

**COUNTER DISCOURSE IN THE WORKS OF
JOAN CRATE, JOVETTE MARCHESSAULT
AND LEE MARACLE**

*THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY*

By

RAJANI B.

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
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Dr. N. Ramachandran Nair
Professor and Head of the Department of English
University of Calicut.

CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that the thesis entitled "**Counter Discourse in the Works of Joan Crate, Jovette Marchessault and Lee Maracle**" submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an original record of studies and research carried out by **Rajani. B.** during 1996-2000 under my guidance and that it has not been previously submitted for the award of any degree or diploma.


Dr. N. Ramachandran Nair 09/11/00

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DECLARATION

I, Rajani. B., hereby declare that the thesis entitled “Counter Discourse in the Works of Joan Crate, Jovette Marchessault and Lee Maracle” submitted to the University of Calicut for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in English is an original record of studies and bona fide research carried out by me during 1996-2000 under the guidance of **Dr. N. Ramachandran Nair** and that it has not previously formed the basis for the award of any degree or diploma.



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Preface

This thesis was originally titled "Emerging Voice of the Native Canadian Women." However, it was pointed out at the time of my preliminary viva-voce conducted in 1997 that the topic was too wide and I was advised to narrow down my area of research.

I have selected for the frame work, theories from both feminism and postcolonialism, though native writings seldom conform to the western literary canon. The collection of secondary research material as well as primary materials proved to be a daunting task as many of the books were not available in India.

I sincerely thank Dr. N. Ramachandran Nair, Professor and Head of the Department of English, University of Calicut for guiding and helping me throughout the course of this work.

I am grateful to Dr. M. Dasan of the same department for helping me to collect the primary texts.

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I am also grateful to M/s. Front Line, Calicut for typing and printing this thesis.

Rajani. B.

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Introduction

Any discussion of the literature of a marginalised group of people should necessarily begin with the dominant community's conscious attempts to de-limit and destabilize the culture and knowledge of the former. The case of the Native Canadian writer is unique, for, many of the Indian tribes have been completely wiped out of existence. The genocide has been literal as well as figurative. In this context, it would be worthwhile to examine the efforts made by native writers to construct a Counter Discourse to challenge the onslaught of the white colonizers.

Trapped by history, handicapped by the lack of knowledge of the English language and torn apart by the evils of racism and sexism, the native women writers feel frustrated when they attempt to break free from the fetters of mainstream literature. Identifying the ideological control of the canonical texts and developing the techniques for deconstructing it has not been an easy job. The policy of commodification of the Native Indian taken up by the colonizers has had serious repercussions on native life, for, they were reduced to the role of

"semiotic pawns" on the chessboard under the control of the white sign maker (Goldie 10).

The Native women writers discussed in this work -- Joan Crate, Lee Maracle and Jovette Marchessault -- have all developed modes of discourse of their own. In Maracle's overt portrayal of the native life in the reservations and Jovette Marchessault's attempts to re-vision history and invert androcentric myths, one can perceive the concerted efforts of a colonized people to subvert the canon.

The imperial project had attempted to contain aboriginal cultures in order to control them. Decolonization has brought in its trail attempts to re-vision the political, historical, linguistic and cultural realities presented by the colonizer. Hence there has been a prominent endeavour among native writers to re-work the European interpretations of events, narratives and history in order to invest them with more local relevance and to divest them of their assumed authority. Helen Tiffin terms this project "canonical counter discourse" ("Counter Discourse" 22), a process whereby the post-colonial writer unveils and dismantles the basic assumptions of a specific colonial text by developing a counter text that preserves many of the identifying

signifiers of the original, while altering its structures of power.

This thesis, "Counter Discourse in the Novels of Lee Maracle, Joan Crate and Jovette Marchessault", attempts to study the various levels of literary resistance developed against the Western literary canon. The first three chapters seek to study the 'different' status of Native Women's Literature, while the fourth focuses on the ways Native writing adheres to western literary modes in an attempt to subvert it in its own terrain.

The first chapter, "The Genesis of a Counter Discourse" attempts to define the discourse of a community which had been trapped by the forces of colonialism for centuries. The modes adopted by the white colonizers to appropriate knowledge and the result -- the degrading opinion the natives have about themselves -- are discussed in detail. The role of discourse in controlling the power of the indigene is immeasurable and hence a counter discourse that aims to dismantle the existing power structures of the colonial discourse is integral to any resistance activity.

The very stereotype that mummifies the present of the native has been used as a starting point for counter discourse by many writers. The images of sexuality,

alcoholism and the mysterious orality created by Crate, Maracle and Marchessault undermine the powers wielded by the colonial powers. The choice of multiple sexual partners in the case of Dione and the overt lesbianism of the characters in Marchessault's novels go a long way in nurturing the sexually perverted image of the native. Maracle, on the other hand, by creating the stereotyped native alcoholic losers in her fiction attempts to place the blame squarely on the colonizers.

The next section "Subjectivity and Power", discusses the way in which the creation of subjectivity aids the indigene to usurp power. The appropriation of the 'I' position is an important strategy in counter discourse. Paul Smith's observation, "Wherever the 'I' speaks, a knowledge is spoken; wherever a knowledge speaks, an 'I' is spoken" (100) proves the importance of this strategy. An attempt to create a splintered subjectivity too has been made by writers like Joan Crate. Instead of being self-destructive, this technique aids to develop the myth of native subjectivity as being ungraspable.

The last section "Writing Resistance" discusses the paradoxes inherent in counter discourse. That counter discourses could be constructed only by references to the dominant discourse, as a resistance against the dominant

discourse proves that the relationship between the two is symbiotic. The specialist modes of resistance-writing like creation of new schemata, mimicry, revisionary historiography and revisionary ethnography are dealt with in detail in this chapter.

The second chapter, "Feminism in the Native Context", focuses on the issues of feminist thought and on the ways the native women writers conform to the present day feminism. In issues of language, the native writers under reference uphold the feminist faith that women should develop a language that is not controlled by patriarchy. Jovette Marchessault and Joan Crate have both attempted to appropriate the mode of l'écriture feminine in their narratives. Marchessault and Maracle have taken their subversive tactics to a greater extent in that they have often refused to abide by the dictates of the novel genre.

In the second section "Resisting Phallogocentrism", the issue of the subject matter in feminist fiction is discussed. The emotional, sexual and domestic themes discussed by women writers which form the "private" sector in fiction is not to be considered irrational, for, the public-private hierarchy itself is something that ought to be deconstructed. The valorization of the domestic and sexual themes in the narratives under reference is discussed in detail. Other feminist strategies like

inversion of Romance, Myth and Quest narratives are also attempted by Crate, Maracle and Marchessault.

In the third chapter, "From the Margins of the Margin", an attempt has been made to study the authors under discussion from a postcolonial viewpoint. Though feminism and postcolonialism share much in common, the double ostracisation of the native women make their position more problematic. The polemic regarding the margins -- that the margin is the real site of power and the ensuing controversy that touches upon the very need for a margin-centre dichotomy -- is also discussed here.

As a master narrative which has assisted the imperial project of colonisation, the Bible and its institutional significations and uses, figure among the canonical texts which are attacked. The attacks levelled against the Bible and the Catholic Church by Maracle and Marchessault are extremely vehement. Following the influential work of Hayden White, attempts have been made to demonstrate the ways in which history entails an ongoing reassessment of the past that facilitates a perception of the present and the future. By reclassifying aboriginal histories as myth or legend, or disclaiming them altogether because they are not written down, colonial historians dismissed as less significant all methods of story telling but their own.

While these attempts to reorder the colonial world to suit European sensibilities may have been initiated for reasons of convenience, they were also intended to secure complete authority over the colonized populations. Frequently, the conquered were prevented from presenting their side of the story -- either by the absence of a common language and access to information or by loss of self-esteem or even by genocide.

The final section of this chapter, "The Lesbian Voice of Dissent" takes a look at the gay theory and the attempt made by Marchessault to define the lesbian sublime. In her return to the period of pre-oedipal jouissance and in her portrayal of women as the angel makers, one could perceive a concerted effort to empower women.

The final chapter, "The Deployment of Western Literary Modes", discusses the texts of Crate, Maracle and Marchessault from a narratological perspective. If the earlier three chapters highlighted the essential differences in technique made by the native writers to aid the construction of a separate identity for native writing, this chapter examines the adherence of the texts to the western narrative modes.

Various topics related to the narrative structure -- the narrator, the reader, narrative expectations, dialogue -- and their presence in native texts are all discussed in this chapter. A structural analysis of the texts under reference is also attempted. The narrative within a narrative is a feature common to both native and western narratives. The presence of a story teller is imperative to most native communities and this in turn aids the insertion of narratives into the main text.

The final section discusses the role of myths in providing order to modern narratives. Special emphasis is given to the native myths which are curiously similar to the western myths like the Proserpine myth and the Mother-Goddess myth. An attempt has been made to relate Jovette Marchessault's works to the proletarian myth of deliverance. Eventhough the presentation of the structural analysis of the native narratives in the western narrative mould seems to destroy the very purpose of counter discourse, a reading of the chapter in the light of natives appropriating the white canon could vindicate it.

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Chapter 1

The Genesis of a Counter Discourse

Colonisation brought with it attempts not only to conquer the land but also the mind and discourse of the colonised. The main battles fought by the colonizers were certainly over land, but once this was achieved, they attempted to assert their domination over the indigenes through narratives. And these narratives -- letters, diaries, stories, novels and autobiographies -- were elementary in the construction of colonial discourse.

Discourse, as Foucault defines it, is a system of statements within which the world can be known. It is a means by which dominant groups in society constitute the field of truth by imposing specific predetermined knowledges and values upon dominated groups. Through negative descriptions and the creation of the powerful self-other dialectic by claiming the all-powerful subjectivity, the authority of the European cultural and moral superiority was buttressed. Colonial discourse thus became a system of knowledge and beliefs about the world within which acts of colonization take place. Although it is generated within the society and cultures of

colonizers, it soon becomes the paradigm against which the indigene evaluates her/himself.

Colonial discourse creates a conflict in the consciousness of the colonized as the narratives operate on the assumption of the superiority of the colonizer's culture, history, language, art and philosophy and this certainly is not in keeping with the Other's knowledge. The colonizers in their narratives and accounts spread the belief that when "'they' misbehaved or became rebellious, because 'they' mainly understood force or violence best, 'they' were not like 'us', and for that reason deserved to be ruled" (Said, Culture XIII). Yet, paradoxically, in their need to become indigenous, to belong to the land, to create a mother country which is far away from the country of their origins, the colonizers often adopt the process of indigenization -- through writing about the humans who are truly indigenous. Even though this raises serious questions about the real powers of the colonizers, this indigenization move is reterogressive for the indigene as their voices are appropriated by the colonizers.

Negative descriptions have been central in colonial discourses. It was by assembling a series of descriptions -- of the native bodies, their speech acts, their habitats, conflicts, societies, sexualities and ceremonies -- that colonial discourse sought to master indigenous

cultures. That the polemic of power is hidden in such descriptions is made clear by Aijaz Ahmad who remarks, "to say ... what one is presenting is 'essentially descriptive' is to assert a level of facticity which conceals its own ideology, and to prepare a ground from which judgments of classification, generalization and value can be made" (99).

Aijaz Ahmad also takes exception to the fact that the third world alone is defined purely in terms of an experience of externally inserted phenomena. While the first and the second worlds are defined in terms of their production systems (capitalism and socialism respectively) the third world alone is defined in terms of "experience". This classification divides the world between those who make history and those who are mere objects of it (99-100).

Thus, it is quite pertinent to believe that the native in colonized cultures was talked about, analyzed, abused and separated from his/her environment and covered with a discourse, the purpose of which was to keep him/her subordinate. The objectification of the native was furthered through the creation of negative stereotypes. The most prominent among these stereotypes was that of the lazy native. The White Colonizers held on to this myth,

in Eric Williams' opinion, because of "an outworn interest, whose bankruptcy smells to heaven in historical perspective, can exercise an obstructionist and disruptive effect which can only be explained by the powerful services it had previously rendered and the entrenchment previously gained" (211).

Colonial discourse is very much dependent on the concept of fixity involved in stereotyping. Homi Bhabha in the essay, "The Other Question", writes:

Fixity, as the sign of cultural/historical/racial difference in the discourse of colonialism, is a paradoxical mode of representation: it connotes rigidity and an unchanging order as well as disorder, degeneracy and daemonic representation. Likewise the stereotype, which is its major discursive strategy, is a form of knowledge and identification that vacillates between what is always 'in place', already known, and something that must be anxiously repeated. (37)

Any disruption of the "fixity" would be equivalent to an attempt to question domination of the colonizer and this, in turn, is likely to invert the power structures in the white/native relations. And hence the active involvement of native writers in either reifying or

reviling stereotypes could be regarded as the starting point for counter discourse.

The natives occasionally get to occupy subject positions in colonial discourse. But the truth remains that the predominant strategic function of colonial discourse is undeniably "the creation of a space for a 'subject peoples' through the production of knowledges in terms of which surveillance is exercised and a complex form of pleasure/unpleasure is incited" (Bhabha, "Other" 41). Thus the subject positions of the native was determined by dominant discourse and this is evident in white-written native-centred works like Since Daisy Creek by W.O. Mitchell, The Temptations of Big Bear by Rudy Wiebe, Anne Cameron's Daughters of Copper Woman, Lynn Andrew's Medicine Woman and Rosamond Vanderburgh and Nan Salerno's Shaman's Daughter. Such representations which may or may not make use of native stereotypes certainly do not benefit the natives.

Attempts to dilute the serious ramifications of stereotyping -- statements which urge us to believe that stereotyping means only simplification -- should be ignored because of its more serious import. Stereotyping is simplification because it is an arrested, negative form of representation that "in denying the play of difference (that the negation through the other permits) constitutes

a problem for the representation of the subject in significations of psychic and social relations" (Bhabha 45).

Thus the colonial subject is constructed within an apparatus of power which contains a knowledge of other, "a knowledge that is arrested and fetishistic and circulates through colonial discourse as that limited form of otherness, ... the sterotype" (Bhabha 47). And the pathetic condition of the native who is weighed down by the huge burden of significations is poignantly conveyed by Fanon:

[A] continued agony rather than a total disappearance of the pre-existing culture. The culture once living and open to the future, becomes closed, fixed in the colonial status, caught in the yolk of oppression. Both present and mummified, it testifies against its members.... The cultural mummification leads to a mummification of individual thinking... as though it were possible for a man to evolve otherwise than within the frame work of culture that recognizes him and that he decides to assume ("Racism" 44).

But, as it has been pointed out earlier, the very stereotype which mummifies the present of the native could very well be the starting point for counter discourse by the colonized. And the path is cleared by Homi Bhabha who asserts that the chain of stereotypical signification is "curiously mixed and split, polymorphous and perverse an articulation of multiple belief" ("Other" 51). This fact, when viewed from the angle of deconstruction could undermine the fact that the master is a powerful monolithic force. This disjunction is also in keeping with the multipronged counter strategy of the native. The creation of numerous subjectivities for the other further proves the point that the other is ungraspable, or, in other words, that no system of hegemony is ever able wholly to determine the range of subject positions open to the native.

Images of Sexuality, Alcoholism and Oral Power

One static image attributed to the native woman by dominant discourse is that of a sexual figure. The primary role for the native male is found in violence and hence he is designated as an active object. The native female, on the other hand, is way down in the hierarchy as an object functioning as the standard commodity of sexuality. If "redskin has for years been the signifier of fear, the dusky Indian maiden has stood for free and open sexuality, not the realm of untamed evil but of

unrestrained joy" (Goldie 15). Lee Maracle, Joan Crate and Jovette Marchessault -- all differ in their treatment of this female stereotype in their works.

Rayna Green in her article on the image of Indian women in American culture flatly concludes that Pocahontas is an "intolerable metaphor" for native women (714). The Pocahontas legend, in its symbolic capacity, insists that the Indian woman allows herself to be identified either as a princess or as a squaw. As a princess, the native woman's image is so tied up with abstract virtues that she must remain Mother-Goddess. As a squaw, on the other hand, she has to persistently maintain her erotic image. Green suggests that the image of Native Indian woman in western culture has been split into that of the noble princess and that of the randy and fertile squaw, and that the image of the Indian woman has suffered from what is in effect a cultural whore/madonna complex (712).

Dione, the half-Indian heroine in Joan Crate's Breathing Water suffers from the very same complex. Her attachment to her child, her intense preoccupation with the physical well-being of the child--all portray her as a perfect mother. Yet, her sexual exploits prove her 'squaw' image. The portrayal of Dione as a sexual figure, in complete reification of the stereotype, is an extension

of the masculinist construction of the other. It is the perfect example of the "static other reflect[ing] the gaze of the observer and return[ing] the image which the male gaze requires" (Goldie 65).

In spite of her adherence to the squaw image of the erotic, fertile Indian woman, Crate subtly effects an inversion. Unlike the dusky Indian of western narratives who represented the attractions of the land in a form which requested domination, Dione is a character, perpetually on the move, on a lookout for dominance. Dione's sexuality seems to be what Foucault calls "pursued pleasure, that is, both sought after and searched out" (45). Foucault observes that though modern society has attempted to reduce sexuality to the couple, there exists groups with multiple elements and a circulating sexuality, a distribution of "points of power, hierarchized and placed opposite to one another" (45-6).

It is also an attempt by Crate to reconcile the difference between the severely circumscribed form of sexuality that society appears to consider normal and the complicated array of sexuality existing within the same society. That the society would repress such deviations is a certainty and Foucault believes that "because this repression is affirmed, one can discreetly bring into co-existence concepts which the fear of ridicule or the

bitterness of history prevents most of us from putting side by side: revolution and happiness, or revolution and a different body, one that is newer and more beautiful; or indeed, revolution and pleasure" (7). To Foucault the very force of repression creates a space in which repressed elements can be voiced. Freud's view that humanity is sexually driven and Foucault's that repression could be a source of energy suggest the importance of the "standard commodity" of sexuality in the semiotic field of the indigene.

Lee Maracle, on the other hand, attempts to reverse the stereotype. Her heroines, both in Ravensong, and in Sundogs, are anything but erotic. Both of them are educated girls attempting to make a mark in the society. In the absence of idealization or exoticization, one cannot but disregard the view that narratives usually invite a European, heterosexual male reader to identify with the narrator. Both the heroines, Stacey and Marianne are quietly but firmly positive about the world they offer to the reader, confident that the reader would understand its values. Marianne in Sundogs is a sociology student who takes an active interest in native politics. The novel does not construct her as an asexual figure. Infact, the narrative contains details of her sexual encounter with her partner Mark. But that is only to

offer relief from the events at Marianne's household. This encounter also means a letting free of suppressed feelings of shame and inferiority for Marianne. She says, "I remember desire, the restoration of my beauty beaten from consciousness by crude teenagers duped by illusions of racial superiority" (107).

Maracle does not attempt to make a super woman out of her heroine. Marianne has to fight real hard to ward off the temptation to play the "squaw" role when she encounters a white man's interest in her. She is flattered by James' attention. She traps herself between the attention of two men -- native Mark and the white James -- to the detriment of her relationship with the former. Marianne is also guilty of attributing the squaw image to her sister Rita. When she realizes that Rita's marriage to Bill is over, Marianne is quick to place the blame squarely on her sister:

Morals are for dullards who have no passion with which to imagine complicating the world with needless pain, and virtue is for those who lack opportunity. Chaos. Mother rolls about in some little old man's sweet arms; sister Rita, cheats on her husband.... Rita and her bigotted Catholicism that does not allow her to abort an unwanted child but somehow enables her to be comfortable with adultery. (25-6)

Moreover, when Rita speaks about love, Marianne gets the uneasy feeling that "she is talking about the kind of love that involves sex and... [doesn't] feel like helping her (33).

Stacey in Ravensong is a high school student who is greatly concerned about the survival of her community. She is more mature than Marianne in that she never doubts the power of her native roots. Stacey's acceptance into the Faculty of Education at the UBC opens up a whole array of possibilities for her community. It also gives her an impetus to do more good for her community especially because she had plans to start a school in her village. Her views on sexuality too reveal a balanced mind. When her white classmate, Polly commits suicide, Stacey is disturbed beyond consolation. Her classmates' pious remarks on Polly's loss of chastity angers her. Her thoughts about Polly's death lead her to wonder about the frailty of white girls. She knew that the frailty of her villagers stemmed from the hunger of the body and that the reason for the frailty of white girls lay elsewhere.

She did not know a great deal about [Christian] faith but somewhere in its canons lust must be defined as terrible -- sinful is the word the Christians at home would probably use. This lie of sin lived in their minds, while lust, the

natural passions of heart, pushed up on their bodies. The reality of lust wants expression. The exorcism of it requires dispassionate repression. The conflict between expression/repression must underlie whatever was joggling up [the white girls'] need to condemn Polly, twisting their faces into paradoxical emotions.

(30)

Here, one could perceive an attempt to define an uncommon sexuality, uncommon in modern societies, one that is free from guilt and repression.

In her autobiographical collection of essays, I Am Woman, Maracle attempts to define the sexuality of native women. She places the blame squarely on the white colonizers for negating Native Indian Sexuality. "Sex becomes one more of the horrors of enslavement," (21) she writes while commenting on how sex is equated with rape for native women. Maracle also criticizes the native males for deprecating and transforming women into "vessels of biological release for men" (24).

Eventhough she is a heterosexual, Maracle also discusses the problem of homosexuality. "Love", in her opinion, "presumes the right to choose" (29). She

vehemently attacks "homophobes" who "are quick to vilify love between women because the idea of women loving each other is diametrically opposed to volunteering yourself up for rape" (25). She believes that the talk about lesbianism being something about "women identifying with women" (26) is nonsense. But that sexuality is a matter of personal choice is reiterated by Maracle not just in I Am Woman but also in Ravensong. In her treatment of the lesbian relationship of Judy and Rena in Ravensong as part of the community life, Maracle asserts the fact that one's choice of sexuality has nothing to do with abnormality. In a way, this relationship could be regarded as a prelude to the lesbian communities in Jovette Marchessault's works.

Jovette Marchessault's homosexual narratives are also liberatory in that she writes about a different sexuality that calls out for "revolution and pleasure" (Foucault 7). The force of patriarchal repression creates a space of resistance from which she makes her voice heard.

The case of homosexuality which also attempts to create a "reverse" discourse is dealt with by Foucault in The History of Sexuality: An Introduction. By placing the homosexual in the psychological, psychiatric, medical category, the homosexual became a "difference", a case history in addition to being a type of life and a life

form (43). The acknowledgement by the dominant discourse of the "different status" of homosexuals albeit as perverts amounted to the creation of a new site of struggle wherein "homosexuality began to speak in its own behalf to demand that its legitimacy or 'naturalness' be acknowledged" (101).

For the homosexual discourse and homosexual identity, the imposed splitting of the normal from the abnormal provides a tool of resistance. In her most explicit homosexual narrative, Lesbian Triptych, Jovette Marchessault writes about her irresistible desire to set foot in the street from which she was forbidden. As the patriarch had asked her to keep herself only on the "sidewalk", never on the "street", she often fantasized about making it to the streets (43). Marchessault writes ecstatically about her first step in the metaphorical street. "What a curious sensation ! Here was a blank slate, a whole world to be populated ! I stayed in suspense, one foot in the street, my face tense, expecting the worst. Nothing happened. The rest of me followed my foot. Bliss ! Joy ! Gasp !" (44).

And in her novels, especially, White Pebbles in the Dark Forests, Marchessault writes about this world which is populated by women who dare to walk the streets. In

her "Lesbian Chronicle", Marchessault attacks vitriolically the conforming multitude and the patriarchs who attempt to 'fix' people,

Heterosexual ? Lesbian - homosexual ? You haven't a clue, my dear proprietors, my dear surgeons! You try to graft your obsessional weakness on my body and on my head. Your grafts present certain difficulties, however you see, they result almost always in weak beings who kill each other, rack their brains and everything else. Neither hetero nor homo, my dear obsessed sirs ! I am in another place, in the forgotten zone, in the no-man's land of women's memory, the ah ! - my - zone, my first land, that incomprehensible continent of desire, before which you fly into a rage, brainsick, terribly troubled in your original sin. (57-8)

Violence is yet another "standard commodity" (Goldie 88) found in the semiotic field of the indigene. The image of the fiery, scalp-loving Indian has enthralled mankind for centuries. Renate Zahar in an analysis of violence as liberation writes, "Through the act of violence the colonized is capable of freeing himself from his reified status and becoming once more a human being" (Fanon, Colonialism 77). Or in other words, the

frightening image attributed to the Indian might have been liberatory. Yet, when violence is looked upon as a "standard commodity", a value of the other, a reflection through which to expose the self, it ceases to be a liberatory practice. Instead, it becomes something that is reinforced. A liberating violence would have enabled the native to somehow subvert the text and deny the violent native as object through an even stronger subjectivity.

