition emulates the phraseology of Gloria Naylor's subtitle for The Women of Brewster Place: Use Me is "a novel told in ten stories." Stephanie Zacharek describes Use Me as a "collection of discrete but linked stories, which reads like a novel" and comments that the stories "somehow come together as a vital whole, even though they deal with seemingly random angles of Evie's teenage years and their aftermath" (Zacharek "Use"). In the preface to her interview with Schappell Shelly Ridenour describes Use Me as "a novel masquerading as a collection of short stories" (Schappell "Using"). Ridenour's terminology is interesting, given that such suggestions of generic hoodwinking are generally reversed; one is more likely to find descriptions of short story collections posing as novels than the other way around.[48] When reflecting upon her writing process to Ron Hogan, Schappell stresses the integrity of the text's parts. She recalls: "I really wasn't concerned with it seeming like a novel, or interconnected. I wanted the stories to stand alone. I wanted them to be snapshots" (Schappell "Beatrice").

Through her formal vision Schappell opens up the quest narrative for her heroine; by sustaining an episodic structure she continually navigates Evie away from paradigmatic plots and roles. Although Evie forms long-term relationships – she marries, has children and maintains a lifelong friendship with Mary Beth – she forges connections that are charged with ambivalence and that transport her beyond her roles as wife and mother. Stirrings of sexual attraction shift the parameters of friendships with Mary Beth and Sister Corrina. Like Naylor, Schappell uses the form to probe those relationship boundaries that seem to offer the most stability: "I'm interested how, at some points, we become parents to our parents, or a spouse can become more like a friend than a lover. Or a friendship like Evie and Mary

Beth's can have an erotic charge. All this gray ambiguity and eroticism that exists between people" (Schappell "Beatrice"). Like June Morrissey, Evie becomes a postmodern female version of wandering alpha males such as Eudora Welty's cyclic hero, King MacLain who seek reinvention in the open spaces beyond the borders of home. For Evie, identity boundaries are constantly realigned through new and reinvigorated connections, whilst for the male wanderer they are only reaffirmed by conquest.

The similarities in form, tone and subject matter between Use Me and The Girls' Guide are such that it is worth examining them closely together. Glamour magazine illuminates the proximity between the texts in a comment that appears on the blurb of Use Me: "Fans of *The Girls' Guide to Hunting and Fishing* will devour this grittier, grabbier take on the path from addled adolescence to equally perplexing parenthood." Both heroines tell their stories with dark, sardonic humour, as they reinvent floundering careers, resurrect failed love affairs and reassemble themselves after crushing moments of self-doubt. Both Schappell and Bank centralize one of the staples of the traditional male *Bildungsroman* identified by Ben Knights: the "loss of the father" (117). Like their creators Evie and Jane must confront the deaths of their fathers from cancer: an experience that becomes a pivotal, shaping event in the search for a unified self.

The largely chronological order of the stories in The Girls' Guide and Use Me generates a marked sense of sequentiality that differs from the almost incidental chronology of Eudora Welty's cyclic paradigm. The most appropriate taxonomy for these texts is therefore Robert Luscher's preferred term, 'short story sequence'. Although both story sequences observe a chronological structure and chart the development of a protagonist/narrator, the individual stories within the texts remain

remarkably self-contained. One could take any of the stories out of their context and read them as independent narratives, and yet both writers have created the sense of a tightly unified whole. Like Welty, Schappell wrote her linked narratives as individual stories and did not recognize the connections between them until halfway through the writing process. She recollects that at no point did she plan to turn her sequence into a novel and that the stories asserted their independence until the end:

> I'd been writing these stories about these two women for a while. But it wasn't until I had five or six of the stories that somebody pointed out to me that they were all about the same things -- women and their fathers, women and men trying to negotiate power through sex and intimacy. It was only then that I realized that was true. I wrote the rest of the stories, and went back to rewriting and editing them so that they felt cohesive (Schappell "Beatrice").

Bank tells Simon Hattenstone that she pursued a similar process, writing the 'Jane stories' over a period of twelve years. She continues to speak about the narratives as stories rather than chapters and rarely uses the term 'novel' to describe her text.

Given the determination of both writers to preserve the integrity of their stories, the absence of repetition within the sequences is striking. Schappell and Bank rarely repeat information in order to re-establish the context of their characters' lives: an aspect of Susan Minot's Monkeys that Katherine Bucknell found particularly tedious. I have argued that such reiteration in Minot's sequence reflects the hierarchical order that binds the 'monkeys' together as a composite protagonist. Whilst Jane and Evie value the unity furnished by familial relationships, the opening narratives of both sequences mark estrangements from the family as the girls seek connections beyond the home: Jane forges a bond with her brother's girlfriend Julia,

and Evie has her first romantic experience with a mysterious French boy. Although both of these stories end on moments of reconnection with their fathers, these heroines remain largely isolated figures throughout the rest of the text.

Both Bank and Schappell retain a forward-looking focus on their protagonists. In The Girls' Guide it is Jane Rosenal's voice that dominates, narrating six out of the seven stories; Evie Wakefield narrates eight of the ten stories in Use Me. However both writers disrupt this discursive continuity with more isolated voices. The fourth and literally central story in The Girls' Guide, "The Best Possible Light," is narrated by a new centre of consciousness. Nina, a mother of three adults, has only a tenuous connection with Jane; she rents the apartment previously owned by great-aunt Rita and is Jane's downstairs neighbour. Jane is referred to only once in the story and Nina herself does not feature at all in Jane's stories. However, common themes emerge as Nina struggles to live up to the positional identity that has been assigned to her. At a family reunion Nina comes up short in her performance as the redeeming mother. Upon hearing that her son is to be a father to his fiancée's baby as well as his ex-wife's, Nina narrates: "Then, everyone turns to me, as though I'm going to deliver some kind of pronouncement. I get these voices in my head of what The Mother is supposed to say – maybe something about how it will all work out. My own mother would say something definite, final" (121). Reviewers of The Girls' Guide have largely neglected this story, perhaps because it disrupts the main narrative line; those who insist that Bank's sequence is a novel may prefer to ignore a story that challenges such categorisations.

Shifts in tense and narrative perspective offer openings onto other identities. Bank changes tense in the sixth story, "You Could Be Anyone," in which Jane chooses not to name herself as protagonist. The shift to the present and future tenses

and detached second-person narration enables Jane to distance herself from her most harrowing narrative: her discovery that she has breast cancer and the breakdown of her relationship. The self in this story remains strictly provisional; by casually narrating a scenario as though it is familiar to the reader, Jane demonstrates that it could therefore happen to anyone. When she learns that she has cancer she gives an account of her boyfriend's reaction in the future tense, enabling her to gloss over the experience and present his response as generic: "After your first chemo treatment, before you lose your hair, he will take you wig shopping. He'll make it fun, and annoy the saleswoman by trying on wigs himself" (219).

In the same story the anonymous boyfriend feels compelled to share his sexual fantasies about other women and to justify them with the theory of 'transference': "He's oblivious. He says, 'It's transference,' putting himself on the couch: he's hating and loving you the way he did his mother. Fantasies are his way of escaping your power" (213). Jane's cynicism towards her boyfriend's psychology emerges strongly from her dry, detached narration. As a narrator, however, she engages in her own act of transference; by projecting her feelings onto a second-person, anonymous persona she eludes her darkest narrative.

Interviewers have pressed Bank persistently on the question of the autobiographical content of The Girls' Guide. Like Sandra Cisneros before her, Bank admits that she wrote many of her own experiences into her protagonist's narrative. Whilst she speaks freely about the parity between her love life and Jane's and the shared experience of losing a father, she does not confirm whether she herself has had breast cancer. It is the only subject that Bank refuses to discuss in "A Polished Act." She tells Hattenstone: "That is actually something I don't talk about. I just feel that's a private experience and it's not one contained in my writing," but

then concedes: "Well I feel real comfortable talking about it in Jane's life" (Bank "Polished"). If Bank has indeed suffered the same experience as Jane she has used the story sequence form both to express and contain her own pain: the experience is locked safely within the parameters of the single story and is not mentioned again.

In Schappell's Use Me, Evie Wakefield shares narrating privileges with her best friend Mary Beth who narrates two stories; the first of these, "Novice Bitch," predates the friendship with Evie but the other, "Garden of Eden," features Evie as a character. Questioned about whether she worried about the balance of the sequence, Schappell reveals that although she "started off being very interested in Mary Beth," she began with an Evie story, "Use Me," and simply followed her instinct and "wrote more": "At one point, I thought to myself that maybe I should make it more balanced, but then I thought, 'No, this really is Evie's book'" (Schappell "Beatrice"). For Schappell, her form enabled her to represent the haphazard nature of the lives of girls and women: "I didn't care about it being perfect. Life isn't perfect. These aren't perfect stories, these aren't perfect women ... It's about ambiguity, about the dark stuff we don't like to talk about" (Schappell "Beatrice").

This 'imperfect' form also enabled Schappell to examine the permeable boundaries of intimate relationships. "Gray ambiguity" obfuscates the most firmly established connections. In both sequences, shifts in the father/daughter relationship form landmarks in the journey toward selfhood as the line between daddy's little girl and independent, self-determining daughter becomes increasingly blurred. The opening stories of both sequences bring to the fore tensions fuelled by family relationships. Both girls feel that they have been taken "hostage" on holiday with their parents as they are forced to visit endless museums (Schappell Use Me 3). Evie and Jane spend most of the opening stories shunning the intimacy of Family and

trying to establish themselves as individuals rather than co-dependent members of the family unit. For both girls, the sense of shame that taints this positional identity is undercut by momentary, urgent desires to reclaim the role of oldest/only daughter. Both girls project this need onto their fathers. Evie confesses: "I'm embarrassed by how good it feels to be so close, the four of us, but he doesn't put Dee down and put his arm around me like he should ... I just let go" (20). It is to her father that Jane finally admits she misses their old holidays at Nantucket (39).