This kind of a liberatory violence is perhaps, seen in Marchessault's second novel of the trilogy. The violence of the little girl who is also the protagonist in Mother of the Grass is a cry of despair and an attempt to free mothers from the oppression of the Father. "Song Four" culminates in a dramatic, desperate act by the grand daughter who pushed beyond endurance by the awfulness of life under patriarchy, impulsively turns on the gas in the middle of the night, and goes back to bed. It is ultimately the love of mothers that restores the homicidal protagonist to a rekindled desire for life. The child-narrator finds absolution and healing, not through repentance for her rebellious act, but through reconciliation with her "mothers". The child flees from endless punishment meted out to her and her fellow girl companions, but the single act of violence, opens her eyes to the possibility of community among women through their

shared grief and love and hence is, in a sense, liberatory.

While the murderous impulse of the child is not condoned by the narrator, the anger and frustration it represents, the sense of outrage in daughters against the continual sacrifice required of their mothers is fully acknowledged. The novel provides a brilliant commentary of life under impoverished conditions in the slums of Montreal. During what unfolds as a forbidding cycle of disillusionment and self realization about growing up female in a working class neighbourhood in Montreal, Marchessault's narrative voice describes how she came to feel the full tyrannical weight of patriarchal authority in the male dominated city. As an adolescent growing up on the streets and in convent schools and as a working class wage earner, she soon loses any vestiges of power over her own life and confronts violence at every step. On the familial level, oppression takes the form of frustrated paternal desire and aggressive reprimands of female children and Marchessault attributes this violence primarily to phallic insecurity.

In Like a Child of the Earth, Marchessault attempts to redraw the picture of the violent native by attributing violence to the white colonizer. She writes

about the greedy explorers who meted out inhuman treatment to innocent natives:

On his second voyage, Christopher Columbus took solemn possession of this continent, and erected a column topped with a cross.... Christopher Columbus shot and killed a number of savages with his crossbows in order to teach them respect for the weapons of Castille. They also unleashed a large Spanish dog on some others. This was the first time that a mastiff had been set on the Indians. (41)

The last sentence is pregnant with connotations because the dogs were widely used in the attacks against Indians. It also signifies the degraded brutality of the colonizers. Marchessault does not stop here. She goes on to enumerate the list of violent acts of the whites. In her view, "It was all pillage, thieving, abduction, rape, torture, threats, and blows, and baptisms. Those who resisted were hanged and the villages burnt and bled" (41).

If Marchessault redefines violence in the White-Native context in her counter discourse, Lee Maracle uses the trope of violence in order to stress the fact that it is a direct result of colonialism. The violence described

by her is the violence resulting from alcoholism. In her narratives, "alcoholism" is used only to demonstrate the decadence which civilization has created for the native. Each negative society contains a subtextual attack on the results of the white conquest.

The character, Old Snake, in Ravensong is a brilliant example of a native man losing his place under colonial rule. Old Snake was half-drunk and unclean most of the time.

No self-respect. [Stacey] remembered her mom telling her about when he returned to the village after the war. He hadn't participated in the war, but had left with the others to sign up. He was rejected by the army for some reason or other. He ended up working on the rail road for a long time -- six years. Then when the white boys returned the rail road bosses had let him go. His union had not protected him. White boys come first, they had all but told him. Acid rage filled him with hate. May be that was it. May be some folks are just eaten alive by the hate and humiliation they sometimes butt up against because they have no place to empty it out. The Old Snake made his wife pay dearly for this hate.

(148)

Violence breeds more violence and Old Snake is finally shot at by his own wife.

In Sundogs too, one can see examples of alcohol-related violence of native men who fail miserably in the highly competitive white world. Bill, the protagonist Marianne's brother-in-law is a stereotypical alcoholic, womanizing native. And his stereotypical behaviour forces his wife Rita too, to accept a stereotyped behaviour when she walks out of the marriage to have affairs with other men. Marianne's brother Rudy, the "lady-killer" (86) too becomes a victim of alcoholism and perpetrator of domestic violence when he attacks his wife and children. But soon he is filled with remorse. "Rudy sits in his corner lost in his own embarrassment. He looks as though he feels no grief. I picture his love for family leaking out in drips as his hands abuse his wife and children. As trauma follows trauma in his life he lets love for life go. He can no longer grieve" (140).

In order to absolve himself of his guilt, Rudy later decides to take an active participation in the road block at Mt. Currie effected by the natives as part of the struggle.

In her collection of essays, I Am Woman, Maracle discusses the related problems of alcoholism, violence and

hatred within native communities. In "Rusty", she discusses the tragedy surrounding her friend's life. Rusty narrates her tale of child abuse and this narration is truly poignant in its dealing of this hidden aspect of native life.

He must have seen me there, a bunched little brown heap on the floor. When he grabbed me and hissed that I was not his kid and that that meant he could do what he liked with me, I had the feeling that his kid or not, that was a lie. I was, terrified about the meaning of 'what he liked', but believed that I would never again have to shame myself with his paternity.... At twelve, I didn't fight back. Lee, I didn't fight back. (48-9)

It is this violence that made Rusty seek revenge on men. She speaks about "a trail of broken white boys... strewn behind [her], bewildered by the extraction of their affection and the bareness of [her] heart" (49). Rusty's subsequent alcoholism and her inability to relate well to the opposite sex is discussed in this context by Maracle. She also attempts to give us a clearer insight into the stereotype of the "dusky Indian" when she narrates how Rusty reacted to the advances of white boys. "What white boys wanted in dark meat was not the coy, flirtatious

routine of white girls but the subtle mysticism they thought dark-skinned girls had a monopoly on. They wanted sultry silence and intense submission, a wise facade without their own women's smugness. They wanted the self-effacing surrender of a dark woman to white superiority" (49-50).

Thus by defining the parameters within which stereotypes are demanded by white males and by providing the reason for the same, Maracle, involves herself in a liberatory practice.

The orality of the native is also an intrinsic part of their image. The valorization of orality is based on the belief that speaking has a more subjective presence than writing. Jack Goody echoes this view when he writes, "Words assume a different relationship to action and to object when they are on paper than when they are spoken. They are no longer bound up directly with 'reality', the written word becomes a separate 'thing', abstracted to some extent from the flow of speech, shedding its close entailment with action, with power over matter" (46).

In spite of the valorization of orality in native cultures, the belief that the vast complex of powers are inaccessible without (written) literary texts exists. In the need to gain access to literacy, many oral cultures

are forced to leave behind their oral world. But remnants of these powerful verbal performances are retained by many at the subconscious level. Breathing Water contains instances of the oral past asserting their supremacy through the subconscious.

The heroine Dione's obsession with voices is discernible even at the outset. Her inability to concentrate on anything she does is attributed to the flood of voices which she keeps hearing. "The voices smack together too fast" (5), she complains. Her frequent mental journeys to the past, memories of the happy childhood days spent in the company of her Indian father, the stories he narrated -- all tell one that she is lacking that essential bond with tradition. The power which her father wields over her through the Indian stories he had narrated in the past pass a favourable comment on native story telling powers. It is pertinent to note in this context that Dione gets a hold on her life only when she starts telling stories to her child Elijah.

However, it is in Lee Maracle's Sundogs that one finds a character living out the powers of Orality. He is Elijah Harper, MLA from Red Sucker Creek, Manitoba, a native activist who supports the return of title deeds of land to aboriginal people. Marianne, the protagonist who

is ultimately drawn towards the world of native politics gives a beautiful description of the oral powers of Elijah.

Elijah looks frail. His voice is so soft you have to feel around for the words, study his face for their meaning, but there he is... still talking. Even steady sounds, statistics about the nature of our life in this society. Its treatment of us indicted. Historical accounts, contemporary accounts, minute after minute, hour after hour he goes on. Facts about his village, the residential school system -- the death of our culture....

I don't know why, but I want to weep. I feel so consumed by the magic of it all, the absolute irony of it, the greatness and the simplicity of it, that I just want to roll all over the floor and wail. (67-8)

The relentless yet polite attack that Elijah unleashes on the white authorities shakes Marianne off her stupor and complacency. She describes the effect his speech has on her, "I shed hot tears of shame, cooling tears of pride, sweet tears of recognition, tears of joyous truth until exhaustion overcomes me and I sleep" (69).

Terry Goldie, while discussing the various aspects of native orality, comments that there is often a constant use of the word "musical" in representations of indigenous speech (118). At least part of this musicality seems to reflect a desire to see orality as a metaphysical, unknowable power.

Marianne's descriptions of Elijah's orality live up to this "musical" stereotype. "Three generations of us glued to the words of a little man whose command of English is connected to some other language, some other rhythm, a rhythm my mother bemoans is lost" (68).

Ravensong too has characters with oral powers, though not on the same level as Elijah. The protagonist describes the soft yet powerful funeral speech of the matriarch Ella to prove this point. When Ella rose up to speak "her voice lost its nearly ninety years of wear and tear" (20), writes Stacey to convey how powerful the performance was. She goes on to comment on the strong influence of her words on the villagers.

Her voice rose up at the end of each line as though there were no periods in her language, just pauses. The music in her voice sang sounds of gentle urging while her body stood stock still.... The very word 'child' ... conjures

images of infinite grand children climbing mountains, heroically traversing thousands of years of the emotional entanglements life presents. The word rain images woman-earth, the tears of birth and endless care-giving. (20-1)

The valorization of the grandmother in Marchessault's narratives necessitates the reification of orality in them. Marchessault's grandmother serves as a treasured link between past and present, between the sacred beginnings and the profane realities of daily life. She also functions as a central source of knowledge, a kind of female sage and sensitive conveyor of private feminine truths and unorthodox wisdom. Her re-readings of the biblical scripture -- the Serpent's role in the Fall -- her nature stories, gynocentric tales all have a strong impact in the formation of Marchessault's rebellious character.

Terry Goldie's assessment that orality is "a manifestation, a demonstration of the other" is true (117). More recently, there has been a general re-evaluation of the importance of orality and oral cultures and a recognition that the dominance of the written in the construction of ideas of civilization is itself a partial view of a more complex cultural practice. Eventhough the

dominance of writing as the vehicle of authority and truth is not challenged by the writers of indigenous cultures, one can discern an attempt to re-strengthen oral traditions.

Subjectivity and Power

The creation of subjectivity is essential in counter discourse because as Joan Didion observes, "Writing is the act of saying I, of imposing yourself on Other people... it's an aggresssive even a hostile act" (17). Since the narratives in colonial discourse attempted to heap ideas upon ideas of inferiority in the native minds, it is logical to expect the counter discourse attempting to wield hegemony by appropriating the "agressive" I-position.

The question of the subject and subjectivity directly affects colonized people's perception of their identities and their capacities to resist the condition of their domination, their subjection. The power of the "I" in the discourse of the native could be truly comprehended when one studies Paul Smith's view on subjectivity. "Wherever the 'I' speaks, a knowledge is spoken; wherever a knowledge speaks, an 'I' is spoken. This is the dialectical mechanism of a certain presumption of the 'subject': that is, a 'subject is presumed to exist,

indexed as an 'I' and loaded with the burden of epistemologies" (100).

The subject is generally construed epistemologically as the counterpart to the phenomenal object and is commonly described as "the sum of sensations," (Smith XXVII) or the consciousness by which and against which the external world can be posited. In other words, the subject as the product of traditional western philosophical speculation, is the complex yet unified locus of the constitution of the phenomenal world. In different versions the subject enters a dialectic with that world as either its product or its source, or both. In any case, the subject is the "bearer of a consciousness that will interact with whatever the world is taken to consist it" (Smith XXVII).

In Althusser's view, we exist as subjects only in ideology. And again, the term 'subject' has ambiguous potential, meaning either a) held to be responsible, centres of initiative, through being, and b) subjected and tied to an imaginary identity (169). Acceptance of the first meaning would help one to comprehend why it is essential that a counter discourse begins with the appropriation of subject position.

The argument that the acceptance of the subject position within the subject-object dialectic only strengthens the binary opposition inherent in western discourse offers no reprieve to native writers. The opposition or dialectic between subject and object, between self and other, does not seem readily susceptible to being radically over turned. The dialectic of the internal and the external will not quite go away, and human beings are not prone to think about themselves except within some version of that opposition. Even the radical questioning undertaken by deconstruction has regularly to foreground the impossibility of thinking outside or beyond it. Derrida's confession that the dialectical inconveniences are "necessary and, at least at present, nothing is conceivable without them" (13) conveys the dilemma regarding the negation of the all-knowing, all-perceiving subject of western humanism.

The stereotype which the colonizers had constructed to retard or contain native image is implicitly the place where battles are fought and strategies of resistance negotiated. Counter Discourse tries to inhabit this image site by providing alternative ways of perceiving the natives. And one of the most important strategies employed by those involved in counter discourse is the creation of subjectivity of the oppressed. As Key Chow observes, "subjectivity becomes a way to change the

defiled image, the stripped image, the image-reduced-to-nakedness, by showing the truth behind/beneath/around it. The problem with the reinvention of subjectivity as such is that it tries to combat the politics of the image, a politics that is conducted on surfaces, by a politics of depths, hidden truths and inner voices" (qtd. in Mongia 123-24).

In Paul Smith's view, resistance takes place only within a social context which has already construed subject positions for the human agent. He further adds that the place of that resistance has, then, to be glimpsed somewhere in the interstices of the subject positions which are offered in any social formation. More precisely, "resistance must be regarded as the by product of contractions in and among subject positions" (25). The movement from the portrayal as other to that of the self constitutes this form of resistance writing.

The appropriation of the voice of authority, the 'I' in discourse is to be found in many of Lee Maracle's works. But in most cases, in Maracle as well as Crate and Marchessault there are indications of the possibilities of developing configurations of identity that destabilize self/other, margin/centre dichotomies by challenging traditional humanist notions of a unitary self and its

various forms in conventional identity politics. As these writers translate their "marginal" or "threshold" identities (Keating 25) into their writings, they engage in a tactical renaming, or the construction of differentially situated subjectivities that, deployed contextually, deconstruct oppositional categories from within. The discussion of alternate identities will be taken up after a study of the role of power in discourse formation.

In his essay "The Politics of Knowledge", Edward Said writes about the major difference between an impoverishing politics of knowledge and true assertion of identity:

If you are weak, your affirmation of identity for its own sake amounts to little more than saying that you want a kind of attention easily and superficially granted, like the attention given to an individual in a crowded room at a roll call. Once having such recognition, the subject has only to sit there silently as the proceedings unfold as if in his or her absence. (24-5)

In Said's opinion the powerful will be acknowledged by their sheer force of presence. But then by a logic of displacement, as soon as someone else more powerful emerges, they are displaced. This has led to the general

belief that in order to consolidate their dominance, the powerful have to permanently impose themselves. This foregrounding of their own power, difficult as it might be, has been successfully carried out by native writers. In the process of articulating the plight of their people, in depicting the trauma produced by colonial domination, and in an attempt to re-define indigenous cultures, native Indian writers in Canada have inevitably involved themselves in a dialectical polemic with western cultures. They have been drawn irresistibly to writing about the fate of their people in a world controlled by white men.

Native writing often valorizes a specific version of the human condition, the specificity of which is marked, first, by the experiences of racism and prolonged exclusion from and oppression by the dominant culture and, second, by the corresponding development of perseverance, the will to survive, and the celebration of the marginal human condition. That the knowledge about native life and native tradition is best revealed by natives themselves is something that was ignored by the white colonizers for a very long time.

One could see the clear demarcation between the white and native apprehension of knowledge in the autobiographical narratives and in the revisionist historical narrative. Generally the autobiographer sees

him/herself as a whole and coherent human being and subscribes to the possibility of a knowledge about the self. In such autobiographical places, the reader is offered some kind of cohesion of the writing subject.

In traditional autobiography, the appearance of the third "I" (not the subject of enunciation or the subject of the enounced, but that "I" that would be prefigured or desired by the moral and ideological operation of trying to maintain the coherence and propriety of the ideological subject) is a crucial instance of the ideological force of the discourse by which the intended moral subject guarantees its own knowledge by virtue of its provenance in a life lived. Indeed, in this mode, the "I" that speaks becomes a kind of de-facto third person pronoun, supposedly having full objective possession of that which it views.

All the native writers under discussion have succeeded in providing the illusion of a coherent subject. Maracle's self-presentation in I Am Woman functions as a critical intervention into the discursive structure. Her "I" represent a free, unified and autonomous subjectivity and this constitutes a shift from that which has always been considered as other to self. She constructs her subjectivity at the intersection of racism and sexism.

Maracle's self-presentation as a native woman intellectual, functions as a critical intervention into the discursive formation. Her writing of history on a terrain maimed by the racist texts of the white colonizers, too, defies the image of the inarticulate Indian. Again, by disrupting decorum through the usage of vulgar slangs like "getting your rocks off" (25), she attempts to silence critics, who, with a prudery that borders on authoritarianism, tend to lay down the rules for genre writing.

Post structuralism has consistently concentrated on the subject in order to question its traditionally privileged epistemological status. In particular, there has been a sustained effort to question the role of the subject as the intending and knowing manipulator of the object, or as the conscious and coherent originator of meanings and actions. Barthes conceives of subjectivity as exactly an infinite and infinitely mobile collection of subject positions in cahoots with given discourses but never entirely given over to them. "Today the subject apprehends itself elsewhere and subjectivity folds back in upon another point in the spiral -- deconstructed, disunited, deported, unchained; why should I no longer speak of 'myself' when myself is no longer one's self?" (Barthes 171).

The acceptance of the jouissance of this splintered subjectivity, of the almost celebratory dispersal of subjectivity, must call forth a relation of the subject to the external world which will be, as Paul Smith asserts, different from that "metaparanoïd relation established and guaranteed by the unitary subject" (108).

Joan Crate's attempt in Breathing Water is clearly to find a way of escaping the realm of the imaginary, to continually displace the identifications that settle there and fix them. One of the obvious ploys she uses is to write her narrative in fragments -- all discourse, no recit -- and to operate within those fragments the widest possible variation of relationships and personal pronouns. The writing subject here shifts between I and she. What is at stake here is not simply Crate's own effort not to allow the imaginary any stability, nor simply the effort to prevent the reader from making each utterance refer back to a unified enunciator. Rather, it is a question of offering something else; the history of the fragmentary construction of fragmented subjectivity in a theoretically infinite language. Crate through Dione demonstrates here that the process whereby she, as "subject" comes to be crystallized at certain moments and then to be diverted, cast adrift again. In this manner, she proposes the activity of writing as not some expression of presignified or determined instances in a life, but rather the process

of language constructing a momentary subjectivity for the human agent who always, by contestatory and resistant use and reception of language, emerges as the place where contradictory discourses are marked.

In psychoanalytic terms too, Joan Crate destabilizes western culture's dominant/subordinate world view and the subsequent dichotomy between subject and object by blurring the boundaries between self and other. In psychoanalytic parlance, Crate's invitation to recognize the other in ourselves entails a reversal and subsequent reincorporation of the displaced projections that occur during ego splitting. Alicia Ostriker in her essay on the role of language in women's poetry remarks, "[the] quest to reintegrate a split self is simultaneously a drive to topple the hierarchy of the sacred and the profane, redeeming and including what culture has exiled and excluded. To deny the other is to deny the self. Conversely, it is dread of what seems loathsome within the self that produces a projection of it onto another" (196).

The claiming or reclaiming of women's identity has been seen as a means to do away with exploitation, objectification and oppression of women. In most disciplines, this urge has given life to a two-fold enterprise; first filling in the gaps of a patriarchal

tradition, and second, encouraging women's active use of the present social structures to ensure that the newly recovered women's tradition will both continue and have a continuing effect on patriarchal institutions. Elaine Showalter in the essay, "Women and the Literary Curriculum" encourages both tactics as ways of rectifying women's relation to dominant modes of literary studies and textual production, on grounds that "Few women can sustain the sense of a positive feminine identity in the face of [male domination of the curricula]. Women are estranged from their own experience and unable to perceive its shape and authenticity, in part because they do not see it mirrored and given resonance in literature" (qtd in Smith 135).

A woman's claim to identity often devolves in some fashion upon a faith in women's essential character or identity which has been chronologically oppressed and suppressed by male domination and such an identity is some times assumed to be the ground on which to establish the category 'woman'. Thus, the possibility of woman as an identifiable set of subjects mounting any kind of resistance to patriarchy is foreclosed upon immediately. Patriarchy has defined and placed women as the 'other' with the result that, if women begin to speak and act from the same ground of subjectivity and identity as men have traditionally enjoyed, a resistance is automatically

effected in a sense. The marginalization of femininity by patriarchy is a means by which its own identity can be formulated and guaranteed. Thus, in the promotion of claims to women's identity there is already not only a contestation or a seeking of power, but also a contraction at work.

Lee Maracle effects an attempt to empower women by the very use of the title, I Am Woman. This title could also be regarded as an answer to the problematic of gendered identity. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, the Afro-American writer in her essay "To Write My Self", comments on the attempt to define selfhood thus. "[G]ender in the sense of society's prescriptions for how to grow up as a man or as a woman is, in stable societies, inculcated in tandem with, indissolubly from, the child's growing sense of who I am. To be an 'I' at all, to be a self, is to belong to a gender" (168).

This belonging to gender is perhaps, very important to native women writers. For, under colonization, the femininity of the coloured woman was erased. The native man might have been stripped of the social attributes of manhood and fatherhood under western colonization. But the native women were the true losers, they had no satisfactory social definition of themselves as women.

Maracle writes, "How many times do you hear from our own brothers, 'Indian women don't whine and cry around, nag or complain.' At least not 'real' or 'true' Indian women Embodied in that kind of language is the negation of our femininity -- the denial of our womanhood" (17).

The text, thus, is an attempt to define her femininity from her position of invisibility and political and cultural non-existence. Like Sojourner Truth who powerfully addressed the problem and its contradictions in her address "Ar'n't I a Woman?", Lee Maracle too attempts to counter the question: 'Who am I?' In effect, Maracle is insisting on her own femaleness and then querying the relation between her experience of being female and the white middle class experience of being a woman. She elaborates on the depths of the pains and the contradiction of being denied womanhood.

Maracle's assertion "I Am Woman" could be recognized as a challenge to the possible self-satisfaction of white middle class men and women and the patriarchal assumptions of the native male. She counterposes "I" -- the self -- and "woman" in her hostile challenge to the white audience. And the taking up of the autobiographical identity offers Maracle a "standpoint epistemology", "an account of the world as seen from the margins, an account which can expose the falseness of the view from the top

and can transform the margins as well as the center... an account of the world which treats our perspectives not as subjugated or disruptive knowledges, but as primary and constitutive of a different world" (Harstock 171). Her intervention in the disciplinary norms of historiography effects an active displacement of the prevalent white views. Her strong statements like "Catholicism killed our mothers" (122), "Passive resistance is our chief enemy" (99), "To accept a European interpretation of our old ways is foolhardy" (39) and "Without a firm understanding of what our history was before the settlers came to this land, I cannot understand how we are to regain our birthright as caretakers of this land..." (40), reveal a concerted attempt on Maracle's part to reassess white views on native life from the latter's point of view. Her decision that she should "break the chains that imprison me in the present, impede my understanding of the past, and blind me to the future" (40) conveys the extent to which the native mind is imprisoned in the ideology of the oppressor. Thus, through self representation and self-presentation, Maracle exposes the potential to intervene in the comfortable alignments of power relationships.

A few native women writers have responded positively to the demands by psychoanalysis and post-structuralist feminism that one should call into question "the rigid

identity that cramps and binds" (Gallop XII). She does not seek some liberation from identity, for, that would lead to another form of paralysis. Identity, in Gallop's view, must be continually assumed and immediately called into question.