The death of her father robs Jane of the centre from which she draws definition. She notes a sudden shift in her perspective as the pressure of the paternal gaze dissolves:

> Something changed then. I saw my life in scale: it was just my life. It was not momentous, and only now did I recognize that it had once seemed so to me; that was while my father was watching. I saw myself the way I'd seen the cleaning women in the building across the street. I was just one person in one window. Nobody was watching, except me (189).

Although initially disconcerting, this epiphany marks the opening up of Jane's destiny. In this way, Bank emulates the structure of the traditional *Bildungsroman*, in which the hero, having pursued a "journey whose rules seem to be established by the elders," finally breaks free of them (Knights 117). Soon after this awakening Jane finally resigns from her job. Her father's mantra, "*Don't take the easy way out, Janie*" ceases to have much currency in her narrative (192). The mantra echoes the mentality of the father in Grace Paley's story, "A Conversation with My Father." He reads his daughter's open ending as a "refusal to look [tragedy] in the face" and feels that she has chosen the easy option (Paley Enormous 167). No longer deferring to

her elders for direction, Jane becomes "just one person in one window" rather than the protagonist of her father's projected plot.

For Jane and Evie, rejection of paternal paradigms is only the first step towards self-determination. Their resistance to neat solutions and schematic structures expresses itself clearly in their responses to cultural discourses: the jargon of popular psychology and the soundbites of the media. Both sequences express deep suspicion towards the rhetoric of guidebooks and the advice columns of magazines. In Use Me Evie heaps scorn on her mother's attempts to hone her parenting skills: "Ever since my mother took this dopey Parent Effectiveness Training Course, to 'learn how to talk so your kids will listen,' she wanted to discuss things" (77). In the opening story the young, less cynical Evie tests the seduction tips of Cosmopolitan magazine on the French boy at the chateau: "'*You've got to keep them guessing. Be mysterious. Be playful like a tigress.*' That's what the magazines tell you ... I wonder if this French wineglass is the one *Cosmo* says the perfect breast is supposed to fit into? Or was that a champagne glass?" (25, 26). "Try an Outline," the eighth story, follows Evie's grieving process after the death of her father. The story is a parody of twelve-step programs recommended by counsellors to people coming to terms with grief; the story takes the form of a sequence of imperatives designed to guide mourners through their trauma such as "Imagine Cancer" and "Take Charge" (229, 230). Under the headings Evie vents her true feelings of resentment towards the healthy people in the world, creating her own subversive survival guide: "Hate everyone. Everyone is evil. Even babies, babies are evil because they've got their whole lives ahead of them" (231). Two stories later Evie admits that she has strayed "off the grieving time line altogether" (288); she has rejected another pre-determined plot line for a provisional one.

In The Girls' Guide Bank debunks the jargon of self-help by presenting various soundbites and guidelines and subverting them with the stories. She prefaces each story with quotations designed to dispel anxieties arising from the difficulties of modern life. Her sources range from The Junior Scout Handbook to Benjamin Spock's The Common Sense Book of Baby and Child Care. The framing presence of these quotations enhances the status of each story as a separate narrative entity, much in the way that J. Gerald Kennedy observes in his study of story sequence conventions.[49] Ellen Fein and Sherrie Schneider's best-selling guide to snaring a husband, The Rules (1995), not only prefaces the title story of the sequence but infiltrates the narrative itself; the two authors become speaking subjects in Jane's imagination, goading her on as she plays hard to get with Robert. By juxtaposing contradictory pieces of advice and exposing their simplicity with the contexts of the narratives themselves, Bank challenges these goal-oriented structures. The contradictions of these texts worry Jane from the start: "I think, '*Self-Help? If I could help myself I wouldn't be here*'" (240).

Bank parodies the rhetoric of popular psychology but her intertextual references also indicate the lack of a stable system in the postmodern world. In his study of postmodernism Hans Bertens states: "It is the awareness of the absence of centres, of privileged languages, higher discourses, that is … the most striking difference with Modernism" (46). Edmund Smyth writes that such "ontological uncertainty" is "central to postmodernism" with its emphasis on "the fragmentation of the subject" (10). However Smyth also uses the example of literature to present this uncertainty as a "liberating" characteristic of postmodernism. He writes of "the mixing of writings and intertextual referencing: the multivocal, heterogeneous and heteroglossic nature of postmodern writing" that has "broadened the scope of

contemporary fiction" so that "The borders of genres have become much more fluid" (14).

The uncertainty of this climate is reflected in these heroines. Forever mindful of the threat of dispersal, they approach the possibility of plurality with caution. They both abandon the paternal line, giving up steady jobs and dating unsuitable older men, but continue to seek "centres." In "Sisters of the Sound" a pregnant Evie retreats to a convent where women go in order to "'escape from loving husbands and sick fathers'" (154). Evie herself recognizes that this narrative of deviance signifies merely another search for "rules and rituals that imparted meaning to life's suffering" (153-4). The forms of these texts realize this ambivalence towards the "liberating" effects of postmodernism; both writers observe the fundamental conventions of the linear quest plot – sequentiality and causality – whilst disrupting its unity with tangential narratives and shifts in perspective.

Paley's decentred form provides a helpful contrast here. She deploys a highly fragmented form to debunk patriarchal structures and challenge masculine preoccupations with origin. Her elliptical, scattered representation of female experience becomes a counter-model to the "absolute line" favoured by the father figure. Most of Paley's heroines are single mothers, adjusting to lives that lack control and structure and adapt readily to new plots. Jane and Evie react less efficiently to this postmodern uncertainty.

Discourses of the sixties and seventies remain relevant to these contemporary women. Bank prefaces the story of Jane's relationship with Archie, "My Old Man," with quotations that assert polarized notions of female identity: Betty Friedan's quotation from The Feminine Mystique claims that creativity is the only possible means of achieving self-determination for any gender: "The only way for a woman,

as for a man, to know herself as a person, is by creative work of her own" (Girls' 75). In The Sensual Woman (1969), 'J' offers advice that directly opposes second wave feminism; she insists that the modern woman needs to recognize and nurture her essential status as an object of gratification: "Pin up on your bed, your mirror, your wall, a sign, lady, until you know it in every part of your being: *We were destined to delight, excite and satisfy the male of the species.* Real women know this" (75 J's italics).

Jane oscillates between these positions of autonomous creator and posturing sex object throughout the narrative. The actions of great-aunt Rita challenge the absolutism of these discourses; she shows Jane that these ideals are not mutually exclusive. As a successful and talented novelist she has achieved creative autonomy but her advice to Jane on snaring men could easily have come from The Rules or The Sensual Woman. She counsels passive, stereotypically feminine behaviour: "'When you're out ... try to appear captivated'" (79). Jane finds the paradigm of the passive female difficult to resist. At several points in her relationships she suffers from the same affliction that Faith Darwin finally manages to combat: "him-itis," the "dread disease of females" (Paley Later 79). Jane wryly acknowledges that she enacts the very stereotypes that she inwardly condemns: "He takes you to Paris for your birthday. Your friends say he's going to propose and you find yourself dressing for the event that you'll both reminisce about years later. You even put makeup on. After a few ringless dinners, though, you stop posing for the memory, and relax" (213).

In "Use Me," Evie adopts the persona of the more sexual Mary Beth to impress author Michael Morris: "I leaned into the table a little so that my blouse parted and he could see the tops of my breasts. I felt like I was channeling Mary

Beth. I never talked like this. I liked it. I liked it a lot" (114). Just as Schappell 'channelled' Mary Beth for two stories before returning to her more representative heroine, Evie soon returns to her authentic if rather precarious self. Despite their gravitation towards stereotypes, both Jane and Evie share Faith's underlying feminist sensibility; like Faith, Jane objects to the masculine bias in everyday speech. Both women criticise their boyfriends for using 'balls' as a metaphor for courage. In Later the Same Day Jack attacks his father for succumbing to his wife's requests, demanding, "Where were his balls?" Faith reacts with silence: "I will never respond to that question. Asked in a worried way again and again, it may become responsible for the destruction of the entire world" (Enormous 172). Similarly, when Archie tells Jane that she has "balls" for giving up her job, she replies: "'Could you put that some other way?'" (195).

In Later the Same Day Faith scorns Jack's "woman stories" with their stock female characters and contrived plots. In The Girls' Guide, Archie displays a similar compulsion to Jack when he concocts stories about Jane, embellishing real events and giving her a comic role, crediting her with witty one-liners. When Jane queries these fictions and protests that she doesn't want "'to just be some made-up character in your anecdotes,'" Archie merely corrects her use of the split infinitive (92). Less adept at endings, Archie is unable to bring his relationship with Jane to a conclusion, and uses his novel to satisfy his predilection for resolution and absolute lines. He ties up the loose ends with a happy ending that strips hero and heroine of their flaws. Jane registers her scepticism in her flippant evaluation of the novel: "Most of it is true ... except that the hero quits drinking and the girl grows up. On the last page, the couple gets married, which is a nice way for a love story to end" (104).

The endings of both sequences offer the reader a kind of completion that does not compromise the integrity of the final stories. Evie's epiphany at the end of "Here is Comfort, Take It" is triggered by her discovery of an event that occurred in one of the earlier Mary Beth stories, "The Garden": an episode that lingers in the reader's consciousness, accumulating significance as the Evie stories progress. In her diversion of this storyline Schappell uses her form to tease the reader; in "The Garden of Eden" she builds the sexual tension between Mary Beth and Evie's father and cuts the reader off just as they are about to touch. For the next four stories the reader can only wonder whether Chas Wakefield responded to the touch of Mary Beth's hand. Schappell provides the ending to this story only in the final narrative when Mary Beth casually recalls kissing Evie's father. Evie is initially disgusted by this image, but her friend's confession actuates a vital shift in her narrative. Having veered between the established paradigms and acts of self-assertion, Evie appears to have surrendered to an entirely positional identity. The final story opens with the image of Evie nursing her son, Charlie, and whispering that she "'won't ever let you go'" (286). Charlie has evidently become another channel through which Evie seeks definition. He has become the only person to make her "want to keep on living"; she continues to breastfeed him although he is almost three (287). Only when Mary Beth challenges Evie's image of her father is Evie able to extricate herself from this co-dependence. The final line of the story, "I let go," refers ostensibly to her son, but resonates back through the entire sequence to the opening story in which Evie "let go" of her father (320, 20). Her act of relinquishment paradoxically yields a greater understanding of those closest to her; for the first time since his death she sees her father clearly: "I close my eyes for a moment, and there he is. My father.

The sight of him in motion takes my breath" (320). Thus Schappell reveals how the "gray ambiguity" of relationships can be redeeming.

The Girls' Guide closes on a similar act of relinquishment for Jane who achieves self-acceptance through her relationship with Robert. Bank appears to have succumbed to the lure of the traditional happy ending for the single female; however she at least grants Jane a relationship that empowers rather than compromises her identity. Both Jane and Robert accept their equal status as "hunters and prey, fishers and fish" (274). Finally able to "say whatever I want now," Jane rejects the posturing of her previous relationships in which she "stored up jokes and anecdotes" and "practiced them in my head." (274, 91, 91). Thus the final paragraphs of each sequence capture moments of readjustment for the postmodern heroine. Ignoring the either/or absolutism espoused by the guidebooks, these heroines achieve an autonomy that emerges *from* rather than in spite of their relational impulses.

Emily Carter: <u>Glory Goes and Gets Some</u>

"it's typical of me – Glory at her most self-centered, self-involved, self-pitying, and a list of other terms that start with my favorite word – 'self'" (Carter <u>Glory Goes</u> 82).

Before finding her form, Emily Carter adopted the same methodology as Sandra Cisneros and Grace Paley and began telling stories through verse. She describes herself as a "prose poet, a ranter and raver," echoing Paley's sentiment that poetry is the most powerful medium for "addressing the world" (Carter "A Word," Perry 107). If poetry is the most effective form for self-expression, fiction, Paley argues, offers a means of "getting the world to talk to you" (Perry 107). Like the Faith Darwin narratives, Emily Carter's short story cycle, <u>Glory Goes and Gets Some</u> (2000), satisfies the urge for both 'ranting and raving' and dialogue. Throughout the text Glory reiterates her need to hear stories as well as tell them. In the story "Minneapolis" she describes her reluctant move to a St. Paul rehabilitation centre. She ends the story on a hopeful note, finding solace in the prospect of the town's inevitable fund of stories: "I'm gambling that my whole life has led me here, for whatever reason, and that the city will at least tell me some stories. If I can make any sense of them at all, I'll tell them to you" (56).

Carter's stories fuse elements of the poetic with the prosaic; beautifully crafted images sit alongside impulsive appeals for sympathy and metafictional querying of the narratives themselves. In "Glory B and the Ice-Man" Glory tells the tale of her friend Katasha who, after watching scientists dig up the frozen corpse of a lost explorer on television, reacts with unqualified outrage; three days later Katasha introduces her new boyfriend who has a suspiciously spectral appearance and a

frozen hand. Before revealing this strange turn of events, Glory offers the reader several clues to the boyfriend's identity and, at the story's climax, steps beyond the frame of supporting character and acknowledges the predictability of the plot's outcome: "You've guessed it already of course. I don't know why I'm bothering ...Alfred's hand was cold" (40). Despite Glory's dissatisfaction with the tale itself, the sensation of touching the frozen hand is worthy of description:

> You know that, but you can't know how cold. It was like touching a silver ice tray with the palm of your hand. It was like holding a piece of frozen tuna, but colder. It's also hard to describe the cognitive jolt that went from his hand to mine, because, while I held it, I knew – against all logic – that I was touching something that was very, very far away (40-1).

Metafictional questioning does not rule out the possibility of creating a resonant image. When Glory's scepticism threatens to undercut the story completely, she pulls the reader back into her experience with a "cognitive jolt." This establishes a pattern that runs throughout the cycle. Glory never fails to convey the reality of her emotions and physical sensations although she often stands outside this reality, casting a querying eye over episodes or relationships.

The resonant final image becomes a staple of Carter's cycle: she concludes "Cute in Camouflage" with the poignant visualisation of the late Millicent's hats "hang[ing] for a split second against the kid's-book-blue of the sky, like large, jewel-colored birds floating lazily on an afternoon updraft" (206); the sight of the "sixth and littlest" girl emerging from the parachute cover, "sparkling quietly like a candied plum" is the final image in "Parachute Silk" (98). Affinities with Paley and Cisneros emerge again here. Indeed Cisneros's description of the narratives in The House on

Mango Street serves equally well for some of the sketches and stories in Glory Goes and Gets Some: they are "like poems, compact and lyrical, ending with a reverberation" (Cisneros "Do You" 78).

Like The Girls' Guide to Hunting and Fishing, Glory Goes and Gets Some is composed of stories that are the product of "11, 12 years worth of work" (Carter "Encyclopedia"). As the stories progress, the symbiosis of form and fictional subject becomes increasingly apparent; changes in the form reflect shifts in Glory's psychological state. As somebody who "talk[s] first and think[s] later," Glory needs enough space to improvise but also enough freedom to cut herself off when she runs out of steam or decides to revise her original outburst. For her, jazz is the art form closest to her personal style: "Take jazz, all right, let's use jazz as an analogy, parallels are always good. Now, what I mean is, what – do you think every time Bird sat down to blow he had the whole musical score right in front of him? Did he have the whole thing thought out? He did not" (19).

As a site for recapitulation, the story cycle form facilitates Glory's distrust of absolutes. At the rehabilitation centre she objects to the idea of making an "I Will Never" list because "It's no good to think like that, in such grandiose and sweeping language ... It's better not to think in these agonized, religious extremes. Better to just break it down into smaller, more manageable units of time" (97). The sketches and stories in her cycle are the narrative equivalents to these units of time, the shape and distribution of which remain subject entirely to Glory's whim; her narrative of mobile, fragmented units is a counter-model to the twelve-step programs that she is forced to follow in the rehabilitation centres. Unlike the twelve steps, the vignettes and narratives are not dependent upon each other for significance and their positions within the form are not fixed. Carter herself expresses her deep suspicion of such

programs and states that they have come to represent a particular postmodern American sensibility; it is the tension between these discourses and the solitary voice of the sceptical outsider that became her central concern when writing the cycle:

> I do find the whole recovery, 12-step phenomena distinctly American – this sort of optimistic, common sense, common decency is very uniquely American. I wanted to explore what happens when a cynical, secular, humanist background is presented with the optimistic spiritual philosophy. I thought the clash was interesting" ("Encyclopedia").

Carter's choice of form signals a rejection of these quintessentially American structures. The cycle is divided into six parts, each of which deals roughly with a particular period in Glory's history: her experiences at rehabilitation centres in Minneapolis; her troubled schooldays; her long days living in the St. Paul boarding house. Any sense of linear progression is undercut as, within these "units of time," Glory makes imaginative shifts backwards and forwards to other incidents. The tale of her doomed marriage forms a kind of linear mini story, which Glory saves for the narratives towards the end of the cycle; however, references to this painful experience appear in earlier stories.

Glory's representation of her HIV status exemplifies her aversion towards preordained structures. She announces her condition to the reader in a seemingly arbitrary fashion, burying her revelation in the midst of a sentence in an early story, "New in North Town." The random location of this announcement belies a willed resistance to the kind of structure that her HIV status might impose upon her life. Glory contains this narrative thread by dispersing any events that relate to her medical condition amongst other stories, consigning the HIV narrative to the status

of subplot. She recalls the moment when she first discovered that she was at risk in "Ask Amelio," immediately trivializing this plotline by emphasizing its predictability: "Do you have to be a brilliant plot-predictor to guess what it was Amelio had to tell me, and how he thought I should know and go get the test?" (64). The reader must wait until "The Bride" in Part Four to discover how Glory gained confirmation of her suspicions. Glory's resistance to "common sense" structures becomes evident as she describes her attitude to her condition. She admits that she forgets to follow the regime for taking her pills and insists that she cannot account for these lapses: "I knew it was just that I forgot, but it must have seemed to everyone else that I was simply choosing not to be disciplined. *If you were stupid, it would be one thing, but you're incredibly bright.* How can you forget to take a simple pill four times a day?" (232 Carter's italics).

Like Paley and Cisneros, Carter intersperses episodic stories and sketches about her protagonist's life with thematically related stories of friends and neighbours. In "WLUV" Glory describes how she feels a strong affinity with the late-night callers whose voices emanate from her favourite radio station:

> It's one in the morning and you have an opinion. You are awake and everyone else is asleep ... You've looked out your window hours before and the neighbors were calling to their children and standing in their yards drinking sodas ... Other people's conversations flow around you in currents, and you are a rock in the stream, a rock with an opinion (79).

The image is a fitting metaphor for Glory's place in the cycle; sardonic yet sympathetic, her voice offers a comforting constancy amidst the flow of less familiar voices and fragments of dialogue.

Glory's narrative status changes from one story to the next although she narrates all the stories and is the recurring protagonist in most of them. As narrator, her role shifts from that of inscribed listener and commentator in early stories such as "Glory B. and the Baby Jesus" to that of detached observer in later stories like "Bad Boy Walking" and "Zemecki's Cat." The early narratives suggest an acute awareness of her status as narrative subject: she tries to retain her mystery but is also eager to establish her presence even when she is not the primary character in a particular story. Four of the five stories in the first section feature her name in the title although she plays only a minor role in two of them; in "Glory B. and the Baby Jesus" she is the frame narrator of Ex-Sister Jacqueline's story and in "Glory B. and the Ice-Man" she is the sceptical witness to strange events. The name "Glory B." does not appear again in the entire cycle, as Glory sheds this particular persona in favour of others. She uses the opening narratives to experiment with identity boundaries and blur the line between fiction and reality.