This deconstructionist view on the negative aspects of a "rigid identity" is in keeping with the ideas of radical feminists who warn that a woman's identity lies outside the realms of patriarchal language. Mary Daly observes:

The fact is that the female saying 'I' is alien at every moment to her own speaking and writing. She is broken by the fact that she must enter this language in order to speak or write. As the 'I' is broken, so also is the Inner Eye, the capacity for integrity of knowing/sensing. In this way the Inner Voice of the self's integrity is silenced, the external voice babbles in alien and alienating tongues. (355)

The way out of this alienation is pointed out by both Julia Kristeva and Helen Cixous whose differences do find a meeting point in the theory of the Imaginary or the Semiotic. Kristeva's theories are rooted in psychoanalysis. The semiotic is defined, through the

language of psychoanalysis as being an only partially socialized supplement to the symbolic order. That is, it is linked to a kind of residuary, pre-oedipal aspect of subjectivity. Kristeva makes the case that the semiotic is the effect of the bodily drives which are incompletely repressed when the paternal order has intervened in the mother/child dyad and it is, therefore, attached psychically to the mother's body. Kristeva's semiotic and symbolic are not posed in contradistinction to one another. They both have a part in the construction and constitution of the "subject" and continually cross each other to the extent that together they render "signification as an assymetrical but double process" (Kristeva 80).

This theory about the symbolic and the semiotic continually crossing each other could be regarded as a prelude to Cixous' theory of feminine ecriture, where language is constructed solely in the semiotic. If Joan Crate's splintered identity could be seen as adhering to Kristeva's pre-oedipal, Jovette Marchessault conforms to Cixous' celebratory, sometimes mystical writing which predicates future possibilities on the disruption of all notions of psychic identity. Also, by refusing to fall back onto the idea of a primary or core identity, Marchessault provides a powerful accompaniment to "humanist feminist notions of subjectivity" (Smith 146).

Cixous in "The Laugh of the Medusa" writes that the symbolic world is a phallogocentric organization constructed in the tight knot of "a liberal and cultural -- hence political and typically masculine -- economy" (249). She rejects the Freudian/Lacanian proposal that women are necessarily in a negative relation to the symbolic. She wants that phallogocentric economy be de-thought (depense) - - that libidinal as well as economic structures be undone at one swoop of the female body.

Adrienne Rich, too, describes the formation of a "female consciousness" (Lies 18) as a necessary precondition in the construction of a feminine language. In her view, "Patriarchal thought has limited female biology to its own narrow specifications. The feminist vision has recoiled from female biology for these reasons; it will, I believe, come to view our physicality as a resource, rather than a destiny... We must touch the unity and resonance of our physicality, our bond with the natural order, the corporeal ground of our intelligence" (Born 21).

Thus Rich argues the one should not reject the importance of female biology simply because patriarchy has used it to subjugate women. The idea that a woman's language that inscribes female desire could be used as a

resistance to phallogocentric power has become popular since the seventies. The female subject envisioned by this school of thought is centred at the level of the Imaginary, but dispersed in its relations to language and the structures of male domination. The female subject in this schema is constructed by way of a certain stratification dispersal and disruption at the level of the subject's operations in the symbolic, subverted however by a coherence at the unconscious level.

Jovette Marchessault's rebellion against the patriarchal language transcends issues of grammar and stylistics. In order to express her rage against a culture which has severed women from their bodies, from the memory of their foremothers, from themselves, Marchessault had to unmask the taboos and the apparent logic of the dominant language as hypocritical veneers which hide the confusion and the pain of the oppressed. To accomplish the elevation of the feminine, she deviates constantly from a purely autobiographical discourse in order to insert mature feminist observation and philosophical argumentation alongside the more poetic descriptions of her grandmother's intuitive comprehension of life and her own youthful discoveries and disappointments.

In Mother of the Grass, the young autobiographical protagonist remains unnamed until the novel's final page. This is done primarily because of the author's desire to establish a continual link in her narrative between her own story and those of countless other mothers, daughters and grandmothers. But the final naming of the text's protagonist is also a symbolic inscription of the female writer herself, signaling her ultimate rejection of the patriarchal and materialist values she had previously adopted to survive in the modern urban sphere, then came to loathe as she began to view the world through her grandmother's eyes. Ironically, it is the event of her grandmother's death that gives Jovette Marchessault the necessary strength to recognize and accept the significance of her own female lineage and difference:

My grandmother's death unclenched something in me. First, a tumbling of the fears which fell to dust, the circling and so gentle motion of her arms around me when I was little... my grandmother's words, my only inheritance... my most precious possession. It was that which gave me the strength to pick up the phone, to say, 'Hello Grosslot, this is Jovette Marchessault and I will not be back today, or tomorrow, or the day after. It is over. (173)

Precipitated by the passing of one woman's life, the narrative closure paradoxically opens up and liberates the life of another. The text of Mother of the Grass is, in effect, both the creative product and the poetic symbol of freedom.

Multiple Identities

The subject 'coloured woman' has moved from a positioning as an object of oppression to one as a subject who responds to oppression through multiple modes of resistant self-understanding. This has led to the discussion of "a multiplicity of identity" or "plural selves" (Espinoza 48). Embracing plural identities can be a liberatory practice for women who often find themselves committed to multiple subject positions. But it could also tear the subject under reference in many directions when it derives from the hegemonic legislation of reality leading to the fear, as voiced by Anzaldua, that "they would chop me up into little fragments" (Bridge 205).

But many writers assert that a commitment to identity politics is not at odds with multiplicity. For instance, the Combahee River Collective -- a group of coloured lesbian activists in 1977 presented a theory of identity politics based on multiple oppressions. They were "concerned with any situation that impinges upon the lives of women, Third World and working people" and they

indicted White Feminist racism after affirming their own "vision of a revolutionary society" (Anzaldua 217-18). Recognizing the multiplicity of identity and oppression, they asserted that racial, sexual, heterosexual and class oppressions were often enacted simultaneously.

Lee Maracle, a practitioner of the powerful subject position assumes multiple identity in I Am Woman. She takes up her position as a spokesperson for both natives and for women. While speaking about the need for women to empower themselves, Maracle writes, "We look at males when they speak and stare off into space when a woman steps assertively into the breach of leadership. Men who stand up and passionately articulate our aspirations about sovereignty are revered as powerful leaders, women who do so are 'intimidating'. We mock the liberation of womanhood" (18).

In spite of her preoccupation with native feminism, Maracle continues to raise her voice against white racism:

To win we must plan in the cellars and attics, lurking in the dark with one eye cast about for the enemy. In our heart of hearts, we know the enemy is a beast that will stop at nothing to keep his world intact.... We know the enemy is ever watchful, on guard day and night against the

potential threat we all pose. To plan, we must learn to sum up our history -- not the history of betrayal but the history of our resistance. We must learn from our mistakes and chart the course for our eventual victory. (95)

Maracle's voice is most vitriolic when she raises her voice in support of the bodily-oppressed -- the rape victims among native women. She writes about natives being "spiritually dead people", warmed up and forced to behave as if they were alive. "I am certain it is because we have been raped. Our men know that we have been raped. They watched it happen. Some of the rape we have been subjected to was inflicted by them. Some of them were our fathers and our brothers. We are like a bunch of soft knot in dead trees, chopped down by white men, the refuse left for our own men-folk" (56).

Eventhough Maracle is not a lesbian, in the essay "Isn't Love a Given?", she ponders over the question of homosexuality:

Having the freedom to love, be loved, determine the nature of the physical expression of that love, the power to name it, govern it, is liberating, whether the person you enjoy this freedom with is the same sex as you or different

from you. It is just as powerful to enjoy the freedom to love with a man as it is with a woman. What is lacking for all women is the absolute right to be cherished and the absolute freedom to govern our love's expression. (26-7)

But, such stances on the multiplicity of oppressions, especially by lesbian writers are severely criticized. Diana Fuss observes that the case of the Combahee River Collective is a problematic example of lesbian identity politics deployed in the context of social struggle. Referring to the particular identity politics of coloured lesbians, Fuss remarks that they advance a definition of identity politics that lacks "a full awareness of the complicated processes of identity formation, both physical and social" (100). Fuss argues that gay and lesbian activists attempt to establish a causal relationship between identity and politics, invoking confused binary choices in which the subject is expected to "claim" or "discover" a ready-made identity or to "make" and "construct" such an identity out of scratch (99). She further argues that here "the link between identity and politics is causally and technologically defined while, "for practitioners of identity politics, identity necessarily determines a particular kind of politics" (99).

Such statements undermine the related interests of lesbian writing. To relate their identity only to their sexuality would be too prejudiced a view. Marchessault's interests in feminism, her anxiety over the issues of racism, destabilization of nature and the deteriorating effects of technology are all portrayed vibrantly in the three novels of her trilogy. As a speaking subject of the newly constructed discursive formation of counter discourse, Marchessault is well aware of her subjectivity across a multiplicity of discourses: feminist, lesbian, nationalist, racial, socio-economic and historical. The peculiarity of this displacement across several identities perhaps implies a multiplicity of positions from which she is driven to grasp or understand herself and her relations with the real.

Chela Sandoval in her work on U.S. Third World Feminism formulates the theory that "oppositional consciousness" becomes possible only when the "subject can learn to identify, develop and control the means of ideology, that is, marshal the knowledge necessary to 'break with [dominant] ideology' while also speaking in and from within ideology" (2). Thus when women of colour can identify the ideological implications of their "half dozen categories of marginality", they can also begin to create a space for oppositional consciousness.

The valorization of the multiple identities receives accolade from none other than Foucault who emphasizes the "relational character" of power, whose "existence depends on a multiplicity of points of resistance" (Sexuality 95). "From Foucault's perspective, instead of examining power as the key to understanding and dismantling subordinations, it might be better to examine resistance and struggle" (Smart 135). Like power, resistance is not a homogenous, fixed phenomenon: it is pluralized, "diverse in form, heterogeneous, mobile and transitory" (Cousins and Hussain 242). He considered resistance to be an exercise of power, as a projection of alternative truths. To him, liberation could be identified with resistance, the acting out of refusal at multiple points of power relations (Wolin 181).

Marchessault's body-writing finds support in Foucault's theory that the attack on bio-power should rally around "bodies and pleasures" (Sexuality 157). The frequency with which Foucault designates the body as the target of power lends credence to the critical view that Foucault presupposes that the body is an essential subject. Foucault also insists that our subjectivity, our identity and our sexuality are intimately linked. They do not exist outside of or prior to language and representation, but are actually brought into play by discursive strategies and representational practices. The

relationship between the body and discourse or power is not a negative one as power renders the body active and productive. Sexuality and identity can only be understood, then, in terms of the complicated and often paradoxical ways in which pleasures, knowledges and power are produced and disciplined in "language, and institutionalized across multiple social fields" (Martin 278).

That women writers can resist totalizing, universalizing and essentializing identity categories and still be able to act has been proved beyond doubt by Jovette Marchessault and Joan Crate. They seem to share Judith Butler's view that political action is not possible but more likely if we refuse to totalize or essentialize woman. Butler suggests that it would be better to see "women" as "an undesignatable field of differences" rather than as a totalized "identity category" so that the term can become "a site of permanent openness and resignifiability" (16). While keeping an open mind to the post-structuralist /post-modernist notions on challenging the coherent, autonomous subject, it is also necessary to remember that both postcolonial writers and women writers must work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity. For writers like Lee Maracle, who write from the insecure intersections of racism and sexism, the radical post-modern challenges could appear to be the

luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses.

Writing Resistance

In spite of their differences, post-modernism and postcolonial feminist writing have overlapping concerns in form, theme and strategy. In critiquing traditions, rejecting the universal (male) subject, embracing differences, rethinking margin/centre dichotomies, deconstructing existing power structures and in re-visioning of history, post-modernism might appear to be a natural ally of postcolonial feminism. But nowhere is their similarity more obvious than in their "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard XXIV). A detailed discussion of the inversion of these "masternarratives -- narratives of mastery, of man seeking his telos in the conquest of nature" (Sarup 132) will be taken up later in this thesis.

Counter Discourse is a term coined by Richard Terdiman to characterize the theory and practice of symbolic resistance. It is also the means of producing genuine change against the "capacity of established discourses to ignore or absorb would-be subversion" (13). Or, in other words, it is a subversive strategy whereby "the margins of the nation displace the centre: the

peoples of the periphery return to write the history and fiction of the metropolis" (Bhabha, Nation 6).

The attempts to create a Counter Discourse was not an assuaging process for the postcolonial because any attempt to hold a subject position turned into a mockery with the stereotypes intervening in the discursive fields of the natives. Aijaz Ahmad portrays the dilemma of the postcolonial when he writes:

Any attempt to know the world as a whole, as to hold that it is open to rational comprehension, let alone the desire to change it, was to be dismissed as a contemptible attempt to construct 'grand narratives' and 'totalizing' (totalitarian?) knowledges ... Power was universal and immutable; resistance could only be local; knowledge, even of power, always partial. Affiliations could only be shifting and multiple; to speak of a stable subject position was to chase the chimera of the 'myth of origins'. (69)

In spite of the fact that the counter-discourse is constructed to counter the established discourses, it can be identified only by reference to the institutions to which it relates and by the position from which it comes and which it marks out for the speaker. As Richard

Terdiman has pointed out counter discourses are always interlocked with and parasitic on the dominant they contest, "working as opposition without effacing the antagonist, inhabiting and struggling with the dominant which inhabits them" (Parry 88).

From this, what emerges is the fact that the prevailing discourse could be countered, but not overthrown, by anything keeping to its terms and its terrain. What could speak beside it, on its terrain, was a counter discourse which would essentially surround the antagonist and attempt to neutralize or explode it. The criticism that the discourse of resistance is often not enough to break the hold of prevailing ideologies appears to have a true ring as it is often caught between negativity (rejecting what is dominantly affirmed) and complicity (granting primacy to what it opposes).

The native women writers discussed here certainly do reject the tropes imposed by dominant discourse, but they are also guilty of complicity in that in their very opposition to concepts of racism, patriarchy and religious intervention, they also unknowingly assert their primacy. A good example of such complicity is to be seen in Lee Maracle's I Am Woman.

Early in the book she stresses the fact that the book is not meant for Europeans. "If you do not find yourselves spoken to, it is not because I intend rudeness--you just don't concern me now," (10) writes Maracle. But evident all through the text is the implied reader, the 'white' you. In "Heartless Teachers" Maracle reprimands teachers for distorting history: "You taught my child that, here, on the West Coast, we were cannibals" (79). Ardent as she is in her attack on colonialism, Maracle is unable to explode the myth of the centrality of the White reader. Thus the same eurocentrism which she attempts to dismantle is strengthened by her vigorous attack on it. "In the interest of humanity, you ought to sound the death-knell of your own decadent ways and the renaissance of my ways. Such things as genocide, confinement and cultural prohibition are not part of my ways. We were almost obliterated by your ancestors" (82).

In spite of such deterrents in the practice of counter discourse, native writers by adopting a series of tactics like revisionary historicism, mimicry, guerilla ethnography and reversal of myths have succeeded in positioning themselves as the new centres of power. Their complicity would be explained as a means by which previously muted groups attempt to communicate in the dominant mode, for, "in any situation, only the dominant mode of the relevant group will be 'heard' or 'listened

to'. The 'muted groups' in any context, if they wish to communicate, must express themselves in terms of this mode, rather than in ones which they might otherwise have generated independently" (Ardener 20).

Since most of the tactics of resistance writing will be discussed under both postcolonialism and feminism in the following chapters, the discussion in this chapter is limited to the specialist modes of resistance writing like new schemata, mimicry, revisionary historicism and revisionary ethnography.

For most writers of resistance literature, cultural production plays a decisive and critical role in the activation of what Edward Said referred to as a "repressed or resistant history" ("Orientalism Reconsidered" 94). Resistance literature is seen as immediately and directly involved in a struggle against ascendant or dominant forms of ideological and cultural production. And this involves the inversion of schematic knowledge as assessed by white writers and patriarchy.

For any discourse to be intelligible, it is essential that the reader be able to adjust to an existing schemata so that the mind, stimulated either by key linguistic items in the text or by the context, activates a schema,

and uses it to make sense of the discourse. In the context of the theories where schematic knowledge is seen as a crucial component of a language user's competence and therefore also of central importance in language acquisition (Cook 46); it is necessary for a native writer to break the barriers of the reader's understanding. This could be done by opting for known schemata and adhering to them so that the reader could identify it in any context and understand the discourse. But in native-centred texts written by the white authors, one could perceive an adherence to definite schematas through a misrepresentation of traditional native values and beliefs. By using stereotypes and by describing native rituals, native spirituality and native mysticism, non-native writers force the schemata onto the reader's minds.

The lengthy descriptions of family relationships in Maracle's novels, the discussion of the problem of alcoholism and the presence of the Grandmother in Jovette Marchessault's novels--all are instances which prove that the ordering of the discourse is determined by the writer's hypothesis about what the reader does and does not know.

Schemata are definitely not fixed structures. The process of "schema refreshment" (Cook 191) undertakes a renewal of existing schemata and this involves the process

of "schema disruption." These may be divided into two types--those which disrupt schemata through conventional text and language structures and those whose disruption is matched by deviant text and language structure (192).

The former category is undertaken both by Lee Maracle and Joan Crate. Maracle's creation of strong subject-positions in I Am Woman, Ravensong and Sundogs, her portrayal of the power of orality in these novels and the depiction of urbanized Indian families in Canada as opposed to the existing ideas of native life are all instances of disruption of schemata through conventional text and language.

Guy Cook in his book Discourse and Literature discusses the modes of schema formation and also comments on the term schema disruption. "Deviant language may change language schemata and a deviant world may change world schemata" (204).

Deviant language is employed by Jovette Marchessault in her acceptance of l'écriture feminine. In her epic of origins, Like a Child of the Earth, the protagonist's very movement through flight and space to earth and her nomadic wanderings disrupt the expectancies of the reader. In the second novel of the trilogy, Mother of the Grass,

Marchessault disrupts all schemata by writing in a style that joins in the flood tide of women's speech and by reversing the myth of Creation. She displaces the Christian creation myth of the fecundating divine Father's Word. This new myth locates the origins of creation in the woman's body and gives a visionary sense of what the future might be when women's power is recognized. White Pebbles in the Dark Forests is deviant in form, language and content. Because of the dialogue form, the schemata is not predictable. The discourse here is the creation of two or more people in interaction, and thus only partly under the control of one individual. That this discourse is in the written form and not the spoken certainly does signify that it is a pre-meditated work, but the presence of two or more voices incorporated into the text makes it a cause for disruption.

Marchessault's Lesbian Triptych also disrupts schemata on all levels. In the first narrative of this Triptych, "A Lesbian Chronicle", she traces a lesbian heroine's journey from the dark ages of religious bigotry to the bright and joyous realm of a woman centred culture. The child protagonist of this section, both a prophet who foretells the coming of a new feminist era and a fighter against the heterosexual ideology of male supremacy finds no parallel in literature. To subvert the traditional bourgeois language of its facade of rationality,

Marchessault experiments with the sound of words, the analogous formation of idioms and the emergence of the absurd. In fact, the power of the phonetic language to shape new perceptions is illustrated at the beginning when the young girl's discovery of the choke of a car produces a linguistic illumination. The words, "choke" and "bloke" become so closely associated in her mind that a new truth dawns on her: "Her bloke ! Her choke ! After my illumination, my etymological intuition in the shed, they were, for me, the same thing. They had the same function -- to throttle" (39). Similarly, the author's play on the sound and rhythm of idioms succeeds in communicating feelings of anger which might never surface in a purely rational discourse. The following passage describes men harassing young girls at the end of the school day,

They looked at me as I passed: Misss Tsss! Tsss!
They licked their chops as they saw me walking
by, a walking Adam's rib. Good enough to eat! I
heard them sharpen their teeth, I heard their
mouths watering, I heard them drool as they took
out their sharp and pointy tools. They would
devour my eyes, suck my marrow, gnaw my bones,
strip off my skin. They wanted to cook me in the
oven with their radioactive mushrooms. Oh, what
a nice piece! A nice piece of meat!. (61)

In order to communicate women's true perceptions of reality, Marchessault goes one step further when she re-examines words, the very terms which shape our thinking and which mirror the prevailing attitudes of the class in power. Thus, the word "Feast" means public rejoicing to the dominant culture and the same term signified "grief, suffering, and bottomless descents into despair... guilt, punishment, redemption, permanent sacrifice, a flight into nothingness, humiliation, flagellation" (41) to the author. These semantic differences account for the author's desire to create other expressions and to give new meanings to a vocabulary which is incapable of expressing the feelings of the down trodden. Again, the words "road" and "side walk" come to mean the gender roles in which the patriarchal culture imprisons women. The irony within the title "Angelmakers" -- the makers of angels and abortionists also disrupt all our readerly expectations. The creation of a pre-patriarchal world in "The Night Cows" also helps Marchessault to appropriate deviant modes of resistance writing. Thus by means of conventional as well as non-conventional methods, the native women writers engage in "schema disruption" and subsequent interruption into the semiotic field of the dominant discourse.

Another seemingly compliant narrative mode employed by writers of resistance literature is that of mimicry.

It is a term in postcolonial theory which describes the ambivalent relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. When colonial discourse encourages the colonized subject to 'mimic' the colonizer, by adopting the latter's cultural habits, assumptions, institutions and values, the result is never a simple reproduction of these traits. Rather, the result is a "blurred copy" of the colonizer that can be quite threatening (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 139). This is because mimicry is never very far from mockery, since it can appear to parody whatever it mimics. This attribute of mimicry has been well appropriated by Native Indian Writers too. The ability of mimicry to locate a crack in the certainty of colonial dominance and an uncertainty in its control of the behaviour of the colonized could very well strengthen the cause of counter discourse.

For Homi Bhabha mimicry is the process by which the colonized subject is reproduced as "almost the same, but not quite" (Location 86). The copying of the colonizing culture, behaviours, manners and values by the colonized contains both mockery and a certain 'menace', "so that mimicry is at once resemblance and menace" (86). In her portrayal of the character Dione, Joan Crate in Breathing Water mimics the urbanized life of White Canadians. The submergence of her Indian self disrupts the very

subjectivity of the protagonist. Her 'almost-white' life style, her imprisonment within the confines of modern amenities like the "dishwasher, the washer and dryer, the vacuflo, the garburator, stereo, radio and tv" (33) gives her no respite from the frustration and marital boredom she suffers. The ending of the novel is perhaps ambivalent, with Dione, after a long string of sexual (mis)adventures, returns home to become a dutiful wife. But this is in no way shown to be the best option, since one sees Dione, not as a happy wife, but as one who is forced to reconcile with her lot. The endless drudgery of partying and inconsequential small talk is presented even after Dione's transformation. In effect, Dione, like the wife of the son of the sea, learns to breathe in water, to live in hostile company.

The threat inherent in mimicry is brought down to a minimal level in this text. This threat comes not from an overt resistance but from the way in which it continually suggests an identity not quite like the colonizer. This identity of the colonial subject -- "almost the same but not quite" (Bhabha, Location 86) -- means that the colonial culture is always potentially and strategically insurgent. This insurgence could be seen in the almost - assimilated character Marianne in Lee Maracle's Sundogs too.

Resistance literature, in order to maintain its relevance in the discursive field has to frequently interpret its importance in the present. And appeals to the past are among the commonest of strategies in interpretations of the present. In Said's view, "What animates such appeals is not only disagreement about what happened in the past and what the past was, but uncertainty about whether the past really is past, over and concluded, or whether it continues, albeit in different forms, perhaps. This problem animates all sorts of discussions -- about influence, about blame and judgement, about present actualities and future priorities" (Culture 1).

Most native writers bear their past within them as scars of humiliating wounds. If in the past they had read the great colonial metanarratives and had interpreted themselves along colonial lines of representations, native writers today are in a position to re-interpret not just themselves but also the white community. And nowhere is this more visible than in the ethnographic studies of whites by natives.

Ethnography, in anthropological terms, refers to a social research method whereby the ethnographer "participates, overtly or covertly, in people's daily lives for an extended period of time, watching what

happens, listening to what is said, asking questions; in fact collecting whatever data are available to throw light on the issues with which he or she is concerned" (Hammersley and Atkinson 2). In counter discourse, the role played by ethnography is more significant. It has experienced vigorous debates about the status of reflexivity, the extent to which the ethnographer is conscious of his or her own subject position. Or, in other words, the importance of the ethnographer has been enhanced as only a person who could assert his/her subjectivity could begin to study another's life.