In later stories Glory herself acknowledges this tactic. In "WLUV" she describes her narrative strategy after relating the events of her day to her neighbour Kostelowicz: "I tried to make it sound amusing, casting myself as the beleaguered heroine of a series of ludicrous mishaps on the way to a job interview" (77). In "The Bride" she reveals that she "tagged along" with the boys on their trip to Portland because she "was the only character in this heroic tale of youthful iconoclasts, perched sassily somewhere between cohort and mascot" (124). Glory uses capitalization throughout the cycle to highlight the variety of roles that she consciously assumes: within three pages she morphs from the "Madwoman of Your Local Tower of Abandonment" to the "Blue Angel" to the "Free Spirit Sans Underwear" (127, 127, 129). This constant projection of the self as caricature is

symptomatic both of an innate insecurity and an egotism that Glory herself readily acknowledges. When she is advised by her counsellor to focus on "positive, relaxing images," before she falls asleep, she cannot resist revisiting the "cavalcade" of "Glory's Most Painful and Embarrassing Moments on Parade" (82); whilst these memories re-ignite feelings of humiliation and regret, they nevertheless place Glory at the centre.

Glory recognizes herself as a victim of the "Terminal Uniqueness" that the rehabilitation counsellors warn against, and derides her compulsion to assert her singularity, admitting that her "favorite word" is "'self'" (208, 82). However she has little respect for those who accept themselves as representative of 'the many'. In "Minneapolis" she uses her signature technique of capitalization to pour scorn on those who sacrifice identity by conforming to social norms: "America Is Full Of Towns Just Like This, Foaming Happily With Hardworking Citizens Who Know Their Way Home" (54). As the cycle progresses Glory begins to shed her many personae, no longer intent on self-projection. In the fifth, penultimate section of the cycle she begins to recede from the action. However she remains a strong presence in the brief sketches that preface the stories in this section, where she adopts a stream-of-consciousness style to describe some of her darkest moments: the deaths of her friends and her daily arrests for intoxication. Like Melissa Bank, Carter uses the form as a means of containing painful narratives.

Glory's oscillation between self-doubt and self-aggrandizement is just one manifestation of her contradictory nature; she both embraces and eschews solitude, seeking and rejecting boundaries. Having arrived in Minneapolis, she insists on her immunity to the pull of Place: "Certainly I'm no citizen. Of here, or of anyplace else" (56). The cycle's epigram – a Nelson Algren quotation – immediately

establishes Glory as an outsider with few outlets for her needs: "The city was full of lonesome monsters/who couldn't get drunk anymore" (n. pag.). Glory is christened "Bride of Frankenstein" at school, an identity that gratifies her appetite for self-caricature. She welcomes the affinity with Shelley's creature, placing herself firmly within the narrative of the fictional outsider: "I saw myself, heroically, like the monster driven out from the ringleted Swiss family to whom he secretly became attached. He wanted them to like him, and they did not. Party-crasher, Banquo's ghost, I took my revenge by inflicting myself upon them" (115). In the following story, however, Glory recognizes that certain identity boundaries are inescapable:

> You can take the girl out of wherever, but you can't take wherever out of the girl. Except, I hear, in California, where people get instant new identities, free of cultural or familial baggage, the second they cross the state line. Now be realistic, and don't romanticize. There is no way the HIV-positive Jewish child of professional intellectuals is going to be beloved to a group of conservative working-class Polish Catholics (59).

When comparing her status to that of social pariahs like Amelio, however, she is grateful for her roots: "I'm living in the love of my family and the bosom of my world … within the warm, firelit circle of privilege, under a whispering Midwestern sky" (65). When she is at her most disoriented, Glory insists on the existence and function of borders and the essential identity of Place:

> *It may be that a million baby billionaires ... have dot-commed reality itself into a digital distillation of everyplace-all-at-once ... but there is still such a thing as being somewhere physically. There is still somewhere that is only where it is, a place with its own smells of*

> *specific food cooking ... Boundaries have not yet evaporated to the point where it's no longer necessary to know the name of the state you live in* (163 Carter's italics).

Glory's ambivalence towards boundaries aligns her with several other heroines of the modern short story cycle. Her attitude emulates that of the more adventurous story cyclic heroine: the young female wanderer who resists the limits of Home and Family but eventually arrives at an appreciation of certain boundaries.

In her story cycle Welty offers glimpses of wanderers who achieve self-definition by roaming the earth; however she also represents the dangers of the unanchored life. In many ways Glory's quest recalls Eugene MacLain's odyssey in "Music from Spain." Like Glory, Eugene reacts against the daily routines of the city with seemingly unaccountable behaviour; one morning he hits his wife and realizes that "It was out of the question ... that he should go to work that day" (Welty Collected 396). Both Eugene and Glory find refuge in the company of strangers. After striking Emma, Eugene realizes that "no familiar person could do him any good" and decides to "seek a stranger" (400). Whenever Glory's life threatens to spiral out of control, she seeks solace in sexual encounters with strange men. When her marriage begins to break down this becomes a regular pattern: "Even though on certain days I didn't have the energy to climb out of bed, on others I was able to climb into it. With someone else. In someone else's little bachelor pad" (234).

As Welty's Eugene moves through the city with the elusive Spaniard, the pull of boundaries resurfaces. He reflects upon the impression of openness that emanates from the streets of San Francisco, and considers revealing the city's bounded state to the Spaniard: "This city ... often it looked open and free, down through its long-sighted streets, all in the bright, washing light. But hill and hill, cloud and cloud, all

shimmering one back of the other … they were any man's walls still" (407). Unlike his father who fends off boundaries until his final days, Eugene registers a need for these walls. He continues: "And at the same time it would be terrifying if walls, even the walls of Emma's and his room, the walls of whatever room it was that closed a person in in the evening, would go soft as curtains and begin to tremble" (407-8).

Like Eugene, Glory fears the threat of alienation and non-being more than the boundaries of home. Echoing Jane Rosenal and Evie Wakefield, she distrusts the theories of lifestyle guides that extol the virtues of isolation for the postmodern woman: "Even if, as a thousand silky-smooth, greasily transitioned lifestyle features tell us, we are spending more time alone … everyone is very busy forgetting the last time they were lonely" (207). Glory counts feminism as one of the more deceptive ideologies of modern culture. Her mother's feminist values ring hollow when Glory observes her relationship with her stepfather: "What I learned from my mother's devotion to this man was simple – requited love is boring, but necessary. And you are nothing, nothing, nothing, without a man, or, to put it simply, you have no Glamour without one" (111). When her mother tells her that "there's nothing in the world you can't become," Glory adds: "These twilight feminist cooings were quickly drowned out by reality's sonic boom" (113).

Joanna Russ observes that the quest for a man has come to subsume all aspects of the *Bildungsroman* for the female protagonist. In her essay, "What Can a Heroine Do? Or Why Women Can't Write," she states: "For female protagonists the Love Story includes not only personal relations as such, but *Bildungsroman*, worldly success or failure, career, the exposition of character, crucial learning experiences, the transition to adulthood, rebellion (usually adultery) and everything else" (9). In

her opening story Glory recognizes the dangers of defining and assessing one's self in purely positional, sexual terms. In a reaction against her mother's phoney brand of feminism, she begins a life in which gender becomes an exhausting but necessary performance. The first sentences of the cycle present Glory as the compliant object of the male gaze and illuminate her potent awareness of her sexuality. She remembers strutting down a Manhattan avenue, revelling in her self-willed status as a sexual sign: "They honked and squealed, barked, drawled, groaned, purred, hissed, whispered, and raggedly begged at me as I twitched down the street in a borrowed dress that was as red as the stoplights" (15). The image of Glory "twitching" in a borrowed dress frames her immediately as a performer. At the end of the story Glory recognizes that her search for sexual validation obliterated all other possibilities of self-definition. When she heard the men's approval she "couldn't hear much of anything else for a long time" (18).

Russ does not abandon hope for the female *Bildungsroman*. She offers two avenues to the female author who "no longer cares about How She Fell in Love or How She Went Mad." The choices she presents are "lyricism and life." By lyricism she means: "a particular principle of structure … that consists of *the organization of discrete elements ... around an unspoken thematic or emotional center*. The lyric mode exists without chronology or causation; its principle of connection is *associative* (12 Russ's italics).

Although Glory insists on the necessity of requited love, this drive rarely threatens to subsume other aspects of her quest. Cutting across the stories of Glory's failed love affairs and sexual encounters are narratives that tell of "crucial learning experiences": connections with friends and strangers, expressions of humour, and declarations of independence. Glory's 'love narrative' never coheres into a

particular structure; the stories dealing with her failed marriage, "Glory Goes and Gets Some" and "A," are separated by Glory's narration of her great-grandfather's involvement in a horrific train crash: a story that she narrates to her husband Stephen in order to warn him of the "strand" of her "genetic rope" that "is threaded with drunkenness, manipulation, grand gestures, and train wrecks" (215). Rather than devote all of these closing stories to Glory's road to marriage, Carter privileges a more associative dynamic and satisfies her heroine's love of storytelling.