Clifford Geertz argues that with the demise of colonialism, "the west can no longer present itself as the unique purveyor of anthropological knowledge about others" (22). Clifford is optimistic about ethnography's ability to shake off its western epistemological legacy, and in his book, The Predicament of Culture (1988), he surveys several modes of ethnographic writing. While ethnographic writing "cannot entirely escape the reductionist use of dichotomies and essences, it can at least struggle self-consciously to avoid portraying abstract ahistorical "others" (23). Despite the earlier role of ethnography in the colonial enterprise (where rigid lines were drawn regarding the life and culture of the colonized), Clifford propounds the need for a decentred ethnographic practice,

which takes into account and explodes, its colonial history. Such arguments as "it is more than ever crucial for different peoples to form complex concrete images of one another, as well as of the relationships of knowledge and power that connect them" (Geertz 23) give credence to the belief that ethnography is a subversive tool in the hands of the native writers.

A revisionist ethnography of sorts is attempted by Lee Maracle. The protagonist in Maracle's Ravensong, Stacey makes a study of white community's attitude to sex and sin and comes to the conclusion that the native communities were more mature in their attitudes towards life. This aspect of ethnography will be dealt with later in the chapter "From the Margins of the Margin." Again, in Stacey's opinion, her extended family was more closely knit than her friend Carol's nuclear family. When Mrs. Snowden, Carol's mother greeted the two friends enthusiastically, Stacey feels a wave of endless cynicism "stitching itself to her insides", "This greeting seemed both false and fitting, almost characteristic of their world. Stacey knew most of the children of white town were transient visitors in the lives of their parents. Carol had told her she was expected to move out to fend for herself as soon as she turned eighteen. The enthusiasm now seemed so fake" (33).

The dinner at the Snowdens' that subsequently followed too leaves bitter thoughts in Stacey's mind. The exaggerated etiquettes at the dinner table and the propriety of topics discussed at the table -- all appear wierd and snobbish in Stacey's eyes. Stacey excuses herself from the table to avoid being a participant in "the Snowden masquerade" (37).

The narrative, at this point is interlaced with memories of her own family, the warmth and the unity surrounding family dinners. Eventhough Lee Maracle does not attempt to make an ethnographic study, in the anthropological sense of the term, she certainly does empower a character to re-create and re-vision the life of the colonizers.

One aspect of European ethnography -- the presumption over "the native's incapacity to intervene in scientific discourse" (Said, Culture 35) is proved wrong by Jovette Marchessault in White Pebbles in the Dark Forests. The novel is a protest against the destructive uses of modern science, the torture of animals in the name of research, and the adaptation of space technology for ulterior motives. "What seemed at the beginning, to be an extraordinary adventure marked by the spirit of romance", observes the narrator referring to the beginning of aviation at the turn of the century, "was transformed,

with demented speed, into a gigantic enterprise of death" (53). Marchessault proceeds to give us details of airplanes:

For the aviatrixes and aviator of the '20s, the biplane was the best kind of airplane. Brought into the world by Deperdussin -- it was the first plane to break the two hundreds kph mark in full flight....

Equipped with the famous Hispano - Suiza engine, the Spad could attain an engine speed of 215 kph. At cruising speed, it could remain aloft for close to six hours; at top speed, for more than two. From head to tail, with its flexed canvas, its stabilizer with its triangular aileron, all it carried into the sky was streamlined. Even the propeller blades, painted like saw teeth, pushed it toward the sky where it was metamorphosed into a bird of prey in colour, in music, going at the same pace as the clouds and the wind. (54-5)

In her very effective counter discourse, Marchessault also suggests that one reason for the malady that destroys the late twentieth century spirit is the extent of animal torture in our time. She writes, "Since 1945, around a

billion dogs have been tortured to the point of death" (88). And again she enumerates the victims of the animal kingdom: "Eighteen million turtles dead with electrodes buried in their brains, for monkeys, rabbits, cats, mice, and calves, the figure of six billion is conservative" (88). Marchessault, very effectively criticizes the narrow selfish interest of modernity. Only a return to the natural ways of life -- of caring, sharing and healing -- could spell a future for mankind. By using her narrative to discuss the destructive tendencies of the modern man, Marchessault intervenes in the discursive field of the patriarchal eurocentric discourse.

Revisionary historiography is another tactic to be employed in resistance literature as any culture that seeks to become independent of imperialism has to imagine its own past. Using the Ariel-Caliban metaphor and their colonized status and relating them to postcolonial theory could prove a point or two in this context. In Said's opinion, the native could be like Ariel, a willing servant of Prospero. When he gains his freedom he returns to his native element, a sort of bourgeois native untroubled by his collaboration with Prospero. A second choice is to do it like Caliban, aware of and accepting his mongrel past but not disabled for future development. A third choice is to be a Caliban who shed his current servitude and

physical disfigurements in the process of discovering his essential, pre-colonial self (Culture 258).

The third choice has been taken up by most writers of resistance literature. And only recently have the westerners become aware that "what they have to say about the history and the cultures of 'subordinate' peoples is challengeable by the people themselves, people who a few years back were simply incorporated, culture, land, history and all into the great western empires and their disciplinary discourses" (Said, Culture 235).

Rewriting history involves a comprehensive, objective perspective and this objectivity, it was believed, till recently, to be the prerogative of the white colonizers. Reclaiming history involves not just the valorization of the collective histories repressed by the colonizers but also "addressing the significance of personal histories within the large histories of the nation" (Ahmad 109). And while the histories of the Indian communities and their struggles are spotlighted, many of the writers under discussion also seek to make significant the personal stories of people like Louis Riel, Elijah Harper and others.

In her collection of essays, I Am Woman, Lee Maracle makes a pertinent observation on the issue of rewriting

history: "Once we understand what kind of world they have created, then we can figure out what kind of world we can re-create" (90). To discover the slips and blunders in the history written by the settlers and to dispute them demands a good deal of objectivity and hence rewriting history is a difficult task that demands scholarship and tenacity. The reconstruction of history is even more difficult for a Native Indian because there are instances where whole cultures have been destroyed.

Lee Maracle turns her ire on "heartless teachers" (79) who helped propagate the idea that Native Indians were cannibals:

You give my children Europe to emulate, respect and learn from, and at the same time, debase Native peoples' national roots. Who is going to insist that Europe's descendants in my homeland learn from and emulate the heroes and bright moments in our history? Which European child in your classroom knows of Khatsalana, Coquitlam, Capilano or our much lauded (by us) statesman and self-taught constitutional lawyer, Andrew Paull ?. (80)

Lee Maracle believes that Native Indians will attain equality only when their "separate history is recognized"

(80), for until then the myths of decadence and cannibalism propogated by the settler's history would dog them. She declares very optimistically that as Indians become more and more capable of countering the settlers in their own domain, "a new history will ...be written by those who would change the course of history" (91).

Jovette Marchessault attempts to change the course of history when she in Like a Child of the Earth, presents us with an alternate history. Her reworking of Columbus' exploits finds support in Aijaz Ahmad's claim that "Columbus was following a Christian vision of being the first man, Adam naming the world" (24). Ahmad's contention that the landfall at Guanahani led to the death and enslavement of most of the indigenous people and the headlong exploitation of their resources is in clear opposition to the settlers' claim that their first priority was to civilize the demoniac indigenes. Ahmad notes, "One in three of the indigenous population of Hispaniola were dead within two years of Columbus' arrival; in thirty years they had all been wiped out. What torture, disease and imprisonment did not achieve, mass suicide completed" (25).

Marchessault, in her first novel of the trilogy, Like a Child of the Earth, moves like a guerilla leader in

action, subtly yet decisively, proving point by point, the falsity of European historical assumptions. She attempts to wrest the native expropriated history of the indigenes back, reappropriate it for themselves in order to reconstruct a new world historical order. The protagonist in the novel makes a unique journey across all America, past cornfields haunted by Jack Kerouac's ghost, to Montreal, and back through time to Columbus. And here, she portrays the navigator -- Christopher Columbus -- as he appeared to the natives, not as the greatest explorer of his time, but as a savage greedy for gold. Marchessault's account of the man as one who "shot and killed a number of savages with his crossbows in order to teach [the Indians] respect for the weapons of Castille is in keeping with Aijaz Ahmad's perception of the same event. Again, she portrays Colonel William Cody not as a hero from the American West, but as a "bloody killer". She writes:

One day Colonel William Cody appeared, the most bloody killer yet, an assassin designated by the army, by the railway companies, and by the traders in skin and leather. Colonel William Cody alias Buffalo Bill, came with his death, clear-eyed, determined to satisfy his employers and organized a systematic massacre... He killed indefatigably, helped by an army of worms...

Buffalo Bill multiplied like an earthworm and in no time the fanfare of their hooves was buried once and for all in the Native American earth. (135)

In this context, Marchessault also makes subtle attack along other lines too. "In 1889, in the days of Colonel William Cody, alias Buffalo Bill, the year that saw the death of Joe Beef and the birth of Adolph Hitler, five hundred and forty bison were counted on the Native American land" (136).

By juxtaposing the legendary hero Buffalo Bill with Joe Beef and Adolph Hitler, Marchessault attempts a guerilla ambush of sorts.

Marchessault's attempt in this novel is to acquaint herself with the Native North American geography, in order to appropriate it imaginatively for herself and for aboriginal people, in defiance of Columbus and Buffalo Bill and several hundred years of colonization.

Writers like Lee Maracle have also passed the test of objectivity. Eventhough she thinks highly of the American Indian Movement (AIM), she does not allow her love for her community to blind her eyes towards the mistakes committed by native activists. She attributes the failure of AIM at

Wounded Knee to the lack of leadership within the movement. She amplifies:

The most vocal and articulate males, those who conducted themselves the most like arrogant whitemen, were interviewed and reported on over and over again. Touted as leaders, these men overshadowed the issue. The real goals of the occupation were lost in the shuffle. The leadership clique entrenched itself. These leaders began to hire themselves out for speaking tours, initially to raise money for the wounded knee trials. Later they began to live off the movement rather than for it. (98)

Having been a supporter of the AIM in the past, and having seen the rise and fall of the youth movement, Lee Maracle is vehement in her attack on the so called leaders of the movement. As a native intellectual ["I confess that I am an intellectual" (102)], Maracle does not let the fascist tendencies of AIM go unquestioned. Armed with her previous weapons with which she had attacked western domination, Maracle is able to criticize, with more vigour, more rage and more insight, the patterns and structures of domination within the community.

The narratives discussed above not only actively participate in the creation of counter discourse, but also answer Gayatri Spivak's question "Can the Subaltern Speak?". They have proved that the subaltern can not only speak, but also effectively participate in the ongoing debates of post colonial theory and practice and thus meet the enemy from their own sites of resistance.

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**COUNTER DISCOURSE IN THE WORKS OF
JOAN CRATE, JOVETTE MARCHESSAULT
AND LEE MARACLE**

*THESIS SUBMITTED TO
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RAJANI B.

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT.**

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Chapter 2
Feminism in the Native Context

What would become of logocentrism, of the great philosophical systems, of world order in general if the rock upon which they founded their church were to crumble ?

If it were to come out in a new day that the logocentric project had always been, undeniably to found (fund) phallogentrism, to insure for masculine order a rationale equal to history itself ?

Then all the stories would have to be told differently, the future would be incalculable, the historical forces would, will, change hands, bodies, another thinking, as yet not thinkable, will transform the functioning of all society.

(Cixous, "Sorties" 92-93)

One of the raging issues of feminism which still remains unresolved is the question as to how women should construct their discourse, deconstructing the

phallogocentric thought of patriarchy. Helene Cixous' statement points out that "all the stories would have to be told differently." For women writers to break out of the discourse they despise, they have to engage in a counter discourse in which "the body and mind are both involved in a seductive process... of using language, of learning new ways to use it, [this] is linked to a disrobing, self-exposure" (Scott 95).

This chapter deals with the manner in which the native writers construct their stories along French and Anglo-American Feminist modes of thought. Special emphasis is given to the textual strategies of revisionist myth making, *l'écriture féminine*, the female bildungsroman and feminist romance. It is pertinent to note here that none of the authors discussed here -- Joan Crate, Jovette Marchessault or Lee Maracle -- could be seen using similar methods. While Joan Crate excels in her use of the feminist romance, and while Jovette Marchessault gives expression to her version of body writing, Lee Maracle alone writes from the native milieu: She does incorporate ideas of female bonding and the bildungsroman, but racism, in her writings certainly dominates sexism. The concept of race and the subversive marginal strategies employed in the counter discourse of these writers will be discussed in the next chapter.

The positions which women writers are required to embrace regarding the various aspects of feminism are diverse. Should women celebrate a marginal discourse, a woman's language, or should they take over the existing language and make it express their exclusive experience ? Should women become adept at playing the male political game in the dominant political arena, or should they work toward the building of a specifically feminine culture ? Should they demand separate women's studies departments or should they feminize the general curriculum ? Should feminist intellectuals claim a righteous place within the humanist tradition or should they accept post-structuralist critiques of humanism which are more in agreement with the feminist ideas of deconstructing binary opposition ? These are but a few of the issues on which a woman writer is expected to take a stance.

The list containing such questions could go on indefinitely, but then again, the questions tend to fall into the general opposition of integration versus separatism which itself rests on the opposition inside/outside. This in turn adds dimension to the phallogocentric modes of thought and structures -- which are always in binary opposition -- that feminism so strenuously attempts to destroy. This contradiction is inherent in almost all the debates regarding feminism. On

the one hand women's need to get to the bottom of phallogentric structures can lead to the endless deconstructing/reconstructing strategy that prevents action. On the other hand, patriarchal injustice produces and reproduces itself through the workings of the phallogentric structures, so that the actions women take within socio-political and psychological structures towards making immediate and necessary reforms ultimately strengthen the very structures they need to dismantle.

Constructing the site for struggle thus, has not been an easy task. Yet, armed with the combative tactics of the French and Anglo-American feminisms Maracle, Crate and Marchessault have attempted to create their counter discourse. They have been able to identify themselves with the 'female diaspora' visualized by Adrienne Rich in her introduction to an anthology of international women's poetry:

The idea of a common female culture splintered and diasporized among the male cultures under and within which women have survived -- has been a haunting though tentative theme of feminist thought over the past few years. Divided from each other through our dependencies on men -- domestically, tribally, and in the world of patronage and institutions -- our first need has

been to recognize and reject these divisions, the second to begin exploring all that we share in common as women on this planet (Rich, Voice XVII).

The subversion of the male literary canon required that women create new themes, new literary styles and, of course a new language to enrich their writings. Helene Cixous celebrates the feminine difference, asserting that woman writes through the femaleness of her body, as the body itself is an ambivalent source of identification for women. She believed that in order to transgress the laws of phallogentric discourse, woman must recover "her organs; her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal" (Cixous, "Medusa" 250). In "Toward a Feminist Aesthetic," Julia Penelope Stanley and Susan J. Wolfe proposed that "the unique perceptions and interpretations of women require a literary style that reflects, captures and embodies the quality of our thought", a "discursive, conjunctive style instead of the complex, subordinating, linear style of classification and distinctions" (67). The agenda for an avante-garde feminist aesthetics is laid down by Ann Rosalind Jones who insisted that "such techniques as gaps, breaks, questions, metaphors of excess, double or multiple voices, broken syntax, repetitive or cumulative rather than linear

structure and open endings should be employed" ("Femininity" 88). This chapter will focus on these strategies of inversion suggested by the well-established intellectuals of feminist activity.

The history of female reading and writing is a continuous effort to overcome the anxiety attendant upon the limitations of gender roles and narrative forms, but contemporary women writers are working to alter his-story by redefining her-story. Anxiety, or fear about being considered inadequate or trivial, in the worst, of being reviled, persecuted or even destroyed has been found to be the root cause of women's hesitations while entering the field of discourse.

In her autobiographical novel, Mother of the Grass, Jovette Marchessault writes about the extreme anxiety in matters of writing -- the anxiety which could silence, block or kill creativity. She writes:

I did not have the right to sit down and then give myself the pleasure of writing.... In my mind, I had never written more than three pages. I was seeking perfection. Either perfection, perfect inhibition, perfect justification. A crushing proof of the neat virile, male need. Perfection! If only everything were perfect,

rigid, dead, embalmed and stiff ! It's pointless to do any work if it won't be perfect.

(Marchessault, Mother 152).

One of the major dilemmas faced by a woman writer certainly lies within the system of language. She is likely to be at a loss to know whether she is using her own language or the language ascribed to her by culture. (The feminine writer must necessarily confront the question of whether while speaking the man-made language she is really using her own language, or if it is merely assuming her place in the phallogocentric paradigm). If one uses Bakhtin's definition of dialogism, "another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way" (324), one can see that feminine language could be described as a woman speaking man's language, expressing her intentions, but in a refracted, masculine-defined way.

In assuming her place in the phallogocentric paradigm, then, the woman comes to occupy a fictional position. In writing as other, in using the other's language, she writes and speaks for the man, reinforcing his idea of her. She speaks a fictional language, the language ascribed to her, but not her own language. What she can desire, know and, therefore say is determined

within the system of language by the logic of which she is presumed to be outside. It is her taking up this position "outside" logic that puts her squarely "inside" it. Thus one can assume that the language women use in novels is novelistic or fictional.

The reasons for women writers accepting the novelistic discourse to invert the existing phallic order do not end here. The novelistic discourse defined by Bakhtin is seen to have many similarities with the feminine language as elaborated by many French and American theoreticians of feminist activity. Bakhtin's theory of dialogism seems quite similar to what feminist critics describe as the feminine language. Like the novelistic discourse of Bakhtin, feminine language is also identified as offering multivoiced or polyphonic resistance to hierarchies; both also laugh at authority. Furthermore, in the hierarchies Bakhtin mentions, the novel always takes the woman's structural place as the excluded other: masculine/feminine, epic/novel, poetry/novel.

In The Dialogic Imagination, Bakhtin explains the fundamentals of his theory of novelistic discourse. The novel, he claims, resists the authority of official genres. The epic and poetry are "defined" genres which abide by rules, they are hierarchical, ahistorical and

canonical. They "serve one and the same project of centralizing and unifying the European languages" (271). The novel resists hierarchies, authority and "sacralization" of language, because it is an unstable, undefinable, historical genre. The feminine language, for its part, is a release from an enforced silence and hence is recognizable by its fluency. It is also characterized by "lack of restraint, wordiness, utter absence of feeling for form" (Ruthven 108).

The novel is able to resist hierarchy and achieve carnival laughter because of its "double-voicedness", its dialogism. Meaning is created not through the single voice of the ordinary language, but in the interaction of voices. The eternal conflict in the novel between character's voices or between the narrator's voice and the characters' always leaves the novel speaking more than one language.

The "nativeness" in the voices of Maracle, Marchessault and Crate assures us of dialogism in their works. The native 'I' in Maracle is not always in agreement with the Feminist 'I', so much so that one could almost sense a dialogue between the two. In the preface to her work I Am Woman, Maracle writes:

The tools I pick up are rooted in my body. My body, conservative and cautious though it is, desires liberation. (XI)

and again,

The prohibition of women's right to choose is all-encompassing in North America. It is the most deep-seated bias in the history of class society. Racism is recent; patriarchy is old (21).

Even after assuring us that she writes to represent the native woman and never the native male, the racial memory gets the better of Maracle. She assumed the role of the spokesperson for native youth in "The Rebel".

Fighting the good fight [against Whites] used to be good enough. There is in the spirit of people a truth that lingers in the atmosphere that shrouds our community; the sense that this last fight is the decisive one. If we don't win this one we are a lost people -- a dead people (95).

and again,

To win we must plan in the cellars and attics, lurking in the dark with one eye cast about for the enemy... We know the enemy is ever watchful,

on guard day and night against the potential threat we all pose. To plan, we must learn to sum up our history -- not the history of betrayal but the history of our resistance. We must learn from our mistakes and chart the course for our eventual victory (95).

In her novels, too, one finds that the narrative voice is not monologic. Marianne in Sundogs is an assimilationist to the core and her subjectivity is rigid as far as the discourse is concerned. Yet, the dissenting voice of Maracle is everywhere present through the voices of all the other characters. In Ravensong, the voice of the Raven, Stacey and the visions of Celia go into the making of the narrative voice.

Marchessault's fiction, Mother of the Grass may be autobiographical, but the narrative is essentially dialogic with the voice of the grandmother dominating many of the chapters. Marchessault herself takes up many positions -- as the opponent of Christian religion, as a feminist and again as a lesbian feminist. Joan Crate's heroine, Dione, is a character who is yet to get a grip on her voice. "I want voices", is her desperate cry heard throughout the story. In the repeated stories of the myth of Blue Sky, the son on the sea and the woman who married

the ghost, the native voice is unmistakably audible. The bored, frustrated voice of the modern wife of a Greek hotelier is also heard and one might assume that the two voices are in dialogue.

Eventhough the novel and the woman who attempts to write it share the same paradigmatic place in phallogocentric thought, their relationship is not devoid of tension. Following the ancient's belief that the father supplied the seed and life of the new being but the mother only the vessel, male writers often compare the writing process to male generativity. To "father" a text connotes active creation; to "mother" connotes merely nurturance or maintenance. Women's roles as daughters also influence their writing. Harold Bloom in his, Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry, theorizes that male writers seek an oedipal overthrow of their literary fathers, resulting in triumphant separation and autonomy -- in Lacanian terms, a movement into the symbolic. But the female child faces the father's reduction which threatens to inscribe her further in the patriarchal order. She also experiences a double bind in relation to the mother. Identifying with her maternal aspects places her outside the discourse, but severing the tie with the mother means denying some part of the feminine self.

Recent feminist fiction has deconstructed even the conservative Lacanian theories of the double bind in women writers. In the works of Maracle and Marchessault, the identification with the mother does not essentially mean a position outside the discourse. Rather, the nurturance and maintenance aspects of mother-function are regarded as tropes which rejuvenate feminist writing. This line of thinking which led to the creation of a feminine language, *l'écriture féminine*, which believed in a female *jouissance* will be discussed in detail under the sub-title "A Language of Their Own".

In spite of all the arguments which favour the existence of novel as a feminist genre, patriarchy is not guilty of remaining passive to bring novelistic discourse under its control. That a work of fiction, unstable and undefinable as it is, is expected to conform to the existing order, not just in the matter of language but also in that of subject content, is enough proof to reveal the tentacles of masculinist practice. "Art should not imitate life but reinscribe received ideas about the representation of life in art. To depart from the limits of common sense is to risk exclusion from the canon" (Miller 340). Any attempt to produce a work not like other novels, an original rather than a copy, means paradoxically that its literariness will be sniffed out. This is the reason why Marchessault's Like a Child of the

Earth and White Pebbles in the Dark Forests find it difficult to gain recognition as novels.

Since women's lives, and therefore their narratives, fall outside the realm of male discourse, they write against this tradition. They are expected either to conform to this pattern or they have to violently break away from the existing norms and create a tradition from an unspecified site.

Resisting Phallogocentrism

The women writers under reference share a common opponent -- masculinist thinking, but they envision different modes of resisting and moving beyond it. Their common ground is an analysis of western culture as fundamentally oppressive, as phallogocentric. "I am the unified, self-controlled centre of the universe," man (white, European and ruling class) has claimed. "The rest of the world, which I define as the other, has meaning only in relation to me -- as man/Father, the possessor of the phallus" (Jones, "Writing" 362). To speak and especially to write from such a position is to appropriate the world, to dominate it through verbal mastery.

Arguing for a complete overhauling of ideas in the existing order, Spivak states that only such a move from feminists could be effective. The primacy of the

intellect over emotion, the sense over imagination, according to her, is but a culmination of the public/private dualism which emerged centuries back.

According to the explanations that constitute (as they are the effects of) one culture, the political, social, professional, economic, intellectual arenas belong to the public sector. The emotional, sexual and domestic are the private sector... the sustaining explanation still remains that the public sector is more important, at once more rational and mysterious, and generally more masculine, than the private. (Spivak 103)

In Spivak's opinion, to deconstruct this opposition, there is no need to destroy the public/ private hierarchy. In other words, there is no need to deny the private in women's writing.

The feminist, reversing this hierarchy, must insist that sexuality and the emotions are, in fact so much more important and threatening that a masculinist sexual politics is obliged repressively, to sustain all public activity... The shifting limit that prevents this feminist reversal of the public-private hierarchy from

freezing into a dogma or indeed from succeeding fully is the displacement of the opposition itself. (103)

Joan Crate's Breathing Water is an attempt to strengthen the private in women. The emotional and the sexual aspects of the heroine are celebrated as the *raison d'etre* of Dione. Her site of discourse, her domestic status is in conformity with the idea that "women writers who explore subjectivity through domestic or familial relations may be just as 'political' as those who analyse issues of war, state control, and foreign policy." (Kaplan 174)

In addition to the valorization of the domestic position, another strategy employed by the women writers is the mobilization of female characters. To conceive of women and mobility in the same space has been difficult in historical as well as literary terms.