Glory's stance on gender difference is typically conflicted. Whilst she flaunts her physical difference to the opposite sex she also rails against the way that gender difference shapes society, so that at times she sounds like an advocate of the feminism she is so quick to condemn. Glory's feminist self sometimes emerges as merely another persona. When a male doctor arrives to tell her the results of her blood test she demands a female. Upon hearing from the man that "'delivering this information is a genderless task'" she replies emphatically, "'Nothing is genderless'" (137). Having got her way, she concedes that the results are "exactly the same as if the male doctor had given them to me" (138). Other moments point to a latent desire to be truly 'genderless' and suggest that the imperatives of gender are in fact escapable. She occasionally rejoices in disregarding the accoutrements of her gendered, sexualised self. Ironically, the rejection of gender as an essential identity category is prompted by a change in costume. By donning one of Millicent's inspiring caps, she casts off the surface identity shaped purely by her sexuality and finds a new agency:

> Young girls especially liked her caps. In them you could walk around and look at things and what you looked at was more important than how you looked. You could grab a little of that sparkle that was

> usually reserved for the other gender, you could be a mischief maker, you could be Huck Finn. If you wore one of her hats the question of whether everything you said, thought, felt, tasted, touched and did was beside the point if nobody wanted to fuck you – all that just disappeared (196).

Most prohibitive are the restrictions that heterosexual ideology places on female humour. Like Faith Darwin and Jane Rosenal, Glory feels that her sense of humour is one of her most attractive qualities. She finds however that her talent for joke-telling and wordplay incites as much disapproval as laughter from a society that remains shaped by patriarchal ideology. In Grace Paley's "A Conversation with my Father" the writer-daughter suggests that she make her junkie heroine's parents "'the first to be divorced in their county'" to satisfy her father's sense of social propriety. Her father refuses to see the funny side of her flippancy: "'With you, it's all a joke,'" he tells her (Paley Enormous 163). He interprets the open ending as a further symptom of this flippancy and tells her: "'Jokes ... As a writer that's your main trouble. You don't want to recognize it'" (166-7).

In The Rules, the dating guide that Jane Rosenal turns to, Fein and Schneider cite humour as an instant man repellent. "'But I'm attracted to funny men,'" protests Jane, not realising that this does not give *her* licence to take the initiative with joke-telling: "'We're not talking about who *you're* attracted to, silly! Go out with clowns and comedians if you want to ... just don't make any jokes yourself!'" (Girls' 241 Bank's italics). Jane spends her first dates with Robert trying to resist answering his queries with a witty quip or pun. Similarly, Glory has difficulty finding an outlet for what she self-mockingly terms her "devastating wit" (115). When she tells a joke she finds herself emulating a masculine style of delivery and notes regretfully that

humour and female beauty are regarded as mutually exclusive: "I negotiated social situations with inappropriate jokes delivered in the same loud, game-showy voice I had heard men use. I hadn't heard many women tell jokes, and the ones that did were all ugly, which was mainly what they told their jokes about" (113).

Patriarchal ideology is only one of the forces prohibiting the full expression of humour in Jane and Glory who, like Faith, are of Jewish ancestry.[50] In his study of Jewish humour, What's the Joke?, Chaim Bermant states that Jewish culture polarizes humour and femininity: "whether women have a sense of humour or not, there is certainly among Jews a fairly deep-seated feeling that they would be better off without it. If Jewish tradition has frowned on laughter in general, it has regarded laughter in women, not only as unwomanly, but as unforgivable" (220). For Glory, however, her ability to appreciate a punchline becomes her saving grace. In "The Bride" she explains how she became enchanted with the image of living as the bride of Frankenstein's monster, unrestricted by social ideology in the isolated Arctic landscape. Glory explains that all the other girls at school "understood the notion of a single thread" (114). The "single thread" is, literally, a status symbol amongst these girls: the "thread of color in the pattern of their argyles that matched the color of the turtleneck" functions as the "secret sign that let you breathe the wintergreen air with your head held high" (114). Years later she is still imagining her destiny as the monster's bride, when she leaves the treatment centre and the halfway house; unconvinced by the "fellowship" offered by her counsellors and fellow abusers she continues to crave the unconditional love she would receive as the monster's bride (135). It is only when she hears a terrible pun on the radio that she feels a sense of belonging and a need for social interaction.

The thread also serves as a symbol of conformity to social rules that Glory cannot follow and the single narrative structure that she circumvents through her fragmented narration. When she hears an awful pun years later – "'We'll be back after this word from Ovalteen – the clothing store for irregularly shaped adolescents'" (140) – and snorts with laughter so that some recently swallowed pills fly out of her nose that she recognizes the thread in her own life: her sense of humour. As the one essential, unchanging facet of her identity it is her "emotional center," enabling her to integrate whilst retaining her subjectivity (Russ 12):

> I should have known ... that any attempt on my part to merge into oceanic oneness with the eternal would end in what young children generally call a 'noser.' And that was the thread I'd overlooked. I hadn't seen it because it was woven so tightly into my fabric – the punchline ... They could control your fate, but not your ability to get a joke ... Bride of Frankenstein: RIP (140).

Thus she writes herself out of the Frankenstein narrative to which she had already scripted an ending: "The credits rolled over a shot of our skeletons, collapsed in a heart-shaped pile, slowly disappearing under the blowing snowdrifts" (137). Glory favours the narrative structure of the joke because the ending, the punchline, is contingent upon her understanding and interpretation; such a narrative is a welcome alternative to those other endings that are dictated by forces such as her HIV status, the hegemonic Love Story, or the expectations of society or family. Glory's position at the end of this story signals again the importance of establishing the right kind of boundaries and structures. Like Eugene MacLain who finally "race[s] up the stairs" to his wife, Glory chooses the pull of social interaction and boundaries over the

boundlessness of the Arctic landscape: a congenial setting for the case of "Terminal Uniqueness" from which she has suffered until this point (Welty Collected 425).

The final sketch of the cycle verifies Glory's development. In "Clean Clothes" Glory chooses to visualise the "merciful end of time" rather than speculate upon her own ending (237). Glory closes the cycle with a communal scene, marking her development from the solipsistic days of the opening sketch; she pictures the end of time making its first stop at the local laundromat, "City Coin Wash & Dri" (237). The unidirectional honks and barks of the male onlookers of the opening sketch are replaced by the sounds of the laundromat that set off multiple associations: the "jangle" of the manager's keys reminds one customer of "the church bells in his hometown of La Crosse, Wisconsin ... chiming all at once" (238). The love narrative of the previous stories recedes into the background, the predictable ending of the HIV sufferer is ignored, and the romantic destiny of the outsider is rejected. By closing the cycle with this sketch Glory shows that she has released herself from the "Terminal Uniqueness" that poses just as much of a threat to self as these predetermined destinies. The cycle ends on an image of collective recognition, described in a way that recalls Glory's individual experience of connection with the outside world: "people stand and stare at each other with the same expression on their faces, as if they'd finally gotten the same joke" (239).

Conclusion: Open Destinies

There is increasing evidence that scholarly interest in the short story cycle is becoming more widespread. Commentators continue to coin new taxonomies and definitions and the form's international scope is currently the focus of study. In his proposal for an exploratory volume of the form's international status, Robert M. Luscher recognizes that "one cannot claim the form exclusively as a North American narrative aesthetic": by examining cycles from a range of national literatures, the new study will aim to "extend previous criticism and forward recognition of the genre's adaptability and vibrancy" (Luscher "Calls").[51] Not only are critics recognizing the short story cycle as a distinct genre but they are also acknowledging the form's multiplicity.

Interviews with contemporary women writers reveal a growing consensus that it is no longer necessary to define the formal identity of one's work in absolute terms. In a recent radio interview Alice Munro asserted that she no longer feels the need to produce a novel: a pressure that haunted the writing process in her early years: "I don't worry about things like that anymore ... I used to always think I've got to write a novel and I started many, many novels and they changed into stories" (Munro "Open"). Her freedom from generic paradigms is evident in her latest 'collection', Runaway, (2005) which includes a linear mini-sequence of three linked stories. By placing cycles and sequences within the framing context of other, unrelated stories, Munro underlines their status as linked narratives rather than a truncated novel.

My thesis suggests that the form offers possibilities for the female writer in particular; twentieth-century women have found in the short story cycle the perfect

medium for mobilizing identity boundaries and representing replenishment and plurality. As Lala discovers in Cisneros's Caramelo, "*a life contains a multitude of stories and not a single strand explains precisely the who of who one is*" (115 Cisneros's italics). Plurality has, of course, always been a facet of women's experience. Modern heroines such as Edna Pontellier recognize "the dual life – that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions" but struggle to come to terms with this multiplicity (Chopin 57). The growing popularity of the short story cycle amongst women writers suggests that the plural self is becoming a more viable identity for the postmodern heroine.

As generic and identity borders become more permeable, so do relationship boundaries. The contemporary female cycle writer uses the form to probe even the most formalized connections and query the relational sensibility that has become associated with female consciousness. Representations of friendship in the late twentieth century are a far cry from the nurturing, affirming female communities in earlier cycles such as The Country of the Pointed Firs and Friendship Village. All of the writers I have examined query the foundations of female community to some extent. Canadian writer Elizabeth Hay presents the unsettling hypocrisies of female friendship in her elliptical story cycle, Small Change (1997). Hay prefaces her cycle with a quotation from Toni Morrison's Jazz: "You have to be clever to figure out how to be welcoming and defensive at the same time" (Hay n. pag.) Morrison's words reverberate throughout the cycle as Hay's recurring protagonist, like Schappell's Evie Wakefield, struggles with the "gray areas" of friendship. "Baffled" by the "paradox at the heart of friendship" – the desire for friends both to fail and to succeed, the simultaneous urges to divulge and hold back one's secrets – Beth longs for a balance between contact and isolation, autonomy and connection: "This is the

detachment we seek and usually fail to find in friendships – an unbegrudging, clear-eyed, undemanding, infinitely interesting and natural presence" (49, 31). Beth notes that such ambiguity is a feature only of platonic relationships between women: "Not for the first time she envied the more active life of men and their peaceable if almost non-existent friendships. Few of the men she knew had many friends" (123).