If the male authored texts have attempted to represent women as occupying domestic spaces, the new women writers have been explicit in expressing their desire to cease functioning as reflectors of male desire.

The tendency among authors of the patriarchal tradition to limit the movement of their women characters

could be referred to as "immobilization of women". This tendency resulted in the proliferation of "images of nets, webs, cages, bonds and traps" in fiction (Greene 50). Because, for male writers, mobility and the condition of stasis against which it defines itself, point to process and suggest the ambiguous and hence dangerous powers associated with materiality -- both inside and outside the body -- artistic and literary productions have over time employed a number of fixing strategies -- idealization, abstraction and categorization. In her writings, Luce Irigaray remarks on the tendency of the male subject to valorize volume, to establish fixing and freezing in order to maintain the fiction of his own subjectivity; by creating woman as other, she argues, the male subject is able to fix her through "reduction, division, containment, circumspection and reflection" (Irigaray 170). This desire explains the continuous entrapment of woman-as-Image and also suggests her limited function in conventional plot structures.

These plot structures are often linear in form and revolve around the father, the patriarchal family configuration and its accompanying prohibitions. And the female characters as Teresa de Lauretis has observed serve as "markers of positions - places and topoi - through

which the hero and his story move to their destination and to accomplish meaning" (109).

None of the characters under discussion could be held guilty of immobility. All the female characters are highly mobile. Even Dione, the typical heroine of Feminist Romance, in Breathing Water makes an attempt to break off family ties and lead a life of adventure in the outside world. Her frequent visits to the shopping mall, her sexual adventure with the artist, her trip to the bar to drink in the company of Mayor, Witch and Buzzard, her trip across the border with Buzzard, the visit to the strip-show -- all within the tradition of the Feminist Romance invert our preconceived ideas of a feminine protagonist. Dione's frequent absences could be regarded as an attempt to escape the boredom of marital life. On another level, they could be regarded as an attempt made by the heroine to come into grips with her life, her voice and her self.

Maracle's heroines Stacey and Marianne too make decisive movements within the space the narrative provides them. Marianne might be a "social idiot" (44), but a series of epiphanies on the issue of race draw her out of her protective environment. Her participation in the Peace Run to Okanagan Valley is marked by violence. She finds a moment of peace from the confusion and disunity in

her own life as she joins the peace run, but, in returning to the beliefs of her ancestry, Marianne comes to chart the course of her life anew.

The run soon becomes a metaphor for self-identification. The harsh realities of racism and the paralyzing truth of white hatred makes Marianne a committed participant of Native Rights Movement. Maracle writes very movingly about the attack on the runners:

It is an angry crowd, a small crowd, a crowd armed with stones. Stones hail from the arms of men whose eyes are filled with hate. Run... carry out the run. We have to make it. Stones drop. Run... carry the feather. We have to make it. Missiles of hate rain all around my frail body. Run... Carry peace. Peace... run... peace, sweat for peace. Rocks lock legs in cages of hate. Hate, acid hate, red hot hate... twisted hate... run, the hate from my legs. Run rage swollen in muscles, inspired by stones, run it for away... Run, run, run for peace. (181)

Jovette Marchessault in her fictional autobiography Mother of the Grass creates an alter ego who is always on the move. The journey from the tranquil banks of the river comes full circle, when she after a period of harsh

travails in the city, returns to Ouareau River. Marchessault's heroines make a metaphorical journey to the world of lesbian love and always to the Utopian World of Mothers and Grandmothers. The protagonists in Like a Child of the Earth and White Pebbles in the Dark Forests too, are always on the move. In the former, the heroine makes a journey across the American Native Land, following the path of Columbus, in a Greyhound Bus. Her surrealistic journey is anything but passive. In White Pebbles in the Dark Forests, the character Jeanne moves from the so-called civilized society to the lesbian community at the Appalachian mountains. This movement, from the arena of conformity to that of unconventional life, is very significant.

The Russian semiologist, Jury Lotman, argues that novels constitute plot spaces that contain the following character types: "Those who are mobile, who enjoy freedom with regard to plot space, who can change their place in the structure of the artistic world and cross the frontier, the basic tropological feature of this space; and those who are immobile, who represent, in fact, a function of this space" (Lotman 167).

This plot typology suggests that it is the male figure who moves and the females who, immobilized, become

obstacles against which the male quester/hero struggles. Lotman continues, "The mobile character is split into a paradigm cluster of different characters on the same plane, and the obstacle (boundary) also multiplying in quantity, gives out a sub-group of personified obstacles" (167). This plot typology offers a dubious legacy to the woman novelist when she attempts to create female characters who can act in plot space as movers, rather than as obstacles.

The highly hysterical protagonist in Breathing Water has many obstacles in her path, the foremost being her husband. By inverting the hitherto female-held position of the obstacle, Crate is attempting an overhaul of male/female roles. Quite early in the narrative, Dione offers her reasons for agreeing to marry Jorge: "Jo-Jo will be home soon, Jo-Jo, my husband, the father of my baby. That's why I married him" (9). It is her marriage that initially keeps her from breaking out. But with the passage of time, Jorge becomes the mold on which Dione could test her numerous stories concocted to justify her absences from home. "Where the hell have you been?" (95) becomes an oft-repeated question aired by Jorge. Thus, in Dione's quest for self-discovery, it could be rightly concluded that her husband poses an obstacle -- under the euphemistically drawn excuse of performing wifely duties.

In Lee Maracle's Sundogs too, male characters are, constructed within the limits of the term, 'obstacle'. Marianne's sister Rita is unable to complete her university education as a result of her oppressive domestic duties. Her numerous children and her drunkard husband Bill are shown as obstacles in her path of self-development.

Bill always did limp along with both feet planted firmly in mid-air... Drank too much... stayed out long hours with the boys... long hours ?... days is more like it. (34)

Hence, when Rita decides to "dump" Bill, the whole family supports her. Rita's brother Rudy, too, happens to be a formidable character. His violence mars the fragile unity of Marianne's household. "[his family] are all a mess; both kids have bruised faces and Paula is gushing blood" (52).

Most of the minor male characters in Maracle's fiction function as obstacles. In Ravensong, the white boy, Steve, could have hindered Stacey's quest for knowledge; her education. The over enthusiastic Steve is, however, discouraged by the timely interference of Ella, a maternal figure.

In Jovette Marchessault's fiction too, men are rendered the unenviable position of liabilities. All through Mother of the Grass, one hears the harsh, violent and delimiting voice of the patriarchs.

This time, it was Lorraine who was being beaten. This time, it was Lise who fell on her knees with an impossible scream. In the cold of winter evenings, in the heat of summer nights, in the beauty of the first spring evenings, in the splendour of the last autumnal nights, it was Carmen, it was Huguette, it was Marie-Paul, each having her turn, don't cry before you are hurt, don't try to hide, don't try to save yourself in the crowded kitchen which echoes with the shock of the blows. Don't go hiding behind your mother's skirts, for they are waiting for you on the landing. (91-92)

The feeling of collective victimization is enhanced by the fact that "they [fathers] did it less often to the boys and more often to the girls because the girls were guiltier. We live in the folds of original sin" (92).

Marchessault's attitude towards the inhuman breed of "fathers" is revealed further in her outcry: "We are in the Land of Permanent Sacrifice and don't you forget it!

Slap! Hit! your children are guilty... Slap! Hit! Kill! Do it in front of everyone or do it in private, but make an example of them. Beat them ! since each punishment should make them more likely to repent" (92).

That these fathers hinder the healthy physical and emotional development of their daughters is hinted at when Marchessault asks "What was going on in the daddies' heads when they took down their daughters' pants? What were they thinking about when they hit them fore and aft? When they hit them between the thighs with the belt of their trousers?" (93).

Marchessault is so vitriolic in her attack on men that she constructs the two identifiable men in her fiction as mute subjects. Their almost silent language is contrasted to the living language of her mother's and grandmother's:

Their [Mothers'] language was filled to the brim with images and predictions. Theirs was a living language, full of significance, and it rolled and rolled in a sinuous tide or in a straight line, crossing landscapes and certainties.

Things were different with my father and my grandmother's second husband. They talked very little, engaged as they were in getting to the

peak of their day, death in their hands.... Now and then, despite themselves, one or two words escaped from their mouths. (22)

In Like a Child of Earth, Columbus, Joe Beef and Buffalo Bill are portrayed as villains who attempted to retard the progress of human beings.

Thus, both in rebellion and accommodation, the women's fictions discussed above take up strategic positions. By inverting "masculinity" and "femininity", they indicate apatriarchal alternatives. Again, through treating gender roles in the institution of marriage as abnormal (Dione and Jorges in Breathing Water, Rudy and Paula, Rita and Bill in Sundogs, all the couples in Mother of the Grass), Crate, Maracle and Marchessault attempt a counter discourse.

As has been revealed in the discussion above, one subtle bind for contemporary women writers involves the tendency of both writers and critics to align women writers with the realist tradition, with the result that their subject matter is tagged domestic. It can also be judged as trivial, narrow in focus, circumscribed in its range of action and not the stuff of high art.

The narratives discussed above are in sharp contrast to the story line hitherto adopted, "the figure of Rip Van Winkle... the flight of the dreamer from the shrew" (Fiedler XX). Mieke Bal's statement, "Women can only function in certain fabulas, in which the object is a characteristic of the subject (happiness, wisdom) and not a concrete object that would necessitate a long journey or physically taxing ordeal" (83-84) is proved wrong in the novels of Crate and Maracle.

Inversion of Romance, Myth and Stories of Quest

In her book, Feminist Fiction, while discussing modern Romances, Anne Cranny Francis writes:

In the modern Romance, the male hero is usually an established professional man, often from a wealthy family and occasionally from an aristocratic background. He is often some ten to fifteen years older than the heroine, with the added experience -- personal and professional -- this entails. The assumptions are that he is white, middle or upper class and heterosexual. The heroine is correspondingly younger, less experienced, less established, less wealthy, and often from a poorer and less socially elevated background. The plot usually traces the subjugation of the heroine to the hero whom she

initially dislikes because of his arrogance.
(181)

Or, in other words, the resolution of the narrative comes with the heroine's marriage to the hero. Modern Romances fetishize the erotic relationship which often becomes the focus of the narrative. These tales also teach patriarchal gender roles to women, that sexual exploits are a prerogative of the 'experienced' male and that "women must deny their own sexuality in order to achieve a satisfactory marriage. They must not wander off the narrow path of patriarchy into the wild woods peopled by wolfish men with uncontrollable sexual appetites" (183).

Reworking the Romance genre on feminist terms is not an easy job. The reason for this lies with its elision of the ideologies of gender, race and class, its representation of a particular negotiation of these ideologies purely in terms of gender, which obscures or mystifies the formation of a strong subjectivity in a patriarchal society.

An exemplary example of the inversion of the Romance occurs in Joan Crate's Breathing Water. Dione, the waitress, one understands was attracted to her boss -- a rich hotelier, Jorge. But it is also clear that "love"

is nowhere mentioned as the reason for their marriage. Dione marries Jorge only because she is pregnant. Her sister advises her, "Marry him, he is the baby's father. He can support you; he has lots of money" (9). It is not that Jorge was not a typical hero of Romantic fiction. Dione, even in their first encounters, plays the part of the shy, evasive girl. "He was someone I avoided as much as possible. His confident smile and knowing wink embarrassed me. Besides he was younger than bosses are supposed to be" (42).

There is also ample proof to show that Jorge pursued Dione and that he made advances to her: "Jo-Jo began paying a lot of attention to me then and he stopped coming around the lounge when Linda was there. At first I thought he was just being friendly, but after a few weeks he always seemed to be at the back door when I got off work, waiting to ask if he could drive me home. It saved me a five-dollar cab fare" (43).

But all similarities to the conventional Romance end here. Their relationship does not have a fairy-tale ending, nor does the romance last. Dione feels the suffocation of the dishwasher, the laundry and the meaningless television channels and her search for a more exciting life begins. Erotic sexual exploits abound in

the novel. But it is not Jorge who participates in them, rather, it is Dione who is permanently in search of sexual partners. The one-night stand with the artist, her first sexual adventure, leaves in her, a hunger for more such exploits. Each time she returns home, it is only when she reaches the doorstep that she remembers her husband:

I turn to look at his [the artist's] white-clothed white body, his pale eyes cataracted in the buzzing light, and I wonder who he is, what he means, his art, his words, what meaning he has for me. I drive home with the window open, the darkening sky wet on my face. Turning off Lynnwood, I drive into our driveway, I see Jo-Jo's stingray, flame red with strips of chrome shooting up the sides. He's home. (28)

The second adventure with Buzzard when Dione with her child Elijah crossed the border too is not without such encounters. "His mouth is on mine. His arms pull me close. He kisses over and over, pushes my head into the hollow of his neck... It's late: it's much too late" (95). It is however, during the relationship with the stripper that the vamp in Dione stands exposed. Forgetting even her child, Dione goes out with him for a motorbike ride and eventual sex.

Dione leaves all the limitations accorded to women in patriarchal discourse and goes in search of the "wolfish men with uncontrollable sexual appetites" (Francis 183).

While Joan Crate constructs her protagonist in relation to men, sex, marriage and babies, one should also comprehend the subversive potential of her writings. In her romantic fiction, she objectifies male characters, and since this objectification is in an erotic mode, it could be read as an experience of female desire.

In Maracle's novels too, the element of Romance exists, but it is on a much subtler level. In other words, the male partners of the heroine are not integral to her understanding of life. For example, Marianne in Sundogs has a relationship with an idealized hero Mark, but he is not the person behind her conversion from a "social idiot" (44) to a responsible community worker. In fact, in Marianne's eyes, Mark, when he informs her about his broken marriage, is yet another native traitor who has insulted native womanhood. She tells him:

'But [first wife] is Indian', and pain registers on his face. 'You never courted her and I know why you beat her... You don't see worthy women when you look at us. Everytime some white man or woman looks ugly on your face you come home and

wait for us to screw up and then you let us have that ugliness. (165)

Mark's silent acceptance of his guilt destroys the image of the know-all, experienced subject of Romance.

Jovette Marchessault's inversion takes place on a much more extremist plane. Her fictional alter ego has a relationship with a man, Jean-Luc. They rapidly became intimate, spiritually though not physically. Eventhough Mother of the Grass does not conform to the Romance genre, it is worthwhile to note the asexual relationship the heroine has with the hero who is a homosexual. See the following passage:

Through him, I discovered men on the 'wrong' side -- the other side of the coin. As far as men on the 'right' side went, I already knew quite enough. It was altogether another matter with Jean-Luc Quickstep. We got along well. It was enough. That hadn't happened to me very often... We looked at each other through and through. I saw myself through him and he through me. Contact! light in the centre of a vibratory current. To most people, these contacts, probably appear sexual in nature, but to us, all that was secondary. (136)

Through employing a homosexual as a partner for the protagonist and by building their relationship on Platonic levels, Marchessault subtly inverts ideas of sexual attraction between men and women.

Mythology is indeed a hostile terrain for women, for, it is because of the myths that one believes, women must be either angels or monsters. And when Muriel Rukeyes exclaimed "No more masks! No more mythologies" (435), she was voicing the feminist rejection of the traditional division of myth from a woman's subjectivity.

Revisionist myth making is a subversive tactic by which a previously well-defined and accepted myth is appropriated for altered ends. Feminist myths often assume the high literary status that myth confers -- something that women writers have often been denied because they write personally or confessionally. In these reworked myths, the old stories are changed utterly, by female knowledge of female experience, so that they can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy.

Since the core of revisionist myth making for women writers lies in the challenge to and correction of gender stereotypes embodied in myth, revisionism in its simplest form consists of hit-and-run attacks on familiar images and the social and literary conventions supporting them.

Revisionist myth making is on very subtle lines in Joan Crate's Breathing Water. Dione who is perpetually on the run with her child strapped to her chest could be an inversion of the Virgin Mother and the Child. There are many passages in the narrative that remind us of the Christian image:

When I unstrap Elijah from my chest, I find him staring at me, his blue eyes reflecting my brown eyes, and I'm confused, wondering who's watching whom, and which one I am.

'Born again !' Crow shouted. A sunday morning evangelist glowed on the tv screen... 'Money for Jeezus. Jeezus loves ya. Oh yes he does'. Her hands rose toward the ceiling. Jeezus who gave up his life, nailed to the cross, the flies buzzing round his head, an the hot sun aburnin, burnin down on him. (21)

Here, immediately after observing her son Elijah, Dione is reminded of her sister Crow's imitation of a Born-again evangelist. The mother-child inversion is carried to the extreme when Dione during the first sexual escapade meets an artist. The artist drawing the picture of nude Dione is in sharp contrast to Leonarde da Vinci's portrayal of the Madonna. Dione later remembers the

incident as "a story I fell into, a story about me and my boy and an artist" (32).

Marchessault's Mother of the Grass is replete with inverted myths. Her text is essentially a woman's text which centred on the world of women. She attempts a work of feminist myth making as a means to return to origins making it possible for the whole community to be renewed through this representation of myths. In her assessment of Mother of the Grass, Gloria Orenstein writes:

For the Feminist, [the fall from Paradise] is equivalent to the fall out of a matriarchal space-time of ecstasy into a patriarchal history characterised by endless massacre and repression. It is the Judaeo-Christian patriarchal creation myth and all of its subsequent history that the feminist Shaman must exercise so that the natural world order, symbolized by the figure of 'La Mere des herbes', Plant Mother, or the great goddess of vegetation may be resurrected and life upon the planet may enter into a cycle of renewal and regeneration in the Promised Land of Female desire sought by all the heroines of Marchessault's works. (181)

In this novel, the author introduces the female protagonist who is engaged in a passionate search for the lost world of female divinity. In the portrayal of her Grandmother, Marchessault subverts the western myth of patriarchal creation and domination. Everywhere in the text, Marchessault inserts mythical references to the Mother [Not the 'all-powerful' Father]. The grand children, who accompany the Grandmother in her search for herbs, discover caves in the forest. She writes:

Upon entering the cave, we altered our identities along the way, like a crystal which becomes a diamond. Who were we? Who were we really? Were we emeralds in their rocky wombs or explorers or gold prospectors cast out from the hard, sharp matter of a great American city? Or were we children of the earth in search of a universal Mother, a Mother hidden in these subterranean galleries, a mother long since forgotten because her black, acid, gleaming eyes were like those of insects or of fish with beautiful spotted bellies and fins sharpened and polished by the wear, the tear and beating of the water of the deeps?. (49)

Another method employed by Marchessault is the satirization of the Judaeo-Christian ideologies:

When Grandmother talked about the devil or the angels, you felt that she had tried them both out and could make the comparison.... Grandmother's devil was always struggling with the great forces of the father. In her story, what varied was the devil's position - now he was in full flight towards the heights, the thunder clouds, the solar system, full of spirit, nerve, and courage, standing upto the all-powerful Father who held a scale in his mouth to weigh us in advance. (121)

At times, the picture of the Satan and the Father is carried to comic heights:

Grandmother's devil had the role of leader, of a scout on patrol in the mists of the catholic religion.... I could easily imagine Satan -- a simple heavenly angel -- getting a spanking with a flaming strap under the approving eyes of the prophets... He deliberated, did Lucifer! He sighed, he lost his temper, he snickered at the paternal beard and was not fearful -- he was too angry, too nauseated to take the time to be afraid. (121-22)

Even as Marchessault is engaged in the creation of a new Edenic world of feminine existence, she powerfully subverts the myth of Adam and Eve in Eden:

The beautiful, precious serpent has always been there. He made the first rebellion. He fomented the first, devastating, lucid revolution. He dared! He dared! And he was alone against the wrath of the Father. He risked everything because of friendship and tenderness for a woman and a man who lived once upon a time in a garden and because the beautiful serpent had an exalted imagination, one which remarked that a garden is perhaps not nearly enough for a woman, too little for a man, that it is good to take a look somewhere else, further off in the vast world, munching fruit and sauntering up to the gates of a larger, more circular vision, a vision which overflows the night of its own genesis. (54)

Mother of the Grass is revisionist both in its subversive readings of traditional plots, characters and morals and in its portrayal of a female character, the Grandmother, the Mother of the Grass, who exists beyond plots, the female as creator.

All the novels which follow the revisionist pattern are enactments of feminist anti-authoritarianism opposed to the patriarchal praxis of reifying texts. Most of these novels involve revaluation of social, political,

philosophical and religious values, particularly those enshrined in occidental literature.

Perhaps, the genre which is most clearly identified with contemporary feminist writing is the narrative of female self-discovery. Thematizing gender as the central problem for women attempting to reconcile individual and social demands, the contemporary narrative of female development exemplifies an appropriation and reworking of established literary genres like the Bildungsroman.

The editors of The Voyage In point out that the quest narrative is not an easy option for women, as, "While male protagonists struggle to find a hospitable context in which to realize their aspirations, female protagonists must frequently struggle to voice any aspirations whatsoever... Even the broadest definition of the Bildungsroman presupposes a range of social options available only to men" (Abel, Hirsch and Langland IX).

The male novel of development usually ends when the hero reaches adult self-awareness after having tested his inner sense of self against reality by a series of adventures in the world. Mary Anne Ferguson observes:

There is a mythical prototype of this form in the journeys of both father and son in the Odyssey:

the young man sets out to find his father, to learn his patronymic, as a means of finding his own identity. Both he and his father, whose journey affirms his roles of father and husband, return home: the individual's success in discovering his own identity brings about his re-integration into society and the healing of the wounds society has incurred through losing him. Thus male development is essentially comic, the circular journey is spiral, the ending a new beginning on a higher plane. (228)

The pattern for the female novel of development has been largely circular, rather than spiral: women in fiction, till recently remained at home. Most of the protagonists in the novels under discussion test their self image through adventures in the outside world. They are also initiated at home through learning the rituals of human relations.

Rita Felski discusses the female protagonists of the historical self-discovery novels in Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: "[T]he female-centred plot is characterized by a choice of two plots: the 'euphoric' in which the heroine moves in her negotiation with the world of men and money from 'nothing' to all and the 'dysphoric' which ends with the heroine's death in the flower of youth" (123).

This kind of a dichotomy of either marriage or death is transcended in the contemporary self-discovery narrative. It is an essentially optimistic genre, bearing witness to women's self-identification as an oppressed group, and hence as a potential challenge to existing social values.

Yet the narrative of the quest for self are not without problems. When women do construct a bildungsroman, that is, when a female character is constructed as a mover within plot structure, she, like her male counterpart, appears to be confronted with female as obstacle, viz, the maternal presence.

In Breathing Water, at the very outset one perceives that Romance has stopped functioning as a genre. At this very point, Dione's narrative of self-discovery begins. Dione's story begins at the stage when the traditional plot of women's lives breaks off, with the attainment of a male sexual partner. The status of marriage as the goal and end point of female development is called into question by the emergence of a new plot which seeks to expose the insufficiencies of the old. As a feminist text, Breathing Water could be regarded as possessing a recognition and rejection of the ideological basis of the traditional scripts of heterosexual romance characterized

by female passivity, dependence and subordination, and one could easily discern an attempt on the part of the author to develop an alternative narrative and symbolic framework within which female identity could be located.

The beginning of the novel introduces a negative model, an image of female alienation. Dione is a housewife whose entire horizon is circumscribed by the daily drudgery of catering to her domestic duties. Her confinement to the private sphere denies her the possibility of an independent self-fulfilment and locks her in a relationship of psychological and economic dependence upon a husband who is unable to acknowledge her spiritual needs. Dione is all the time aware that she has to break the walls of her private sphere if she is to come to terms with herself. "I want to go my own way. I need to. Something waits for me outside the house. I have to find it" (83).

A sense of estrangement and unreality is expressed in recurring metaphors in which the protagonist perceives herself to be dreaming or describes herself as functioning like a puppet. After spending a night with the artist near the mall, Dione does not quite remember it, "Perhaps I dreamed the whole incident in that basement room" (32). Even the child whom she carries with her during all her escapades becomes a nonentity at times. Standing in front

of a glass door, Dione catches her reflection with the child around her waist. She thinks, "Something is attached to my waist, a little frog kicking blue legs" (85).

The sense of remoteness from a preformed destiny which the protagonist feels helpless to alter is typically described as a splitting of inner and outer self, the heroine experiencing a powerful estrangement from the external appearance by which her social status as a woman in a patriarchal culture is largely determined.

The key transformation of the novel takes the protagonist from the stage of alienation, of a sense of lack, to a conscious affirmation of gendered identity. Rather than offering a negative critique of society by depicting the destruction of the female character, Crate delineates a form of opposition through the resistance and survival of the heroine. Dione's inward recognition and rejection of the ideological basis of existing gender roles is expressed externally in the narrative through Dione's act of leaving her husband. For, "Some form of at least temporary separation from traditional heterosexual relations is a necessary precondition for any gain in self-knowledge" (Felski 131).

The life of the recluse in her sister's house does not last long. Still the shift in physical space offers her new insights into marriage and life. Dione's return to Jo-Jo marks a period of psychological transformation. She is more in control of her life, more committed and certainly more responsible as a parent. In Breathing Water, ironically, the resolution of the feminist narrative also functions as a beginning; Dione's new self-knowledge creates a basis for future negotiation between the subject and society, the outcome of which is projected beyond the bounds of the text. In this novel, external exploration both parallels and contributes to the discovery of the inner self. Individual development requires some kind of recognition of the contingency and uncertainty of experience; this form of knowledge is counterposed to the deceptive mythology of the Romance, the ideological fiction of the idyllic married bliss which provides an already written script without space for the articulation of dissent. Dione's move into society functions as an entry into an existence defined by contingency and change, which is contrasted to the static, dream-like atemporality of an existence structured by repetitive domestic tasks within the private sphere of the familial home.

Marianne in Sundogs too is on a quest for self-identity. In the beginning, she passes off as a shallow

native girl. All her standards are set against white values. Her sense of dressing, her aversion to the large family, her embarrassment at her mother's outspoken habits and dressing -- all force us to believe that Marianne is an assimilationist. Her mother often complains, "You sound just like them [the Whites]" (9).

Marianne slowly grows in stature as she comes to accept the violence, the outrage and the splits that occur in her family. Surrounded by a huge family with its full share of problems, led by a mother who talks back to the television, Marianne slowly wakes up, politically and emotionally, and joins the run for peace that sets out across the country in support of those behind the barricades in Okanagan.

In Crate's and Maracle's work, one sees protagonists who are sexually mature females but who lack emotional coherence. They often profit from their own painful encounters with reality to become self-confident adults in control of their own destinies. Both Dione and Marianne have difficulty in differentiating between sex and love; they lose love when they attempt to grow emotionally and intellectually and both discover self through experience in the world.

Seduction by the Father is an important feature in Dione's life. Her attempts to overcome the seduction of her Father's voice and to find her own voice is charted all through the story. Her obsession with voices explains this: "The voices have started to layer themselves one over the other, and it's becoming difficult to tell them apart, to make sense of what's being said" (5). While in the outside world, she finds herself in the midst of voices, her boring life at home places her in a vacuum, "I don't know what to do here so I turn on the dish washer, the washer and dryer, the vacuflo, the garburator, stereo, radio and tv. I want noise. I want voices" (33).

The seduction by the Father (his memory) demands a denial of the mother. Dione's relationship to her mother prior to the period of self discovery is marked with coarseness. Commenting on her mother's reaction to her father telling them children's stories, Dione writes, 'Filling their heads with dreams!' she'd huff, or 'welcome to the real world,' when Father finished. That was it, always anger" (63). That her mother was an obstacle in the path of her loving relationship with her father is revealed elsewhere too. She is often qualified as a "witch" (133) or a "bitch" (148).

Yet, it is only when she comes to terms with her powerful, sympathetic mother that Dione finds peace in

life. This is again characterized by the erasure of her father's voice.

In Sundogs and Ravensong one sees the presence of a powerful mother figure who provides a positive impetus and guidance for the journey of development. The mother as obstacle pattern is discernible in Sundogs too. Marianne, who had led a protected, rather pampered life finds her mother embarrassing. "It must be six o'clock. It's my mother arguing with the six o'clock news again. It's embarrassing. Some little piece of me wants to give her a break... No. Don't bother going to look. I try to sit still and get back to my essay. I squirm, tense up" (2).

Even her mother's appearance disturbs her:

I always want to chuckle when she jumps into her coat like she is on some dangerous mission... She shops at second hand stores and buys only the cheapest things there. She never bothers matching what she buys. She ends up with the loudest checks, plaids, and flowered designs in the store. Dressed, she looks like a wild array of colour and patterns. She is wearing her houndstooth car-coat overplaid pants and a flowered shirt as though she were a fashion model who just stepped off the cover of Vogue magazine. (7)

Still, during the course of her self-discovery, there are instances which tell us about reconciliation with her mother whose role she had rejected.

The distance between us closes us little: The difference remains, but it doesn't look ominous. She looks afraid, afraid I will choose her language and afraid I won't choose either... My mother, the all powerful, becomes ordinary; weakness backdropped against her great strength brings her character closer to how I see mine. I understand Momma, I understand. I realize I am desperate for this understanding, have always been desperate for it and I am surprised how easy it came, how little effort it took to achieve this moment of understanding. (148)

Marianne develops physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially; but all the experiences in the world have not brought her to a sense of integrated selfhood. She must encounter violence and death before she can accept herself. The death of her niece, Dorry and the connected native ceremonies reveal a new world to Marianne. This and the violence meted out to the peace runners by the whites force her to come to terms with her native self. Her self realization is well echoed in her words, "I hear you Momma, and the crock of youth is not

listening to our relatives. We fill our crock with the sound of everyone's lies without stopping to listen to our own truth... I could hear my Momma's language coming through my mouth and it felt damned good" (206). The experiences undergone by the heroine, while often difficult and painful, are presented as the necessary steps to maturation; her encounters with the outside world help to shape and define the parameters of her subjectivity.

In Ravensong, the maturation and the growing rebellion of Stacey are portrayed. The novel tells the story of a crucial period of change in the history of one West Coast Native Community. Caught between her disparagement of white ways and her awareness of white disdain of native ways, seventeen year old Stacey watches as a flu epidemic kills the most learned Elders in the community and with them much of the traditional wisdom and knowledge that had survived all the previous epidemics. As Stacey develops into a mature native woman, her resistance for the white ways of living and education too builds up. Once when she served a detention for turning up late for her classes, she challenges the Principal to expel her, "You have power to cut my dreams short and expel me, she said simply, but I will not serve any detentions for lateness." (68)

The epilogue informs us that Stacey's dreams of starting a school in the reservation did not materialize, but one cannot help but notice the pragmatism behind Stacey's advice to her son,

Don't worry son. You'll know the answer when you need to. (199)

In the novels discussed above, the female self-discovery is depicted as a process of confrontation and dialogue with a social environment. Although the texts often emphasize internal growth and self-understanding rather than public self-realization, only by moving out into the world can the protagonists become critically aware of the limitations of their previously secluded existence and their unquestioning acceptance of the circumscribed nature of women's social roles.

A Language of their Own

When women do write subversive texts, when they do manage to escape from imprisonment within stereotypes, male-identified models and genres, their discourses often have as a central concern the problem of movement. Helene Cixous has remarked that "cultural containment translates into linguistic imprisonment and that women had to first escape the discourse of men" ("Castration" 42). That escape has been mapped within the discussions that

constituted l'écriture feminine. L'écriture feminine makes important statements relative to female mobility, statements that can direct our understanding of what is different in women's writing.

Helene Cixous celebrates feminine difference, asserting that woman writes through the femaleness of her body: woman must recover "her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal" to experience the textual and erotic pleasures which transgress the laws of phallogentric discourse ("Medusa" 250). She further writes, "a woman's body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardor... will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language" (246).

When Cixous speaks about body-writing and about how male and female writing are different, it would appear that she is taking sexual dimorphism -- the structural difference between male and female genitals -- as the source of language and style. But what she has in mind is the psychological feminity which will come to the fore when a woman writes with her body so that "the immense resources of [her] unconscious will spring forth and the inexhaustible feminine imaginary will unfold" ("Medusa" 251).

Lacanian psychoanalysis played an important role in effecting the transition from the concrete and political orientation of the French feminist movement to the more abstract theorizing of the "Feminine" that has dominated the past decade. Women's oppression, women's history, women's texts paled in significance beside the problems of language, fantasy and desire generated by Lacanian analysis and by Derridean deconstructive philosophy. Jacques Lacan's distinction between the Imaginary (where the child experiences unity with its mother) and the symbolic (which is paternal) has been regarded as a starting point by Julia Kristeva in her linguistic theories. By treating Lacan's distinction between the Imaginary and the Symbolic as a difference between the maternal and the paternal, Kristeva claims that the Lacanian model has a masculine bias to it, since it conceives of language as a unitary phenomenon confined to a symbolic order whose characteristics are undeniably masculine. That other language, ridiculed as baby talk which we are expected to grow out of when women enter the symbolic, is the non-dualistic and native language of the maternal imaginary and this might well be considered the matrix of a suppressed women's language.

Jovette Marchessault is in perfect agreement with the French feminists who affirm that resistance does take place

in the form of jouissance, that is, in the direct re-experience of the physical pleasures of infancy and of later sexuality, repressed but not obliterated by the law of the Father. Like Luce Irigaray and Cixous, she emphasizes that women, historically limited to being sexual objects for men (virgins or prostitutes, wives or mothers), have been prevented from expressing their sexuality in itself or for themselves. Marchessault's modes of writing are also in keeping with Ann Rosalind Jones' findings in psychoanalysis -- "that bodily drives that survive cultural pressures toward sublimation surface" in what she calls "semiotic discourse: the gestural, rhythmic pre-referential language" (qtd. in Marks and Courtivran 362). Her language resists the giving up of the blissful infantile fusion with the mother, re-experiences the jouissance subconsciously and sets them into play by constructing the texts against the rules and regularities of conventional language. Marchessault's "semiotic discourse" is an incestuous challenge to the symbolic order, asserting as it does the writer's return to the pleasures of her preverbal identification with the mother and her refusal to identify with the father and the logic of paternal discourse.

Jovette Marchessault presents us with a good instance of body writing in Mother of the Grass where she discusses Christian faith:

The same Jesus Christ Our Lord didn't want anything to do with the sac (sic) of spirits in a woman's uterus. The same Jesus Christ our Lord didn't want to know about the mother's water. A flood changed the world! And it still smells of water, sea water, of the lunar poisoned water of the female serpent, salt water, foamy water, and the vaginal water in the womb's crucible. It smells of water ! Iodized water, sweaty water, the redolent odour of the tides of blood. It smells of water ! It will always smell of mother-water... It smells of the water-of-life imported from women's wombs of the water of the starry world, of the waters from the depths of heaven and of earth. It smells of the water pocket which bursts and spills of its own accord to free a living child. (92-93)

Joan Crate seems to be more in agreement with Kristeva than with Cixous or Irigaray. Her emphasis on "femininity, colour, music, body" (Rose 137) and the metaphorization of the semiotic as "maternal territory" has opened the way to fantasies of "a centripetal, becalmed and softened feminine sexuality" (Kristeva 37).

Kristeva claims that maternity is a special culturally approved instance of "psychosis" that "reenters the secret, guarded territory of the archaic mother in order to produce the baby, signifier of the mother's desire for the phallic" (Kristeva 238, 241).

The mother in Dione is frequently referred to in images of nursing: "Elijah pulls his mouth from my nipple, whimpers, then returns, sucks and whimpers again" (91).

Kristeva associates motherhood with the attribute of maternal jouissance and the potential for disruption which it possesses. This jouissance, she points out is "feared and devalued by a phallogocentric culture which recognizes the threat it constitutes to the status quo" (Kristeva 167-8).

The identification of femininity with an experimentally fluid form of writing which subverts the reader's expectations of linear, rational discourse, merging identities and ego boundaries in a manner similar to that which occurs in the pre-oedipal mother-infant bond, is a feature in Breathing Water and Mother of the Grass.

Women's words which fill up the aqueducts of your ears and the blood channels of your body from

head to toe during the nine months when every human being,... is aquatic within the tender surfaces of the womb.

Words of continuance ! Sybil's words ! Words which ever find their centre in a cavern, a grotto, an abyss, or a uterus flooded with the waters of tears. Siren's words in the continuous flood of the waters of time. Siren's words which move and dive into the matter of words, caressing it so that it gushes forth all those words which are encountered in a woman's speaking. (Mother of the Grass 19)

The intensity is missing in Crate's work. But in her work, one can perceive an evocation of fluidity, softness, movement and life, especially in the passage where Dione is seen as one with her element,

Air Bubbles vibrate through blue, I dive down, listen to the cold whispers at my ears, pull my arms through the chlorinated water, glide weightless. The son of the sea loved the chief's daughter. Bubbles scattering from my mouth ease the pressure on my eardrum. And the chief's daughter loved the son of the sea. It was clear and strong, their love eternal. I touch the hard blue bottom... Bubbles rise from my nostrils,

chains of tiny bubbles anchor themselves to my thighs. Barnacles lodge at the corners of my mouth... I will stay here until my lungs turn to gills, my hair to seaweed, I will guide fish to the shores. (Breathing Water 67)

In Mother of the Grass, one sees an additional tactic, the valorization of the maternal. This marks a decisive break away from the existentialism of The Second Sex wherein Beauvoir stressed the oppressiveness of motherhood as an institution and rejected maternity as a solution to the problem of female transcendence. Marchessault goes one step further when, in her writings, she echoes the extreme feminist views that enforced matrophobia was "a new form of repression, the denial of the passionate, delicious experiences of women's bodies" (Cixous, "Jeune" 166).

In her verbal rhapsody of traditional feminine symbols, Jovette Marchessault valorizes the 'materrenelle,' woman as Mother Earth or Earth Mother. "[The Mother of the Grass] was giving birth to herbs which aid the birthing of complete babies or of fetuses. To affectional herbs, for every affection, respiratory, cardiac, and intestinal as well as the other kinds" (92).

Hegel in The Philosophy of Right while discussing the opposition between men and women writes, "The difference between men and women is like that between animals and plants. Men correspond to animals, while women correspond to plants because their development is more placid and the principle that underlies it is the rather vague unity of feeling... [Women are educated] as it were by breathing on ideas, by living rather than by acquiring knowledge" (263-4).

It is uncanny how like Hegel's myth of Plant-women are certain feminist theories of feminine knowledge, particularly the notion that the transmission of ideas between women occurs in the ostensibly unmediated manner of communication between a mother and infant daughter. Food, air, knowledge mingle between them and defy separation; experience is so intra-personal that individual identity and power are severely threatened and Mother and daughter mutually absorb each other. This vision of psychic osmosis between the maternal (or Grandmother) and the daughter is present in Marchessault's Mother of the Grass:

Grandmother was made to live in a four-dimensional space, the fourth dimension being precisely that visceral need she had to speak to me about her desires, her hopes, her irrational

self. She had the gift of being able wholly to involve herself in her words, to incarnate herself in flesh and blood in her subject matter... Her words were my food and drink. No matter what or whom she spoke about, her speech sparked an immediate pleasure throughout my entire body. (18)

The same strain is there in the following:

Grandmother's words, the words of a woman, were born quite quietly under the soles of your feet and came up and grew with an irresistible force inside you in an utterly gentle way. With her words, my Grandmother led me to the great widening of the river where suddenly there are no markers and where you do not need a telescope or a microscope. Even less do you need proliferating exaggerations and clarifications, when everything is already there in the delta of words. (18-19)

The Revisionist works under reference do not necessarily confine to defiance and reversal strategies. A more central set of preoccupation concerns female-female relationships in fiction. The founding position of "matriarchal femininism" (qtd. in Armstrong 52) is that

there is something essentially positive in the pre-oedipal attachment between mother and daughter, in terms of which the unique flows and influences between women can be explained: "Mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other - beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival - a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal" (Rich, Born 23).

According to Nancy Chodorow, there is an enormous difference between male and female bonding in fiction. While the former often involves learning how to be a man, "a girl is not trying to figure out how to be feminine, but how not to be her mother. Gender role identification is not so uninvolved, whereas it is the central issue in the masculine case" (137).

Hence, in Maracle's fiction, one finds that the relationship between mothers and daughters, or between sisters is not always an easy one. As has been pointed out earlier, Marianne in Sundogs treats her mother as an obstacle. Her relationship to her sisters, especially Lacey, is a strained one. But her gradual politicization and acceptance of social role is accompanied by a recognition of her own previous blindness to her family's structure. The power Marianne derives after the reconciliation with her mother and sisters is exceptionally sound.

Mother-daughter relations and their ambiguous pains and pleasures are a focus of immense interest to Lee Maracle. Her heroines are girls entering the world of womanhood discovering the strong ties of blood which they so often ridiculed. Marchessault's heroines, identify themselves as lesbian feminists, and discover the values of women's community and ideals of collectivity.

If in Mother of the Grass it is violence of the patriarchal order that brought the daughters together, it is maternal identification of femininity that brings together the mothers and the daughter. In a brilliant piece of expression of love for her mother and grand mother, the heroine says: "I love you, my mothers. I love you to death. I love you to life. Love worked in me! Hatred was strangling me ! Solitude has taken possession of everything, but I felt myself almost ready to live. I love you my mothers" (102).

In her unusual use of the plural "my mothers", Marchessault tries to illuminate the original interpretation of the meaning of mothers in her work. This concept of plurality "refers to her entire biological matrilineage as well as to all her spiritual, natural and mythic mothers" (Orenstein 187-88).

The creative bonding between the protagonist and Francine in Like a Child of the Earth and the community of women who have gathered on the Appalachian Mountains to find a means to save humanity -- all prove the positive strength of female bonding.

In addition to the use of subversive gynocentric writing, feminist writers also attempt a vigorous invasion of the sanctuaries of existing language. They employ "traditional images from the female body -- flower, water, earth -- retaining the gender identification of these images but transforming their attributes so that flower means force instead of frailty, water means safety instead of death, and earth means creative imagination instead of passive generativeness" (Ostriker 315-16).

Joan Crate's Breathing Water offers the identification with the flower image, "I am a flower choked with pollen" (7) -- pollen which has the potential force to procreate. Again Dione's query about the wife of the son of the sea, "But could she breathe?" (180) -- a metaphor for her own suffocating life -- leads to self realization she finds the answer in her own life -- she learns "how to hold her breath" (255) in water and also to find safety under it.

In Mother of the Grass too, one finds numerous images of water. Water, considered to be a treasure house of knowledge and life, is equated with life in paradise. "This river was a feast for the eyes, the ears, and the heart. Living beside a river.. quickly teaches you the habits of eternity, you have the feeling that someone has personally handed you a flawless diamond, a secret, a gift... living besides a river teaches you one thing at least -- to withstand" (8).

The image of earth as a means of creative imagination is abundantly seen in Jovette Marchessault's work which has been aptly termed Mother of the Grass and which celebrates among other things, the ever changing nature of Mother Earth:

The Mother of Grass meditates in the midst of her mists. In the hollows of the earth, she caresses her seedlings, her beloved daughters. The earth on which we set our feet and backsides retains the long shudder of the first mother in childbed.... Its amazing what may be heard when the Mother of the Grass... begins to give birth to the luminous beauty of growing things - balsom, resin, flowering heads, silken skins, hempen threads, cherry stones, grape juice, immortal seeds. Oh, what recent happiness, what

granted joy!... Whirlpool! Birth! The great
renewal! A thunder-clap between the eyes. Magic
in action. (110-11)

Women writers are forced to confront the inadequacies of contemporary literary theory and practice and to formulate practices capable of expressing their own marginalized experiences, their desires and their visions. Maracle, Marchessault and Crate have succeeded in seizing the site of discourse both outside and within male discourse. They have done so by reworking the narrative, reconstructing it on the basis of another pattern of coherence, not on the temporal logic of traditional narrative.

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**COUNTER DISCOURSE IN THE WORKS OF
JOAN CRATE, JOVETTE MARCHESSAULT
AND LEE MARACLE**

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RAJANI B.

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT.**

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Chapter 3

From the Margins of the Margin

This chapter is an attempt to study the texts of Crate, Maracle and Marchessault from the vantage point of postcolonialism. Since the counter discourse of any marginalised community thrives on subversion of the master narratives of the canonical texts, an exploration of the subversive modes -- the re-statement of nativeness, construction of strong native characters, revising colonialist histories and reversing myths -- is pertinent.

In their attempts to create a discourse that empowers oppressed peoples, postcolonial theorists have employed the oppositional terms--margin and centre--where margin represents disempowerment and centre represents power and control. This division within the system of discourse is apparently not without drawbacks. For, as Henry Louis Gates, Jr. asserts theorists utilizing the rhetoric of marginality overlook the ways their references to marginalized and central writers and texts reify existing categories of meanings. Because the centre defines the margin, the margin's "privileged site of cultural critique" (qtd. in Keating 23) is itself authorized by the

dominant hegemonic cultural system. Consequently, the oppositional world view of the marginalized remains locked in a dyadic relationship that inadvertently reinforces existing power structures. Gates also maintains that attempts to overcome this binary construction are ineffective resulting in "breeding new margins within margins... an even renewed process of differentiation, even fragmentation" ("Studies" 298).

The inability of the margin to overcome the binary opposition has further strengthened the centre's hold over it. Sara Suleri makes a related point in her discussion of postcolonial feminist theory where she challenges contemporary feminists to explore "the excesses and limitations" (757) in marginal locations, claiming that "until the participants in marginal discourses learn how best to critique the intellectual errors that inevitably accompany the provisional discursivity of the margin, the monolithic and untheorized identity of the center will always be on them" (757-58).

Like Gates, Suleri emphasizes the constrictive, relational nature of all margin/centre rhetoric. This distinction between the margin and the centre does not offer the former a site of power that intervenes in the hegemonic discourse. Rather, the margin becomes an

oppositional position, defined, reified and controlled by the centre.

Yet, over the years, the margin has changed its status. Through a revisioning rather than attacking technique, the margin has come a long way from its demeaning definition as "the space where nothing really happens" (Soderlind 101). The term margin is currently used as a metaphor; it serves as the vehicle for a number of tenors, or descriptive terms--colonized, native, feminist, homosexual, poor, disabled, homeless and so on. This has led to an ironic situation which has witnessed the hegemonic rise of margins as the new sites of resistance. "Everyone is claiming them [margins]" comments Brydon (1) on the mad rush after the margins.

This new status accorded to the margins has also led to a new power-structure where the margin has led to the creation of new margins. The more powerful theories of feminism and heterosexual thought turn oppressive, resulting in the tangential movement of women of colour, immigrants and homosexuals to a new site--the margins of the margin.

Eventhough both feminism and postcolonialism share much in common, the belief that western feminists are eurocentric in their arguments has been a stumbling block

in their relations. The details of the conflicts within feminism with regard to the position of coloured women will be discussed under the subtitle "Decolonization of feminism".

In the counter discourse within Canadian Literature, Joan Crate, Lee Maracle and Jovette Marchessault speak from the fragmented margins of gender, class, race and erotic preference. Their positions are powerful sites characterized by "emergent energies and experiences which stubbornly resist ." (Raymond Williams qtd. in Philip 11) the dominant discourse. Thus Maracle's voice from the intersection of racism and sexism and Marchessault's native lesbian voice--all find new meanings in the context of their doubly marginalized positions. Before going into the details of the native feminisms of the authors under discussion, it would be worthwhile to study the relationship between feminism and postcolonialism and between feminism and postcolonial feminism.

Decolonization of Feminism

In her discussion on the need to liberate the feminist movement from its narrow confines, M. Nourbese Philip observes:

The common base for women is a shared history of oppression in all its varieties and forms, as

well as... a shared commitment to establishing communities organized along non-patriarchal, woman centred, non-racist principles. While wishing to avoid reductionist arguments, as well as those body centred theories which become at times tiresome, we must acknowledge that a basic common denominator of female experience... in all cultures and in all classes... has been the fact that our bodies have achieved a universal negative significance; bodies which have become palimpsests upon which men have inscribed and reinscribed their texts. (12)

She goes on to assert the postcolonial feminist view that while feminism could make important and significant contributions to resolve some of the problems, only an analysis of the workings of racism could help to lay the foundations of a strong, all-encompassing feminism. But today while western feminists discuss the relative importance of feminist versus class emancipation, the postcolonial feminist is involved in a bitter struggle against not just the remnants of colonial racism and sexism, but also against the forces of neo-colonialism.