Ultimately postmodern women writers seem to share Glory Bronski's theory that although we are living in an era that endorses isolation, community and connection are worth the effort. Whilst contemporary women continue to question relationship boundaries, the capacity for "relationship and dispersal" remains central to self-definition (Waugh 22). In the final story Hay's Beth registers an "overwhelming desire for peaceful friends" (244). In a more affirmative representation, Jennifer Paddock uses the form to celebrate the connections forged through friendship: connections that, she insists, endure despite losing contact with one's friends. In A Secret Word (2004) Paddock presents fifteen years in the lives of three school friends. Individual 'chapters' alternate narrative perspectives and voices: each girl narrates the chapters that chart her life. Although the text carries the subtitle of 'Novel', Paddock herself affirms the self-containment of each 'chapter'. In the question and answer session at the end of the text she recalls: "I thought it would be effective if each chapter, at least up until the end, could stand on its own as a viable story" (Secret n. pag.). Like Welty, what "fascinates" her most is the "connectedness" of people's lives: "What I hope will resonate with readers is how we all weave in and out of each other's lives and brush against each other in known ways, of course, but perhaps more often in unknown ways that can be just as influential." Paddock insists that whilst the intensity of these friendships wanes, the girls remain "connected in a way that will remain essential" (Secret n. pag.).

Other media provide further evidence of the form's affinity with postmodernism. The principles of the story cycle form are clearly at work in the narrative structures of many postmodern films that present the viewer with seemingly discontinuous yet self-contained narrative threads that feature recurring characters and settings. The films of Robert Altman are often recognized as the paradigm for these composite productions. Altman first experimented with a fragmented, multi-layered structure in Nashville (1975) in which he interwove twenty-four individual stories, and used it again in Short Cuts (1993) and Gosford Park (2001). Whilst one cannot ascertain that Altman is aware of the short story cycle as a distinct genre, the short story form itself is a definite influence on his work. The material for the independent narratives in Short Cuts derives from nine Raymond Carver short stories and one Carver poem. Altman turns thematically linked narratives into a cycle in which characters cross over the boundaries of one story to enter another.

Anderson's Magnolia (1999) is one of the most admired examples of the story cycle dynamic at work on celluloid. A collage of ten self-contained narratives, the connections between characters and families emerge gradually as the separate stories unfold. Anderson and Altman deploy a range of strategies to create a sense of unity, often hammering home the message that connection is a latent possibility in the postmodern era of isolation, even for loners like Glory Bronski.

Unlike the story cycle writers discussed in my thesis, the directors of these films feel compelled to tie up and unify all narrative threads, rewarding the viewers with the sense of resolution; both Altman and Anderson use natural disasters as unifying devices to bring characters together and secure the possibility of redemption for their characters.[52] Of course Emily Carter deploys a similar technique when

Glory envisions the "end of the world" in the final story. However, this event remains bound within the realms of Glory's imagination; as a metaphor for the expansion of Glory's vision it appears less contrived.

It is the openness of the short story cycle that continues to excite the twentieth-century female writer: each of the writers examined in my thesis uses the form to open up the plotlines for their wandering heroines. The more dispersed forms of Grace Paley and Louise Erdrich resist closure completely; the shapeshifting women of Erdrich's reservation and the multi-tasking activist mothers of Paley's Brooklyn assert their open destinies as they continue to appear in individual stories that are published independently of unified collections. Both Gloria Naylor and Toni Morrison conclude their cycles with mythic images that anticipate or capture moments of rebirth for their female protagonists. As ebony phoenixes and spectral spirits, these female wanderers oppose the threat of containment. In Susan Minot's cycle the potential female wanderer chooses to retreat; she becomes the one who "cannot out." However, the pervasive presence of 'second stories' signals the possibility of escape. An open destiny becomes a probability after the death of Mrs Vincent. Joyce Carol Oates secures an open destiny for her most mobile cyclic heroine, granting the reader only a tantalizing, indirect glimpse of Annie Quirt.

The closing paragraphs of The Golden Apples gesture towards closure as Virgie returns to Morgana and finally addresses the most fascinating connection in the cycle: her relationship with Miss Eckhart. Re-engagement with old connections and sidelined narratives need not threaten the heroine's self-designated open destiny. As my thesis has repeatedly shown, it is the ability to balance the personal and the positional that distinguishes the cyclic wandering female from many of her male counterparts such as Nick Adams and King MacLain. Female cycle writers have

used the form repeatedly to dramatize homecoming as an act of potential empowerment and to endorse the principle of advancement and retreat. Hovering over Virgie's final moments of reconciliation with her past are the words of Cassie who, in the cycle's final story, fulfils the role of her namesake and prophesies Virgie's next departure into the outer world: "'You'll go away like Loch ... A life of your own, away – I'm so glad for people like you and Loch, I am really'" (457).

Through closing images of renewal and expansion these modern American women create new spaces for plural identities and open destinies. Their enthusiasm for such forms and structures perhaps finds its most powerful expression in the words of Joyce Carol Oates: "We never come to any conclusions ... It's a continual mystery. I really don't think we come to the end of it. It's exciting not to come to the end of something" (Kuehl "Interview" 11).

Appendix

An Interview with Colin Channer.

After contacting Colin Channer in March 2005 via e-mail he kindly offered to answer my questions regarding his story cycle Passing Through. He responded immediately, generously sharing his ideas about the form. Any typographical errors have been amended. Otherwise the transcript remains the same.

RL: Did you have a specific formal vision in mind before starting Passing Through or did the form evolve gradually? Did you find that the form gave you particular opportunities that more totalising forms have denied?

CC: Passing Through did not begin with a formal vision. The first story was written as a one off for an anthology. I did not want to contribute to the anthology because I am just not an anthology type of guy. On top of this it was an anthology of erotica written by black men and I found the subject and the framing a little dull. However, the editor told me he wanted a story in which the erotic and the political were twinned. With this direction from him I wrote what I thought was a one-off story, "Revolution" which I set on the fictional island of San Carlos in 1975. After writing "Revolution" I became fascinated with the character of St. William Rawle, the location of the Metropolitan Hotel and the setting of the island of San Carlos. Providentially, I was under contract to produce a collection of short stories. I wrote a collection of stories set on the island of San Carlos and submitted it to the editor who had taken my old editor's place. I began with "Revolution" and wrote backwards through "The Girl with the Golden Shoes" and "The High Priest of Love." After this I worked forward through time via "How I met my Husband,"

"Poetic Justice" and "Judgement Day." When all the stories had been revised and I was sure that they comprised a narrative whole, I wrote the letters to the editor. So these came at the very end. My idea was that these letters would carry information between stories, work as narratives within themselves and also work as a larger narrative when taken as a whole.

The idea was to have several layers of storytelling going on at the same time. Each story was designed to work on its own when read in any sequence. But the book was designed so that reading the stories in chronological order would deliver an experience that was superior to reading any story on its own. Each letter would work as its own little story. But the letters taken together in chronological order would tell their own story of the older St. William Rawle. I do not like story collections very much. A lot of them, even the good ones, tend to feel hodgepodge. I wanted to write the kind of story collection that I like to read – a collection that has some kind of controlling idea expressed through either character or place.

If the form gave me any opportunities, it was in relation to the story collection and not the novel. Because I knew that the collection was designed to deliver its best experience when read as a whole, I didn't feel pressured to make the stories particularly short. The truth is that Passing Through comprises four novellas and three stories. With this many characters and with this great span of time – the entire twentieth century – Passing Through the novel would have been difficult to write. The structure allowed me to explore a complicated place from multiple points of view, which is something that can come off as distracting or self-consciously hip or simply unsatisfactory to the ordinary reader when done in a novel.

But there is something else. I am heavily influenced by music, specifically, by reggae. I could say that I am a reggae writer in the way that Rick Moody can be

described as a rock and roll writer – a particular kind of music shapes my literary approach in observable ways. I approached Passing Through as an album. I took cues from great albums like Marley's Exodus. When considered as the literary carnation of an album, Passing Through makes perfect sense. The stories/tracks are designed as distinctive components that relate.

RL: Have you read any other incarnations of this kind of form that you've particularly liked? Are there any other writers that you have admired for other reasons?

CC: I am sure that I have, but nothing comes to mind. When I look back there were some story collections that impressed me in college, most notably Updike's Too Far to Go. But I cannot say that I was thinking of these collections in a conscious way while I worked. I think that I am most aware of previous and current incarnations of this form from reading about them. It is very hard for me to read whole collections of stories that do not relate in obvious ways. It is too much of a stop and start experience. As soon as you take off you have to land. But again, I did not have to go to great literary examples for inspiration or influence. The models already existed in the music that I love.

RL: Writers and critics have used a number of terms for this kind of form: short story cycle, short story sequence, and composite novel to name a few. Reviewers tend to prefer "collection of linked narratives." Do you like /dislike any of these terms? Which do you think most aptly describes Passing Through?

CC: I have no preference when it comes to names really. I refer to Passing Through as a collection of connected stories. I think that it could be described as a "loose novel." But why be a "loose novel" when you could be a collection of connected stories? A loose novel is a novel that isn't quite there. A collection of connected stories is a story collection for which you've gotten extra credit!

RL: A number of writers have devised metaphors for the form such as web or patchwork quilt. Do any spring to mind?

CC: My preferred metaphor for the form is "LP" or "concept album." That is what works best for me. It is a metaphor transferred from one narrative form to the next, so it expresses the connections between the two forms in a more readily apparent way than web or patchwork quilt.

RL: Commentators on the form have noted its popularity with female writers or writers who wish to foreground issues of gender or ethnicity. Passing Through features several strong female characters. It also includes lots of references to boundaries and images of shifting borders. Did you find that the form enabled you to destabilize gender/race boundaries in a new way? Do you generally find that your fictional subject is reflected in the form?

CC: This is a big question. I have consistently been destabilizing boundaries of race and gender. The form allowed me to write from multiple points of view and this flexibility was vital to the work. Because my ambition in the final analysis was to look at the evolution of a society over the hundred years of the twentieth century it

was natural for me to look at the movement of certain groups from the margins to the center. And in the Caribbean those groups would naturally include women and anybody who wasn't white. But there is a part of me that believes that the form is popular with people that we think of as marginalized because it is a form that exists largely on the margins of taste and popularity. As such, it is not a form that requires publishers to take the large financial risks associated with a novel.

The kind of advances paid for novels are in a sense reserved (but not exclusively) for members of groups that are considered "in" – like white men. So there is an economic imperative at work as well that has made the form popular with many members of marginalized groups – enough of them can't get sustainable contracts for novels from mainstream publishers.

RL: In your cycle certain characters remain on the margins of the stories; we are offered only tantalizing glimpses of people who fascinate or influence the protagonists. Other characters may feature in one particular story but never appear again in the flesh. You preserve the mystery that surrounds certain characters such as Wilfredo – why did you do this?

CC: You can't tell everybody's story. It is as simple as that. Some characters are major and some are minor like in any other work of fiction. In my reading <u>Passing Through</u> is about two families that descend from Father Eddie, a mixed race priest. One family emerges black and one family emerges white and we track the fortunes of these two families over time against major historical events like World War Two and the Cuban revolution and the release of Marley's first solo album. I think that layering is the hallmark of all things well crafted: wine, painting, music, food. The

same goes with fiction. Some characters come through in hints, some ring strong notes and some are substantial. All the instruments on the album do not get played at the same volume; neither are they all treated with the same effect. The mystery is in the mixing. Some characters in Passing Through are designed to be felt to a greater degree than they are seen or heard.

RL: You engage the reader in a journey that gives her a great deal of agency. You offer hints at connections; sometimes I sensed that a voice was familiar before gaining confirmation of a character's identity. Did you aim for this effect?

CC: Yes. There is an element of mystery in the familial relations. But the great albums are like that. Although they are initially satisfactory, you only hear certain things when you listen to them a second or third time. I did not include a family tree because doing that would give the stories a crutch and I wanted them to be able to stand on their own. A reader must be able to appreciate Shooky without understanding that he is Estrella's son, must be able to feel the emotional complexities between Rawle and St. William knowing that they are related by blood. So yes, the effect was intentional. I wanted the reader to feel a sense of wariness while moving through an unfamiliar world, a world that will remain unfamiliar in certain ways even when the book is closed.

Notes

In these endnotes I continue to adopt the method of parenthetical referencing. In my bibliography I have placed all works cited and consulted together to ease the reader's search for references.

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[1] Although Ingram uses Sartoris as an example of a Faulknerian novel, Faulkner scholarship is in continual debate about the problematics of Faulkner's texts and their formal status, not least, Sartoris.

[2] This is further complicated by Faulkner's classification of Go Down, Moses. He recalls his response upon receiving his first copies of the book to Bob Hass: "'I remember the shock (mild) I got when I saw the printed title page ... nobody but Random House seemed to labor under the impression that GO DOWN MOSES should be titled 'and other stories' ... Moses is indeed a novel'" (Faulkner: A Biography 1102 Faulkner's capitalization).

[3] Marjorie Pryse discusses the status of these later Dunnet Landing stories in her essay "Women 'at Sea': Feminist Realism in Sarah Orne Jewett's 'The Foreigner'" (G. Nagel Critical 89-98). She notes: "Whilst it is helpful to place 'The Foreigner' within the context of Dunnet Landing and read it in light of *The Country of the Pointed Firs*, it is not necessary to do so" (90).

[4] Welty tells Linda Kuehl: "I'm a short-story writer who writes novels the hard way, and by accident" (Kuehl "Art" 86).

[5] For one of most influential of the exhaustive essays on Welty's use of myth see Ruth Vande Kieft, Eudora Welty. See also Shinn, "The Wheel of Life: Eudora Welty and Gloria Naylor" in Women Shapeshifters: Transforming the Contemporary Novel 19-40 and Pitavy-Souques "Technique as Myth: The Structure of *The Golden Apples*" in Prenshaw Thirteen 146-56.

[6] For feminist readings of Welty's works, including The Golden Apples, see Franziska Gygax, Serious Daring From Within: Female Narrative Strategies in Eudora Welty's Novels; Suzan Harrison, Eudora Welty and Virginia Woolf: Gender, Genre and Influence and Louise Westling, Eudora Welty.

[7] In "Welty, Tyler, and Traveling Salesmen," Carol S. Manning looks at how Welty and Tyler "undermine the male fantasy of the free-spirited hero" and "unmask and unhorse the romantic quester" (112). In "Eudora Welty: The Three Moments" John A. Allen writes that "the tendency of Eudora Welty's fiction is indeed anti-heroic; that is, it makes legitimate fun of the posturing male hero-adventurer" (13).

[8] Carol Ann Johnston examines the androgyny of Welty's wanderers in Eudora Welty: a Study of the Short Fiction, 87-105.

[9] Like McHaney Michael Kreyling deploys musical imagery to figure the dynamics of Welty's form: "The shorter intermezzo stories ... function as bridges from one major voicing to the next" (Achievement 79). In Fiction of the Homeplace Helen Fiddyment Levy notes: "Music assumes a greater importance in *The Golden Apples* than in Welty's other extended narratives, representing immediate connection, incapable of misunderstanding and freed from paternal legalisms" (181).

[10] For a discussion of Virgie's origin see Denim and Curley, "Golden Apples and Silver Apples," 140. Michael Kreyling writes: "Mrs. Morrison might be one of [King's] partners; Loch's Perseid behavior clearly does not come from Mr Morrison, father of record" (Understanding 123).

[11] In her readings of cycles by Louise Erdrich and Gloria Naylor Karen Castellucci Cox notes: "the heteroglossia of the story cycle serves not to tell any one story more fully but to submit each story to the larger goal of characterizing the unity or disruption of community" (155). In "The Long and the Short of It" Mary Louise

Pratt suggests why the story cycle has been adopted as a regional form: "cycles do a kind of groundbreaking, establishing a basic literary identity for a region or group, laying out descriptive parameters, character types, social and economic settings, principal points of conflict for an audience unfamiliar either with the region itself or with seeing that region in print" (105).

[12] For Bakhtinian readings of Welty see Yaeger 561-86, and Harrison.

[13] Walker Gibson uses the term "mock reader" in "Authors, Speakers, Readers and Mock Readers." The term represents how the narrative voice involves the reader in a "between-the-lines dialogue" (3).

[14] A shortened version of this chapter appears under the title "'The One and the Many': Grace Paley and the Short Story Cycle" in Short Story. See Lister for full reference.

[15] Paley traces her experimentation with fictional time to her poetry writing: "Once you write poetry you get a certain courage about jumping and making leaps" (Wachtel 206).

[16] Speaking to Nellie McKay in 1983, Toni Morrison notes the reluctance of fiction writers to present female friendship as the primary, defining relationship of a woman's life: "friendship between women is not a suitable topic for a book. Hamlet can have a friend, and Achilles can have one, but women don't, because the world knows that women don't choose each other's acquaintanceship. They choose men first, then women as second choice" (154). Paley's story "Friends" ends with Faith's realization that female friendship is as vital as any relationship with a man: "I think a bond was sealed then, at least as useful as the vow we'd all sworn with husbands to whom we're no longer married" (Later 89).

[17] Other heroines in Paley's stories express a similar contempt for male conversation. In "Lavinia: An Old Story," the narrator writes: "My opinion: What men got to do on earth don't take more time than sneezing ... A man restless all the time owing it to nature to scramble for opportunity. His time took up with nonsense, you know his conversation got to suffer" (Later 63).

[18] In "Chaste Compactness" Ronald Schleifer notes: "It is room that Ginny wants for her children, room ... for happiness beyond (or within) the plottedness of the world; she prefers a sense of time ... as a kind of radiation outside of plottedness" (43).

[19] Iser writes that the blank in a text "makes possible the organization of a referential field of interacting projections" (Act 197).

[20] As noted in the introduction, Susan Mann observes that the form has become a means of representing "the difficulty of being the artist" (12-3).

[21] "Intensely feminine, Joyce Carol Oates is not a doctrinaire feminist" writes Walter Clemons ("Joyce" 38).

[22] Most short story cycle critics classify Too Far to Go as an example of the form. Susan Mann devotes an entire chapter to this cycle, and it appears in Dunn and Morris's glossary along with Olinger Stories and Bech: A Book. There is little consensus among Updike's critics. In his categorization of Updike's works, Robert Detweiler strangely lists Olinger Stories and Too Far to Go under short-story collections and the Bech books under short story cycles.

[23] In the May 2005 postgraduate seminar Oates discussed Blonde, her fictionalization of the life of Marilyn Monroe, and spoke of the "invalidism of intense femininity." As an "overtly sexual being ... a dramatic, exciting presence,"

Maxine falls prey to this invalidism and seems to run out of identity when Ted leaves her at the end of All the Good People (Oates All the Good 176).

[24] In 1973, Oates spoke of her intention to represent an independent female subject like Annie. She tells Michael and Arianne Batterberry that her novel Do With Me What You Will is in fact "a celebration of love, and of marriage ... since I believe that for most women this path leads to a higher freedom through the awakening of love, is *the* pathway" (42). She adds: "However, there are women who must be independent – who *must* stand alone. I honor them, and I will write about them another time" (42 Oates's italics).

[25] The subtitle "A Novel in Seven Stories" appears in the 1982 Viking edition of the text but does not appear in all editions. In this chapter all page references come from the 1983 Penguin edition.