The imperialist attitude of western feminism is revealed by Chandra Mohanty in her essay, "Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses." She

writes that the assumption of women as "an already constituted coherent group with identical interests and desires, regardless of class, ethnic or racial location or contradiction implies a notion of gender universally and cross-culturally" (175-76). It is highly detrimental to the coloured women. Spivak, too is highly critical of such universalizing tendencies which obliterate difference. In her work "In Other Worlds", she draws our attention to the need in any discussion of oppression whether linguistic, social or sexual for the discontinuities and differences between western feminism and women of other cultural identities to be recognized and problematized. "Otherwise the focus remains defined by the investigator as subject" (150). Spivak insists that there has to be "a simultaneous other focus : not merely who am I? But who is the other woman? How am I naming her? How does she name me? Is this part of the problematic I discuss"? (150).

Postcolonial feminism certainly runs the risk of marginalization or ghettoization unless it addresses itself to the two simultaneous projects which, it is believed, would strengthen it. Chandra Mohanty names the two projects as, "the internal critique of hegemonic 'western' feminism and the formulation of autonomous, geographically, historically and culturally grounded feminist concerns and strategies" (172).

The first project has involved attempts to decolonize feminism. It involves a process of dismantling and deconstruction of the eurocentric mindset of western feminism. Since the term colonization implies "a relation of structural domination, and a suppression... often violent... of the heterogeneity of the subject(s)" (Mohanty 173), the concerted efforts on the part of white feminists to exercise their hegemony over women of colour could be viewed as attempts at colonization. This neo-colonization could use tactics ranging from demands by the majority that the minority give voice to their painful experiences, "Do not speak in the voice of resistance. Only speak for that space in the margin that is a sign of deprivation, a wound, an unfulfilled longing. Only speak your pain" (Hooks 23) to appropriation of minority experiences and struggles and reduction of Third world women into monolithic objects.

The second project, according to Chandra Mohanty, which would ensure the positioning of postcolonial feminism within the parameters of power involves reconstruction of pre-colonial history, subjectivity and culture. This project will be discussed in detail under the subtitle "Appropriating Master's Tools".

In spite of all their differences, feminism and postcolonialism do share common ideas. A main issue

which interests both these movements is the one concerning language and writing. The idea that language is a man-made male plot against women or a eurocentric plot against the postcolonial culture exists today. This posits an origin to language, "a kind of non-linguistic transcendental signifier, or a transcendental conspirator a concept which cannot be supported" (Ashcroft 25).

In their placing of accent on the parole rather than on the langue for the re-establishment of the speaking subject, both feminism and postcolonialism engage in an anti-structuralist move. Moreover, language is seen as a process, rather than a system -- something people do, and it is the people's appropriation of it that gives meaning and power to language. Since feminism and post-colonialism speak from the margins of cultures, they appropriate language too from their marginal position. Thus from their position of absence and negativity created by the patriarchal, eurocentric and phallogocentric culture, both seize and refashion the patriarchal language.

The positioning of language as the common ground for the entry of both feminism and postcolonialism is not without reservations. Barbara Christian is one of the few writers who attempts to dissuade coloured women from

engaging in *écriture féminine*. In her opinion, many of the indigenous languages were invented primarily in relation to women. "Some Native American languages, for example, use female pronouns when speaking about non gender-specific activity.... Further, by positing the body as the source of everything, French feminism returns to the old myth that biology determines everything and ignores the fact that gender is a social rather than a biological construct" (60).

These arguments can be countered by the fact that native women write not in their indigenous languages, but in the highly structured, inherently sexist and racist language. Moreover, the body could be considered to be a metaphor for feminine expression just as the phallus is the figurative focal point in patriarchal language. W D Ashcroft in the essay "Intersecting Marginalities" attempts to draw a parallel between postcolonial writing's search for an alternative language to be created from the site of struggle and *écriture féminine*. The accent the former laid on the re-establishment of the silenced voice is reiterated by the latter with its call to return to the pre-oedipal maternal language of *jouissance*.

Among the native novelists under discussion, it is pertinent to note that only Jovette Marchessault appropriates the mode of *écriture féminine* and its

potential for linguistic subversion. Joan Crate and Lee Maracle follow the postcolonial mode of subverting imperial culture.

In her essay, "Post-colonial Literatures and Counter Discourse", Helen Tiffin writes about the processes of artistic and literary decolonization involved in a radical dismantling of European codes and a postcolonial subversion and appropriation of the dominant discourse. The natural correlative of this has been the demand for the creation of a new reality, devoid of all colonial traces. Since it is almost impossible for the colonized to re-create a reality in complete neglect of the European colonial enterprise, "it has been the project of postcolonial writing to interrogate European discourses and discursive strategies from a privileged position within (and between) two worlds; to investigate the means by which Europe imposed and maintained its codes in the colonial dominations of much of the rest of the world" (5).

Contemporary native women writers are in a position of full potential. As participants in two cultural traditions, they pattern their art with discursive acts of "mediation"--"the artistic and conceptual stand point, constantly flexible, which uses the epistemological

frameworks of Native American and Western cultural traditions to illuminate and enrich each other" (Ruppert 3). In this work towards the dismantling of western stereotypes, creation of cultural criticism of the colonizer, they retell the stories of violence of the past and at the same time they also write about the need to effect the emergence of a new cultural and literal activity. In discussing native literature, Paula Gunn Allen directs our attention to the fact that native novels are increasingly concerned with tribal and urban life. Though much of their narrative plotting is western, they "rely on native rather than non-Indian forms, themes and symbols and so are not colonial or exploitative. Rather, they carry on the oral traditions at many levels, furthering and nourishing it and being furthered and nourished by it" (Allen 79).

Some critics believe that the native writers are employing the master's tools against the masters themselves. For example, Simon Ortiz writes about the native appropriation of western literary modes, "They [western modes] are now Indian because of the creative development that the Native people applied to them" (qtd. in Ruppert 5), and Arnold Krupat explains how a committed Native writer "manages successfully to merge forms internal to his [the native writer's] cultural formation with forms external to it, but pressing upon even seeking to

delegitimate it" (qtd. in Ruppert 6). In these "delegitimizing" modes, the autobiography is used to tell not the story of the self, but of the community. The native bildungsroman narrates not the development of the protagonist's mind and character alone, but also the awakening of racial consciousness within a community.

The multiple self identifications of the native women novelists under discussion (coloured, political activist, mixed blood, feminist, lesbian etc) pose a threat to the reconstruction of subjectivity. The multiple tropes of identifications could be regarded as instances of post-structuralist, post-modernist representations of the non-unitary self. This subversive characterization at a time when native women are attempting to discover their self is certainly self-destructive. Moreover, the intersections of these multiple self identities create what is called "border consciousness" (Fast 142) in the speakers. But, even this apparent liability is converted into a favourable argument by Crate, Maracle and Marchessault. Their multiple self conceptions sharpen their awareness that their audiences are also multiple: hence from their shifting border locations, these writers recognize and address different audiences as they seek to influence diverse communities. Thus Maracle in her works addresses both feminists and anti-racists; Marchessaault, who

identifies herself as a native lesbian, addresses not only natives and lesbians, but also anti-church audience.

The Restatement of Nativeness

Contemporary Native story tellers often choose the novel form for their narrative needs as "the novel is a narrative genre well-suited for examining how the traditional ways of knowing function in a multi-cultural world where the meanings of narrative are often twisted and tangled" (Elaine Johner qtd. in Ruppert 14).

Moreover, the size and scope of the novel allows it the flexibility to juxtapose various narrative forms and then bring readers to a standpoint where they can untangle their responses and misreadings taking them back to their experiential roots. Evident in their novels is a profound spiritualism --usually traditional rather than Christian, an intense reverence and respect for nature, a strong sense of community and a love of life, laughter and harmony as aboriginal people. But these qualities alone wouldn't succeed in realistically portraying native life. The de-stabilization of all the above-mentioned values because of the onslaught of western ideals is an aspect of native life that novelists often present. At the end of it all however, the formation of a strong family feeling or community life is hinted at which certainly assures one that the natives are not all vanquished.

The value of a life of mingling, caring and sharing usually emerges in the portrayal of various characters. In Lee Maracle's Sundogs one sees a character, Marianne, who is an excellent example of what Maracle's grandmother called "Crippled two tongue" (Maracle, Differences 166). She is a girl marginalized in her own culture as well as in the western culture "At home, I am not Indian enough and at school I am much too Indian", (Sundogs 10). This is Marianne's predicament. She speaks from her urban experience and is greatly distanced from the language of her tribal ancestors. Sundogs is about Marianne's attempt to create and negotiate relationship with her family and her community.

In Marianne's initial attitude towards her family -- her embarrassment at her mother's ways of talking, dressing etc, her anger towards the concept of extended family, her inability to respond to the needs of her relatives, her failure in recognizing the true reasons behind the gradual increase in violence in her family and her brother's unsuccessful fight against alcoholism and her inability to recognize the real strength of her mother, the soul of the family -- all these prove that she is a victim of the patriarchal and extremely solipsistic western culture. As the novel proceeds, one can sense a change in Marianne's stance. Her relationship with her

sisters improves and she recognizes her mother's true worth. After her return from the Peace Run, she finds a new meaning in her family relations.

My whole family and every Native any of us ever knew gathers at the house. It's a new house... My brothers clutch me like they are sure I have been raised from the dead. Dignified tears leak from Joseph's eyes but Rudy sobs uncontrollably - everyone weeps. I break down too....

Momma's face smiles; tears track down deep lines, fill her crow's feet but her body explodes with pride. Her womb birthed a frail little girl with extraordinary courage.... We began the run for love and we ended on the same note. Now I know this is what my Momma is all about. (204)

Marianne's realization that her problem of having "No roots in the earth and her ways and no roots in family" (190) had kept her from coming to terms with her own self.

Dione in Joan Crate's Breathing Water too has a problem with self which results from her inability to relate her urban self to the native self. The disappearance of her father from the family creates a vacuum which is keenly felt by Dione. Her gradual separation from her family only converts her into a

schizophrenic. It is only when she establishes peace with her mother that she finds inner peace. Towards the end of the novel, one finds Dione, the muddling, inexperienced girl metamorphose into a responsible and confident woman.

These novels hold out hope to young Indian readers, many of whom are suffering from the adolescent identity crisis -- living as a native in westernized society. Much in native literature reveal the depth and diversity of the indigenous culture, the beauty of the native world and the wisdom of the elders. In Maracle's and Marchessault's fiction, the symbiotic relationship between the old and the young is highlighted. In the absence of strong mothers, grandmothers wait to teach Indian ways to the young who may be floundering in an alien culture.

The valorization of the grandmother is one of the features in Marchessault's fiction that could be seen in all the three works of her trilogy. Grandmothers, in aboriginal culture, were deemed even more powerful than mothers, since their age signified seniority in wisdom and experience. In portraying the family intergenerationally, "Marchessault is able to give us a sense of the traditional power of the grandmothers, without glossing over the oppression of the mothers in the modern family" (Brandt 99).

In the first volume, Like a Child of the Earth, she introduces her family members and attempts to create the myth of her Grandmother. In "Song Two" she gives us an insight into her family relations:

My parents, my accomplices in this farce, raised a barricade at the entrance to the nest, because they had, of course, the fearful, feeble outlook of the bird who does not venture far from the nest. Until I might attain the age when I could survive on my own and bring down my prey by myself, they hovered over me, encouraging me, helping me stuff my face. When, after numerous vicissitudes, I attained the age where I could look after myself, I cast my parents off, threatening my mother with my beak and whining voice. I wriggled in front of my father.... I made plans, constructed a setting for myself, and laughed in my mother's beak when she sang about economy, prudence, modesty, marriage, and children... [yet] I did not remember how to leave the nest. (19)

The protagonist is saved from this narcissistic existence by her grandmother. In the second volume, Mother of the Grass Marchessault draws on her childhood experience in a family of women. Marchessault's mother

and grandmother had knowledge of traditional female healing practices and told her the stories of female culture which is later responsible for her faith in the creation of an all-female family. In seven songs, she relates anecdotes from her childhood spent with her beloved grandmother, "In those days, we lived beside the river. We were my grandmothers, my mother, my father, and my grandmother's second husband. We lived as a tribe, in a great congregation of nerve cells and blood cells" (7).

By presenting an extended family where women provide emotional and practical comfort to each other, where the grandmother passes on worldly knowledge through an osmosis-like process, Jovette Marchessault inverts ideas of family relationships that exist in the western system.

Thus, Crate, Maracle and Marchessault effect a reworking of the native women's role as the bearer of life and nourisher of the family and violently invert the patriarchal attack on native family traditions. Jeannette Armstrong remarks:

It was through the attack on the power of Aboriginal woman that the disempowerment of our people has been achieved, in a de-humanizing process that is one of the cruellest on the face

of this earth. In the attack on the core family system, in the direct attack on the role of Aboriginal woman, the disintegration of our peoples towards genocide has been achieved. (x)

Another important issue discussed by the native women writers is, of course, the intersection of racism and sexism. The contents of the literary works of writers like Maracle and Marchessault often disturb the readers of the mainstream culture, for they often articulate the experience of the rejected other in their own land.

Maracle's I Am Woman begins with a discussion of her "personal struggle with womanhood, culture, traditional spiritual beliefs and political sovereignty" (vii). She writes about the humbling of her youthful enthusiasm by racist, sexist and nationalist oppression and expresses shock at the anti-sexist views of native men. She writes at length about the effects of colonization on women:

Colonization for Native women signifies the absence of beauty, the negation of our sexuality. We are the females of the species: 'Native', undesirable, non-sensuous beings that never go away. Our wombs bear fruit but are not sweet. For us intercourse is not marked by white, middle-class, patriarchal dominant-submissive

tenderness. It is more a physical release from the pressure and pain of colonialism--mutual rape. Sex becomes one more of the horrors of enslavement, driving us to celibacy. (20-21)

The response of the native woman towards the native male is marked by anything but tenderness. As Maracle writes, "I am beginning to feel like our own men do not want us. They don't like us. We are just here for them to vent their frustrations, just whipping posts.... Worse, we are with them because they couldn't get a white woman" (51).

Native men, who were better off as "lazy drunken Indians" (17) than native women whose very femininity was negated seldom find common ground in their fight against the common evil of colonialism. Maracle also directs her ire against white feminists who "invite [us] to speak if the issue is racism or Native people. We are there to teach, to sensitize them or to serve them in some way. We are expected to retain our position well below them, as their servants. We are not, as a matter of course, invited as an integral part of 'their movement' -- the women's movement" (18).

The way out of racism and sexism, according to Maracle lies in a heart-to-heart talk amongst themselves.

She writes, "Let us begin by talking to each other about ourselves. Let us cleanse the dirty shack that racism left us. Let us deal with our men-folk and the refuse of patriarchy they borrowed from white men" (139).

Maracle is fully aware of the need to get rid of the internal colonization for, only by reclaiming the essential, independent native self can an Indian woman position herself in the site of counter discourse.

Sundogs could be regarded not just as a story of a native girl's self-realization, but also as a restatement of the events of the Peace Run at Okanagan. Marianne's initial rejection of the very existence of violence in native-white relationship is countered by her first hand experience of it during the Peace Run. It is not that Marianne has not been subjected to racism. While commenting on her sister Lacey's fanatical feminism, Marianne says:

Lacey, you believe in Momma's simple truth ['love one another'] because you never had your blooming tenuous womanhood violated in quite the same way. Lacey, you did not go to my high schools. You worked at home alongside Momma. Lacey, you restricted your world to a coloured one; no white men were allowed in it....

You discussed white men and patriarchy all the time, laughed over its inadequacies, its impotence, and its futile attempt to negate the majority of the world. You emmified them while I was busy dancing to their crazy tunes. I competed with them and in my mind I still do. I had to find partners from among them to study and conduct group seminars. I experienced the humiliation of being chosen last for group after group and only if no one else had a partner because no one wanted to invest his trust in my intellectual potential. (161-62)

She was aware of internal colonization and she considered her mother's belief in the "anti-Native genocidal plot" to be a bit far-flung. In her irritation with her mother's constant talking-back to the television, Marianne comments, "I want relief... from always considering every law, custom and practice of these people as some sort of anti-Native genocidal plot. My mother, I muse, thrives on the plottiness of these people. Without their plottiness, she would have no reason to get up every day. Without their wickedness, she would have very little reason for being" (8).

But, in the end, the overt violence of the white racists against the peace runners makes her realize that

her mother was right all along. The "hate-twisted faces" (183) of the rock-throwers and the wanton whispered epithets of the young white boys who had gathered along the sides of the road awaken the native consciousness within Marianne.

The rampant sexism within native communities too is mentioned in the novel. Judy's violence against his wife and children and her own partner's comment "I never courted any native woman and I have been with plenty" (118) reflects the condition of native women in Canada. Elsewhere, Marianne remarks in passing about native women, "The alternative [to following academics] was to consent to sexual reduction, withdraw or be reduced. Erase yourself or consent to shame. That is the sociology of being native and woman in Canada. It is the result of beseigement, encroachment, small neglect, impoverishment, and mass death" (161).

Marianne becomes a character who is fully aware of the effects of colonization. She realizes that it affects even the way people rate themselves in society. Maracle, from the vantage point of literary resistance, attempts to overturn and transform the colonial discourse. The creation of strong native characters, indeed, weaken the process of victimization. The voicing of their stories

generate personal and political empowerment which is strengthened by the characters' acts of naming violation and refusal to collaborate with oppressors.

Jovette Marchessault's writings are not so anti-racist as they are anti-sexist. In her writings, what emerges is the construction of identity purely on sexist lines; Race becomes a non-entity here yet, on a subtle level, she criticizes a much ignored fact of native life in cities - - that of child abuse.

In Mother of the Grass Marchessault attempts a portrayal of child abuse within the family. Directing her ire against "daddies" the protagonist cries:

What was going on in the daddies' pants as they hit, wounded, and mutilated? Lise told me. Once when he was whipping her thighs with her jump-rope, she was maddened with pain and tried to get away from him, breaking the unity of her suffering and entering on another mode of life, but she slipped and he recaptured her up against his pants leg. 'He had a hard-on, for Christ's sake. He had a hard-on!' Lise told me that. So did big Colette. Huguette and Lorraine also noticed it. (93)

The inability of mothers to stall this abuse is decried by the protagonist. "Mama, you should have screamed out loud. Howled ! Ho-o-owled and ho-o-o-wld and ho-o-owled !" (83).

The violence within the family was certainly formidable, but even worse was the violence meted out to their ancestors. In Like a Child of the Earth, a novel which is almost surrealistic in its emphasis on feminist archetypalism and which attempts to portray the lost history of the natives, Marchessault writes about the "pillage, thieving, abduction, rape, torture, threats, and blows and baptisms" (41). In an attempt to rework the native history, she writes about the false romanticism of Christopher Columbus who "shot and killed a number of savages with his crossbows in order to teach them respect for the weapons of Castille" (41) and about William Cody who massacred the cattle belonging to the natives. William Cody, appears as "the most bloody killer yet, an assassin designated by the army" (135).

The silencing of a group of people who had been reduced to the status of "semiotic pawns" (Goldie 10) in the colonial power strangle hold is well articulated in this novel.

We spoke feebly, we spoke in whispers. Like convalescents, we were cautious about using the verbs 'to have' and 'to be' in the future tense.... We did not remember the old days very well, or the old words, or the starting point of the discourse or how to support an argument because we had been subjects of the Queen of England for far too long. (84)

Here, the very assumption that the colonizer had taught the aboriginal to talk, that they had civilized the Indian is inverted. But hidden in this statement is the polemic of understatement. The narration of events in the past tense ("spoke feebly", "we did not remember" etc) is juxtaposed with the present ability to voice the past dilemma. By effecting a clever splitting of the subject [I-the powerful speaker talking about I-the weak victim of colonization], Marchessault subverts all the preconceived notions of the colonized.

Though much of Marchessault's anti-sexist views are presented throughout all her texts, it is in her attacks on the church, that she becomes vitriolic. Baptism, in her eyes, is equivalent to abduction and rape. However, much of her attack on Christianity is characterised by satirical remarks.

Eh, Christ ! We are christianized. Eh, Christ ! We have fallen in the well of truth with its bleached suns. Eh, Christ ! We are picked up, chastized, and impregnated by the great-Vampire-in-Chief of the lunatic asylum. Eh, Christ ! We are absolutely enslaved by all our institutions, laws and churches. Eh, Christ ! We will perpetuate this deception for millennia. (147)

This tongue in cheek statement is rounded off with yet another inversion: "Eh, Christ, give us the strength to go on, in the name of the father and of the holy mother, amen" (147).

Eventhough she almost never conjures up images of the native religious beliefs, Marchessault is vehement when she treats Catholic religion in her novels. She often quotes scripture in a new context that effectively exposes its misogynistic, even pornographic nature. Marchessault's tremendous anger against the oppressive order of priests bursts out in "A Lesbian Chronicle from Medieval Quebec" and "The Angel Makers" in Lesbian Triptych. These fictions employ the satiric device of inversion, of turning the Church's teaching upside down, in order to denounce the way in which the church has oppressed women's sexuality. The satiric denunciation of papal authority in the "Chronicle", the humorous puns on

bull-Normal School, the bull-dog compulsory heterosexuality, the channel bull, burlesque the religious order, while the inversion of the annunciation in "The Angel Makers" into the blessed arrival of death, instead of birth, travesties it.

The attack on the "Black Robes" (Maracle, Woman 62) or the Christian missionaries who arrive on the native land to 'educate' the people is tinged with a particular brand of humour which is prevalent and vital in aboriginal cultures. The shallowness of western education is pointed out by the Chief in Maracle's essay "Black Robes." In the same book, Maracle also makes a satirical remark on the lateral violence among native people in the poem "Hatred"

If the state won't kill us
We will have to kill ourselves.
It is no longer good etiquette
to head-hunt savages
will just have to do it ourselves.
It's not polite to violate 'squaws'
we'll have to find
an Indian to oblige us.
It's poor form to starve an Indian
we will have to
deprive our young ourselves

Blinded by niceties and polite liberality
we can't see our enemy,
so, we'll just have to kill each other. (1-14)

Appropriating Master's Tools

Picking up the pen and writing a self, a subject position into existence has been an effective tool for oppositional tactics. Like any other tool of resistance, the pen too, is vitriolic in its potential to defend and attack. The words Resistance, Difference and Multiplicity have become synonymous with native women's effort to subvert the master narratives of the western tradition. In their critiques of multiple systems of domination, many native women have asserted that their works followed the interventionist mode, marked by a desire to resist and resignify western narratives.

The major concept of Resistance is clearly defined by Selwyn Cudjoe in his Resistance and Caribbean Literature and by Barbara Harlow in Resistance Literature. Literary Resistance, according to them could be seen as a form of contractual understanding between the text and the reader, one which is embedded in an experimental dimension and buttressed by a political and cultural aesthetic at work in the culture. To Foucault, resistance is not a homogenous, fixed phenomenon: "[I]t is pluralized, diverse in form, heterogeneous, mobile and transitory" (Cousins

and Hussain 242). Native women use several methods to give expression to their literary resistance. The assertion of the self in literary works, the employment of the western narrative forms or their inversions -- autobiography, quest narratives, myth -- the reworking of western historical interpretations, the creation of strong characters, etc. are but a few modes by which native women posit themselves in the field of discourse.

The assertion of selfhood by the native women writers, their notions of narrative forms and their uncanny ideas of asserting their subjectivity are all inversional methods.

Jovette Marchessault's definition of herself as a native lesbian writer represents her ceaseless negotiations of a positionality from which she could speak. Her nativeness is characterized by her attack on Christopher Columbus and Buffalo Bill, her association with the rest of the victims in the world is reiterated in her attacks on Hitler and her concern for animals, her feminist approach is revealed in her attacks on patriarchal religion, language, and modes of living and her lesbianism is communicated in her attacks on heterosexuality.

Joan Crate's character Dione has a difference-defined, complexly constructed self. Her sensuousness, her waywardness are all in sharp contrast to the projected values of native women. Crate is involved in presenting the cultural schizophrenia of a half native - half white heroine and for this she makes use of the stereotype of the exotic, erotic female. Lee Maracle's tactical renaming takes different forms, she utilizes her diverse personal experiences to explore complex sets of native, sexual and race-related concerns. She draws on her native ancestry and writes from the perspective of native women. She also voices the concern of other minority groups in various essays in I Am Woman -- feminism in "The Women's Movement", racism in "The Rebel", religion in "Black Robes" and lesbianism in "Isn't Love a Given ?"