[26] Toni Morrison again recognizes the significance of female friendship in the quest for self-definition to Claudia Tate: "Friendship between women is special, different, and had never been depicted as the major focus of a novel before *Sula* ... Relationships between women were always written about as though they were subordinate to some other roles they're playing. This is not true of men" (Tate 118).

[27] Annie Gottlieb classifies The Women as "mythic fiction," as "Nothing supernatural happens in it, yet its vivid, earthy characters ... seem constantly on the verge of breaking out into magical powers" (3-4).

[28] In "Reconstructing History in Linden Hills," Teresa Goddu notes how the "master narrative of the Luther Nedeeds ... reduces women to a single sign" (216).

[29] For a detailed reading of Gloria Naylor's metaphorical renderings of violence see Karen Stokes, "Ripe Plums and Pine Trees: Using Metaphor to Tell Stories of Violence in the Works of Gloria Naylor and Charles Chesnutt."

[30] See Karen Schneider's essay, "Gloria Naylor's Poetics of Emancipation: (E)merging (Im)possibilities in *Bailey's Café*," for a particularly illuminating reading of Naylor's recasting of biblical narrative.

[31] Ferguson's essay offers fascinating readings of several Erdrich stories. She suggests that the way one reads these texts depends a great deal on the way that the story is initially presented. She argues ultimately for "recuperat[ing] the individual chapters" as short stories, as it is in their purest form that one can "most clearly perceive how the meaning and value arises from experience through the process of making it a story" (Ferguson "Short" 555). Given Erdrich's metafictional foregrounding of the storytelling process, this perception of the value of storytelling has particular relevance for her readers.

[32] For a detailed examination of Love Medicine's cyclic properties see Hertha Wong's essay, "Louise Erdrich's Love Medicine."

[33] The representation of Home as a problematic space links many of the cycles in this thesis. Miranda Gay, Virgie Rainey, June Morrissey and Dot Adare seek definition outside its confines but return to re-engage with their old communities; these women begin to recognize home as a space of grounding as well as constraint. Similarly, Alice Munro's short story cycles feature heroines who are unable to break away from home completely. Howells notes: "'Who Do You Think You Are?' is obsessed with homecomings" (63). When Rose visits her stepmother after two years she romanticizes her return, re-imagining herself as the dutiful daughter. She is, however, painfully aware of the impracticality of her vision: "She thought how she would clean and paint Flo's kitchen, patch the shingles over the leak spots ... She wasn't so far gone as to imagine Flo fitting comfortably into this picture ... But the crankier Flo got, the milder and more patient Rose would

become ... This vision did not survive the first two days of being home" (224). Connections with her home town are renewed when she encounters Ralph Gillespie, an old school friend with whom she developed a tacit intimacy. When she learns of his death she senses that this early relationship retains some kind of hold over her, like Miss Eckhart's hold over Virgie: "What could she say about herself and Ralph Gillespie, except that she felt his life, close, closer than the lives of men she'd loved, one slot over from her own?" (256). Julia Alvarez dramatizes the ambivalence of leaving home in How the Garciá Girls Lost Their Accents: "We are free at last, but here, just at the moment the gate swings open, and we can fly the coop, Tía Carmen's love revives our old homesickness. It's like this monkey experiment Carla read about ... These baby monkeys were kept in a cage so long, they wouldn't come out when the doors were finally left open" (131).

[34] All quotations from Love Medicine come from the 1993 Flamingo-Collins edition.

[35] In The Antelope Wife Almost Soup, the narrating dog, affirms his identity through self-reduplication. When Cally saves him from castration he reveals that, for dogs, the loss of this function signifies a loss of self: "she saved my life, but also saved me from worse – you know. (And now I specifically address my brothers, the snip-snip. The big *C*. The little *n*. The words we all know and watch for in their plans and conversations.) ... she saved my male doghood and allowed me full dogness. I have had, as a result of her courage, the honor of carrying our dogline down the generations. For this, alone, could I ever thank her enough?" (81-2).

[36] Julie Tharp states: "Failure to know one's actual mother within Erdrich's novels is a metaphor for failure to grasp one's own significance within tribal traditions, within history" (171-2). Erdrich herself states that she could not write

about people whose mothers she does not know. When asked if she could contemplate writing a novel about Puritans living in New England, she replies: "I've spent enough time in New England that I feel I can understand to some degree the landscape, but not the people ... I really love the day-to-day stuff, but I don't know their moms, their connections. I don't know where they're coming from" ("Creative Instinct").

[37] Erdrich's critics note repeatedly the centrality of June's narrative to Love Medicine. Robert Silberman writes: "Somewhat in the manner of a murder mystery, the death becomes a means of exploring not only the victim's life but the lives of those around her. *Love Medicine* could have been called 'Who Killed June Kashpaw?' or rather 'What Killed Her?' since the responsibility and guilt are shared by many individuals embedded in an entire way of life, a complex mesh of biographical and historical factors" (Silberman "Opening" 103-4).

[38] Louis Owens reads Karl in a similar way; he states that Karl plays a "paradoxically positive role in the novel" (207).

[39] All quotations from The House on Mango Street are taken from the 1991 Vintage edition of the text.

[40] Affinities with Gwendolyn Brooks's Maud Martha are apparent on several levels. Brooks generally refers to her form as an autobiographical novel, but her description of her writing process resembles the method of the story cycle writer: "Well, I had first written a few tiny stories, and I felt that they would mesh, and I centered them and the others around one character. If there is a form I would say it was imposed, at least in the beginning, when I started with those segments, or vignettes" (Brooks Report 162). Commentators on Maud Martha frequently describe her vignettes as prose poems, placing her in the same tradition as Paley and Cisneros.

D. H. Melhem writes: "certain chapters ... seem to intersperse the work with prose poems" and aligns Brooks's form with Winesburg, Ohio and In Our Time (84). Barbara Christian writes: "[Brooks] selects moments that accomplish two things. They reinforce the outline of a pattern that is repeated in many other lines and is being reenacted here, while paradoxically they focus on Maud Martha's individuality ... The tension between these two elements, a pattern that seems prescribed and Maud Martha's transformation of it, moves the narrative" (249-50). Maud Martha does not appear in any studies of the short story cycle.

[41] In her essay on Chicano literature, Rosaura Sánchez notes that many Chicana women writers "have gone beyond the representation of feminine subjectivity in essentialist terms and have chosen to focus on the diversity of subjectivities and on the collective experiences of women in Chicano/Mexicano/Latino communities" ("Discourses" 1019).

[42] Hemingway's home-resistant male has become a paradigm of alienated masculinity. In Hemingway's Genders Scholes notes how, in the Nick Adams stories, "The interior, that dark space in which Mummy lurks, is to be avoided" (28-9).

[43] In "A Healthy Balance," Sanders uses Kristeva's theories to demonstrate the complexities of female identification with the Virgin: connection with the symbolic mother demands "a sacrifice of the semiotic maternal body" (134). Sanders illuminates how Marie eventually achieves a balance between the symbolic and the semiotic when she asserts her independence both from her role as Nector's wife and her vision of herself as Saint Marie.

[44] Alvarez's Garciá sisters experience the need to establish their own identities away from the family: "At moments like this when they all seemed one

organism – *the four girls* – Sandi would get that yearning to wander off into the United States of America by herself and never come back as the second of four girls so close in age" (168 Alvarez's italics). Like Minot, Alvarez uses changes in narrative voice to enact the tension between the one and the many in the Garciá family. The narrative voice in each story shifts as the different sisters tell their stories. In stories such as "A Regular Revolution," the sisters narrate as a collective.

[45] As Jill Matus notes, the obsession with self-reduplication is figured by the proliferation of twins in Ruby's history: Deacon and Steward, Coffee and Tea, Brood and Apollo. Steward's sense of identity rests largely upon his knowledge that a physical reduplication of himself exists. He tells Anna Flood that being a twin makes him feel "'superior'" (Paradise 116).

[46] Philip Page offers a detailed analysis of the reading paradigms in Paradise. He identifies Patricia as "a kind of model author and reader": "by showing us her active responses to the town and to the raid, Morrison implicitly opens the door for our own engagement with the text and the events" (640).

[47] On the point of submission of this thesis my attention was drawn to Karen Weekes's article on Lorrie Moore's Anagrams, a cycle featuring recurring characters and settings. Weekes examines how Moore uses the form to represent the postmodern "fragmentation" of the self and the "episodic experiences of contemporary existence" (104). Weekes notes how women have capitalized on the disruption of linearity in modern texts and, like Margot Kelley, suggests that contemporary female writers are exploiting the form's dynamics to "sort through the roles now available to their female protagonists" (95). Moore attempts this in a perhaps more radical way than Melissa Bank and Elissa Schappell who observe a fairly stable chronology in their cycles. As my readings will demonstrate, both

writers follow the familiar structure of the *Bildungsroman*, deviating only for particular stories.

[48] Sue Gaisford describes story cycles and composite novels by English writers as story collections that "masquerade[] as novels" (Gaisford 71).

[49] Kennedy writes: "cycles generate meanings through their formal organization. Textual structure includes both the physical arrangement of stories and those devices (such as prefaces, epilogues, or chapter numbers) used to signal relationships and divisions" ("Toward" 15).

[50] Jane never refers to Jewish heritage in The Girls' Guide but Mark Koplik detects a "faint Jewishness" in her humour.

[51] An example of the readings in this forthcoming volume is my essay on A. S. Byatt's story sequences, "The Short Story Sequence in the Homeland of the Novel."

[52] As Marianna Scheffer notes in her essay "Hollywood Misses Postmodernism," Altman's Short Cuts shuns the postmodern "blank terror" that characterizes Carver's endings and unites the characters with the shared experience of an earthquake. Similarly, Anderson points to the possibility of redemption when a plague of frogs rains down on all the characters, prompting an epiphany for those who wish to be saved.

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