Having looked into the respective aspects of each of the novelists under discussion, it is pertinent here to discuss the creation of subjectivity. For a discourse to be intelligible, it is essential that the subject-position be occupied. It follows from Saussure's theory of language as a system of differences that the world is intelligible only in a discourse which in turn is intelligible only with the assertion of the self. Thus, "as well as being a system of signs related among themselves, language incarnates meaning in the form of the series of positions it offers for the subject from which

to grasp itself and its relation with the real" (Nowell-Smith 26).

The subject is created in language and in discourse and also in ideology "since the symbolic order in its discursive use is closely related to ideology" (Belsey 49). Ideology often suppresses the role of language in the construction of the subject and as a result people recognize themselves in the ways in which ideology interpellates them. As a result, they "work by themselves" (Althusser 169) and they willingly adopt the subject positions necessary to their participation in the social formation.

One of the powerful means to assert the self is certainly the autobiographical mode. The use of the first person narrator in each of the novels under study is the primary tactic, used to create the counter discourse. By providing the illusion of a coherent, non-problematic and unified self, Crate, Maracle and Marchessault have succeeded in working "to suppress the role of language in the construction of the subject and its own role in the interpellation of the subject and to present the individual as a free, unified, autonomous subjectivity" (Belsey 67). The taking up of the autobiographical position thus transports the colonial subject into the

territory of the universal subject and holds promise of a culturally empowered subjectivity. For the colonial subject, the process of coming to writing is an articulation through interrogation, a charting of the conditions that have historically placed her identity under erasure. But this appropriation of the subject position cannot be regarded as a mimetic process -- for the native subject establishes her self by "expos[ing] their [white] gaps and incongruities, wrench[ing] their meaning" (Watson and Smith xx) and thus calling their authority into question.

When one reads native autobiographies (or fictional autobiographies) within the parameters of the western autobiography, one might be led to think that the former is a new genre in production. The centrality of the self to western autobiography has no close parallel in native writing. This does not, however, mean that though the western understanding of the self in its various historical representations is neither prioritized nor valorized in Native Indian autobiography, it does not negate the idea of subjectivity in texts. Some sense of a self -- a collective communal self or perhaps "the reflective, conscious subject of experience, a subject that is not identical with any self of its experiences memories or traits" (Krupat, Ethnocriticism 201) is indeed to be found in Native Indian autobiography.

The 'I' in native autobiographies is thus not an individual with rights and responsibilities before the law, but rather the representative of his ancestors, clan or an actor who merely performed his/her appointed character. Ironically, this is nowhere more clearly discernible than in Maracle's collection of essays I Am Woman. This work, according to the author herself, is "a collection of things in my life which shaped me; it's a summation of my life from different angles" (Differences 170). Eventhough the author attempts to inscribe the subjective 'I' throughout the book, very often it is the voice of native women that is exposed. It is mostly about assertions like "We are not a violent people, but neither are we fools" (Woman 94), "Once we understand what kind of world they have created, then we can figure out what kind of world we can re-create" (90) and so on. Sundogs is about a girl's movement from solipsism to a feeling of communal oneness. The narcissistic 'I' in Marianne slowly vanishes as she becomes one with the peace runners.

Ironically, the autobiographical mode is not in keeping with the native way of life where everyone knows everyone else. Thus seldom do we find explicit mention of who-I-am. The native writers appropriate the synecdochic reference of 'I' to mean the tribe. As far as characterizations are concerned, one finds an adherence to

the "metonymic sense of self" (Krupat, Ethnocriticism 212), especially in the work by Joan Crate. Here, the heroine Dione's life in the city and her marital boredom and her sexual adventures prove that the individual's sense of herself predominates as different and separate from other individuals.

Jovette Marchessault's novels are replete with the assertions of not plain subjectivity, but the united subjectivity of an all female community. It is only in the last volume of the trilogy that we get to know the name of the protagonist. The first volume, Like a Child of the Earth, begins with a description of the protagonist's celestial origins. Unfolding within a vast mythico-historical time space which concludes with the cosmic event of her own birth into the human dimension, she journeys like a shaman in a trance-state of expanded consciousness in search of her lost ancestors, both animal and human, who will instruct her in the recovery of the soul in order to promote the healing of a stricken civilization. During the course of her journeys, she identifies herself not just with other natives, but also with Afro-Americans, Jews and the land.

Volume Two of the trilogy, Mother of the Grass, begins with the line "In those days, we lived beside the river" (5). In this novel, she narrates her life on the

terrains of Earth. In seven songs, Marchessault retells anecdotes from her childhood spent in the company of her mother and grandmother. This is the story of a writer's apprenticeship as she first grows to consciousness in the flood of her grandmother's words in a house by the river. In the final song, alone now, the protagonist settles in a house of her own by a river and her writing joins in the flood tide of women's speech. In this novel, it is in her identification with the other victims of child abuse, that we perceive an excellent example of the 'synecdochic self.' "While waiting, we pretended to sleep and sometimes we actually did. We slipped and fell down a mysterious, fog-filled hole where there was nothing to see. There we were, lost ! We were upset ! We were so desperately lost that we ended up screaming" (90).

And again;

We didn't have the time to do it. The cart before the horse was already in our houses, already with our mummies. We had seen the daddies go by--sad, beaten, angry, tired and contemplating revenge now or later. We didn't know when or where to expect it, we only heard the screams which rose in their chests and throats, such a flood of black blood flowing toward the heart. (91)

White Pebbles in the Dark Forests, Marchessault's experimental third novel, provides an apocalyptic and prophetic gloss to the trilogy. Most of the novel is constructed as dialogue, between Jeanne the narrator and the community of women she lives with in the Appalachian mountains. Doris Cowain calls the book as not entirely successful as "her new dramatic forms of expression take some getting used to" (42). The dialogic structure of the novel allows Marchessault to explore conflicting narratives in different voices, and to discuss polemical issue without targeting individual characters.

Marchessault's work is situated at the intersection of feminist discourses current in the international sphere as well as in Quebec, and the texts collected in Lesbian Triptych are located at the cross roads of the critical and celebratory functions of these discourses. The first narrative "A Lesbian Chronicle from Medieval Quebec", the story of a conforming child, who fulfills patriarchy's destiny for her--death of the self--is opposed by that of the rebel who resists the movement into adult hood, trying to hang on to the natural world as she dances through the seven veils of church doctrine (the seven deadly sins), throws them back in the face of authority, and walks herself right off the world of conformity into a woman-centred world. This is a poetic chronicle of a girl's growing up and coming out as a lesbian. Eventhough the

speaking persona asserts her voice, the lesbian voice is hardly ignorable. "If the minister of immigration at one time agreed that the Christian community might include lesbians, it was only on the condition that we remain anonymous that we remain wholly mute regarding our vicious tastes, and that once and for all we lesbians render ourselves invisible" (31).

The centre piece of the triptych, "The Night Cows", is a monologue which ushers in the utopian vision of a world of women beyond patriarchal constraints. Here, the cow-mother, who is both Mother-Goddess and Mother-Parent embarks upon the ultimate female vision-quest journey to seek the truth about the origins and overthrow of female power. She ritually initiates her lesbian daughter to the female mysteries of the body and the spirit, mothering and nurturing her with desire in ways that are forbidden under patriarchy. The monologue begins with "My mother is a cow! That makes two of us" (73). In a mystic journey meant to displace the heavenly father from his sky kingdom, the Night cows float on the Milky way in ecstasy. In the company of the trickster crow, the docile cows who sweat by the day in the kitchen are transformed at night into creatures of beauty, into sisters whose bodies give delight to each other.

In this story, again, it is the ecstatic voice of the lesbians finding the female jouissance in the company of fellow victims that is heard:

And we are off! We are going elsewhere, jubilation for our bodies, food for our hunger, air for our lungs and veins; we are going elsewhere toward our night of the fleshy cows. And we mount higher and higher through the cycles of the heavens. Next to each other, turning toward each other, bearing the scars of our mutilation, sharing the desire to travel together out of the depths of the time we serve by day in the old kitchens. (75)

Thus, in the autobiographical selves created by native writers, one finds an excellent example of subjectivity as the subject-position within a discourse synonymous with subjection.

Lee Maracle's and Jovette Marchessault's novels constitute what is called "associational literature" by Thomas King (245). It is a body of literature that has been created, for the most part, by contemporary native writers. While no one set of criteria will do to describe it fully, it possesses a series of attributes that help to give it form.

Associational literature often describes a native community while it may also describe a non-native community. However, it avoids centring the story on the non-native community or on the conflict between the two cultures,

Concentrating instead on the daily activities and intricacies of Native life and organizing the elements of plot along a rather flat narrative line that ignores the ubiquitous climaxes and resolutions that are so valued in non-Native literature. In addition to this flat narrative line, associational literature leans towards the group rather than the single, isolated character, creating a fiction that de-values heroes and villains in favour of the members of the community a fiction which eschews judgments and conclusions. (245-46)

The existence of two cultures side by side in the Canadian social scenario ascertains that some level of conflict would exist between them. But by playing down the conflict and instead laying the stress on community, the novelists under reference have approximated associational literature. Conflicts are found in abundance in Marchessault's works. But a direct white-native conflict (except in a historical rendering of

events) is avoided by Marchessault. The stress on the community life with less accent on the individual has already been explained above. But nowhere is this more evident than in the last volume of the trilogy, White Pebbles in the Dark Forests. This novel is about the protagonist Jeanne's entry into a community of women who lived in the Appalachian mountains who are alternately called the "red cicadas" (30) and "old guard" (41). Much of the novel is a protest against the destructive uses of modern science: the torture of animals in the name of research, and the adaptation of space technology to military ends. Marchessault advocates a return to pre-industrial, pre-technological world "to save the world... our role is to save this world, so old, beautiful, so cruel and so tender" (8).

The role of the Appalachian community becomes prominent as a united group they nurse back to health Noria's dogs, brought to them from experimental labs across the country. The novel though dialogic in structure presents the communal voice of these old guards who are getting ready to save the world.

Joan Crate, through her creation of an almost white character appropriates the mode of "guerilla ethnography" -- a term introduced by Renae Moore Bredin in her essay "Theory in the Mirror".

What happens to the male and female white bodies of the first world when confronted by the female body of the 'Third World' wrapped in the culturally loaded garb of revolution, talking 'like a man' and taking up the gun? Is there a difference between white women taking up a gun and women of color taking up that gun, which is culturally inscribed as a white masculine subject position? I would argue that by taking up the pen and writing the gun into a text, that in turn, turns the gun into white bodies, women of color... engage in what I am calling 'guerilla ethnography'. Such an attack of writing is a surprise attack across the borders of racial demarcation/categorization. (228-29)

Guerilla ethnography is a strategic response to internal colonialism. It overturns prototypical ethnography by operating behind the enemy lines of colonial discourses, writing an informal, non-hierarchical representation of culture, instigating a reversal of ideology. It is "a serious fictional portrait of western (white) cultural practice, a written account of the lives of 'white' people, a picture of what it means to be culturally white by one who is not" (229).

Crate's Dione is certainly a complex character who lives as the exotic wife of a Greek hotelier on the conscious level and as an Indian on the subconscious level. By portraying the boredom she suffers from in the company of whites, the monotony of city life, her sexual escapades and her kleptomaniacal incursions into the shopping malls, Crate attempts a critique of the western society. Moreover, it is only when Dione learns to narrate native stories that she gets to assert herself in life.

Maracle's appropriation of the tactic is more effective in that she positions the shallow face of white society against the rich communal life of natives and nowhere is this more perceptible than in Ravensong. It is the story of Stacey, seventeen and at the brink of adulthood, who balances her family's traditional ways against white society's hollow values. In describing her white classmates' reaction to the suicide of Polly and juxtaposing it against her own, Maracle creates a negative picture of the white society.

In the bathroom between classes the girls uttered mean remarks in low pious tones about Polly's lack of chastity. Stacey felt a tiny scream birth itself inside where healing light lived. She quieted it by focussing on Polly. She

couldn't believe how small and mean they all were. So what if Polly had a little fun last night? Big Deal! There was no use saying anything to these girls. As she watched the girls and listened to their words Stacey realized that the crime Polly committed had nothing to do with virtue. Half the girls condemning her had rolled around in parked cars themselves -- it was getting caught that laid her out for condemnation. (28-29)

Her obsession with Polly's suicide leads her to ruminate over the real power of white women. She knew that Christians used the word "sinful" to qualify lust.

This lie of sin lived in their minds, while lust, the natural passions of heart, pushed up on their bodies. The reality of lust wants expression. The exorcism of it requires dispassionate repression. The conflict between expression/repression must underlie whatever was joggling up their need to condemn Polly. (30)

While Stacey felt terrible at the wanton suicide of Polly and felt the weight of death, her white counterparts are criticized for their snide remarks on Polly's chastity.

The presentation of the negative aspects of white society does not end here. The typical White Canadian family is represented through the portrayal of her friend Carol's family: Carol's mother Mrs. Snowden's dispassionate greeting on her entry to their house makes Stacey think about the lack of emotional intensity between even family members:

The entire table conversation at dinner was made of 'Please Pass' this, that or the other and 'May I be excused', as though the children did not actually belong there.... The children rarely spoke unless spoken to. The house did not belong to them.... It was almost like they could just barely tolerate each other. (34)

The suffocation within Carol's house is contrasted against the playful tenderness within her own family. The fact that "Mrs. S. had no more rank in her own house than the children" (35) lets Stacey realize the positive sides of gynocentric societies.

Marchessault too presents scenes from the western world. But most of them are attacks on the patriarchal religion and the industries which present the seamy side of capitalism. The Church is satirically referred to as "the Catholic Multinational Corporation" (Mother 33) and

Marchessault comments thus about her fellow-workers: "if fatigue was money, they'd be millionaires twice over, if humiliation was time, they'd be a thousand years old" (Mother 130). She writes about the suffocation, electric lights, the sweat, the dirt and the pain.

In these works, one finds a calculated move on the part of the natives to reverse the stereotypes. They are no longer the "semiotic pawns" (Goldie 10) in the field of discourse, they are the subjects who dominate the colonizers and allot them positions within the discourse.

While most of the white characters in native fiction tend to be weak or rootless, one finds very fine instances of strong native characters--people who take decisions and people who really do matter. Marianne may be the narrator in Sundogs, but it is the character Elijah who emerges as the focal point. Elijah Harper was a Representative for the Natives in the House of Commons and his symbolic blockage of the Meech Lake Accord marked a significant change in Canadian politics in 1990. Referring to the historical speech he gave on television, Marianne writes:

I don't know why, but I want to weep. I feel so consumed by the magic of it all, the absolute irony of it, the greatness and simplicity of it, that I just want to roll all over the floor and

wail. The plot. The physical, the murder of our whole people, is being documented by a man who sat in the House of Commons in Manitoba, silent for two years. His frailness disappears in the folds of his steady gaze. He has waited for this moment... He is there and we all watch. Three generations of us glued to the words of a little man whose command of English is connected to some other language.... Graphic and gentle, polite, free of the bull shit hierarchy, he drives on relentlessly, but not noisily. He carefully chooses each word so as to sound as unobnoxious as he possibly can, while he articulates, documents and advances the most obnoxious and despicable thing a Nation can do--attempt genocide on a people. (68)

Elijah's speech could be regarded as the moment of epiphany in Marianne's life, as, for the first time in her life she saw the heroic stature of her mother and other native women. She recognized her mother's struggle to maintain herself and her children, not just physically, but psychically, culturally, with very few tools. This recognition is in turn followed by the awakening of her racial consciousness.

No character in fiction is, perhaps as strong as Marchessault's Grandmother who appears in the two volumes of her trilogy. The figure of her Grandmother looms as magnificently over the world of her childhood as she envisages the Goddess reigning over all creation. For her, Grandmother incarnates the spirit of those great teachers of all time who impart a sacred knowledge through the manifestation of their joyous being. Marchessault's depiction of her Grandmother is almost mythopoeic. Commenting on her Grandmother's performance with the piano, she writes, "When she played, all the listeners felt that she went from paleontological discovery to paleolithic discovery in which even the essence of the primordial rhythms took the skin from the skull. The atmospheric pressure of those remote epochs reached her fingers which seemed less to be striking notes on the keyboard than to be striking the ivory teeth of an antediluvian animal or of the first time warm-blooded mastodon or a great reptile heated by the fires of eternity" (Child 130). The Grandmother is a powerful story teller, mixing catholic superstition with personal fantasy and shamanic lore, and animating the narrator's childhood imagination with vivid, life-affirming images.

The Grandmother is equally at home playing games with the children, running, jumping and skating as when she is speaking her mind about politics. Her revolutionary

spirit makes her rage against the slaughter of people during the war. The men in the house called her crazy for her wanting to change the world. But the revolutionary spirit and the faith in feminine power which she instilled in her granddaughter proves the strength of her character.

In The Wretched of the Earth, Frantz Fanon claims that the past of the colonized is often disfigured by the settlers to drive home the point that if they were to leave, the natives would fall back into barbarism, degradation and savagery. "Colonialism is not satisfied merely withholding a people in its grip and emptying the native's brain of all form and content. By a kind of perverted logic, it turns to the past of the oppressed people, and distorts, disfigures and destroys it" (Wretched 169).

Distorting history was a form of suppressionary tactic employed by the colonizers all over the world. The belief was that if the field of vision, past as well as present, of the colonized was disturbed, he/she would slavishly conform to the dominant modes of thinking. In Fanon's opinion, successful resistance to colonialism should mean that "the past is given back its value" (170).

Rewriting history is not an easy task, for, official history reproduces the effect of the Real, inscribing its knowledge of history as the best representation of truth. In her essay "Aboriginal Women's Writing and the Cultural Politics of Representation," Julia Emberley writes:

The distinction between hegemonic inscription of history and literature has recently undergone a crisis in interdisciplinary contamination. Under the rubric of a new historicism, a benign exposure to the post-structural critique in literary theory and philosophy has subjected the notion of an unmediated representation of reality to an interpretative turn, or, on another register, a deconstructive turn. (105)

Or, in other words, the idea of objectivity in the representation of history is inverted. In Maracle's view, "there is power in knowing" (Woman 96). And to re-possess the power, histories must be rewritten. To a real rebel, in her opinion, "altering her condition will rewrite her life onto the pages of a new history" (95). She resists the history lessons white teachers imparted to native children at schools, "you taught my child that, here, on the West Coast, we were cannibals. I had to tell my daughters that their great-great-granny, who was almost a hundred years old when I was a child, had never eaten a single soul" (79).

The importance of Maracle's works as revisionary historiography is that they document the struggle of natives today within a history of resistance. As a revisionary history is presented, the narrators also effect "an epistemic break... both with respect to the semiotic field engendering the 'Imaginary Indian' in white writing of the native--she/he is historicized not mythologized--nor is it history as timeless myth as in traditional native 'historical' narratives of mystical orality which reify an 'original source'" (Godard 203). The history which Maracle presents is the history of the twentieth-century Canada.

In Sundogs, the western myth of non-violent existence with the aboriginal people is inverted. The violence meted out to the Okanagan Peace Runners in 1990 is stated in very harsh terms by the author. The real truth behind the blockage of the Meech Lake Accord under the leadership of Elijah Harper and the resultant white rage which was unleashed on the natives is portrayed by Maracle. Even the historical presentation of equality in Canada is reversed. Marianne opines: "Sovereignty--the impossible dream. Equality, solidarity with all creation--a pipe dream" (201).

Marchessault's revisioning of history occurs on two levels--she views history as a timeless dimension as in the traditional mystical native narratives and she also attempts to retell the dark side of native history of the millennium. Her first novel, Like a Child of the Earth is a narrative of her celestial origin. Her vision of a sacred cosmos in which animals and plants preside along with rocks and stars is mythical in a way that is foreign to western thinking. Her interest in "origins" stems from her interest in envisioning a holistic and woman-affirming cosmology. "Two questions torment us--the question of origins and beginning and the question of the final outcome. Everything else is just padding and a way of passing time" (121). This statement could be regarded as a political protest against modernity's sense of alienation from the past and the universe.

The figure of the Woman, Mother and Grandmother, is recognised in traditional aboriginal societies not only as a powerful social figure, but as creator, as mythical source of being in the universe. Since she represents the life-giving spirit of the universe itself, she is deeply connected to the animal, vegetable and mineral worlds, as well as to the stars. Marchessault's genealogy of creation translates the aboriginal myth into modern scientific discourse in order to critique and challenge the way people behave toward the natural world

in westernized, industrialized countries. By casting this woman's culture into a social form, into a lost historical reality, she opens possibilities for feminist revisioning of knowledge. This historical element of her feminist aesthetic brings to light her interest in feminist archetypalism and it is a concentrated move in reclaiming a native heritage.

Elsewhere too, Marchessault attempts to revisualise history. Her portrayal of Christopher Columbus is an effort to invert all our pre-conceived notions of this explorer. Her Columbus is a tyrant who sent horsemen and dogs after the aborigines -- a man who killed a number of savages with his cross bows in order to teach them respect for the weapons of Castille -- a ruthless murderer.

Christopher Columbus craved gold. Gold and more gold! He was afraid in Spain they were going to say that he had not brought back enough gold. He required that every Indian fourteen years of age and older pay a tribute to him. The Indians preferred to flee to the mountains where they poisoned themselves with manioc sap rather than work as Columbus's slaves....

With his caravels filled with gold, Christopher Columbus decided to return to Cadiz.... The

conquerors had left with their cross and their greed. They returned with gold, slaves, and syphilis. (42)

Marchessault even terms Columbus as a man who attached himself to an erroneous idea with superhuman force. Buffalo Bill or Col. William Cody is presented not as the great hero and showman of the American West. He is shown as "the most bloody killer, an assassin" (135) who organized a systematic massacre of the bison in native lands. American President Thomas Jefferson is referred to as "that progenitor, poppa, momma, and obstetrician who once took on the task of drawing up the Declaration of Independence of the United States of America, inspired by the Rights of Man" (141). In the same breath, Marchessault calls him "the same Jefferson who, in beautiful Virginia in the South, never found time to free the two hundred slaves on his estate. Not even the Mulatto Woman who was his mistress for forty years and who gave him seven children and whose existence he kept secret" (141).

The literary works of native women writers inadvertently and self-consciously embody literary processes and genres unlike those of the old canon. Many of them have chosen purposefully to ignore standard rules and forms ill-suited to native story telling. They

strive to introduce new codes and their writings carry a new vision as they refuse to separate the literary and the academic from the sacred and daily thus bringing to the text the unpaginated experiences of contemporary tribal reality.

The Lesbian Voice of Dissent

Lesbian and gay literature, long relegated to the margins or closets of academic discourse, has lately become increasingly visible in the guise of "queer theory", a marriage of lesbian or gay literature and politics with post-modern, post-structuralist theory. Queer theory has been described as "an in-your-face rejection of the proper response to heteronormativity, a version of acting up" (Hennessy 967).

Jovette Marchessault is a native lesbian writer who believes that female bonding is a political weapon that could neutralize the cultural power of hetero-relations. Lesbian writing, as portrayed by dominant thinking, is not just about sex or sexuality. There is a broader cultural definition of sexuality that is at work here. Strong bonds to Earth and her inhabitants serve as a pivotal edge to most lesbian writing. Homophobia as well as racial discrimination wreak havoc in native women's lives and the native lesbian writing of Marchessault names these two evils.

The lesbian novel could be regarded as an outcome of the refusal to accept limitations posed by female novels of development. For in the female novels of development, as analysed by Susan J. Rosowski, the heterosexual protagonist "awakens to the limitations of her role, particularly as wife and mother, escaping through death, passivity or dreams of childhood or passion" (qtd. in Zimmerman 244). This naturally leads to the question as to how the feminist heroine is to grow into freedom. Since the female novels of development suggest the return of the integrated personality (of the protagonist) to the husband, feminists increasingly are choosing an obvious alternative -- relationships with other women.

Jovette Marchessault, in her autobiographical works that describe the awakening of the lesbian consciousness, subverts the normative space of autobiography by turning it to her own radical purposes. She uses the traditionally conservative, masculine mode of sublime writing subversively, thus attempting to inscribe a lesbian sublime that, as Biddy Martin remarks, "works to unsettle rather than to consolidate the boundaries around identity, not to dissolve them altogether, but to open them to the fluidities and heterogeneities that make their renegotiation possible" (103). This "counter-sublime" inscribes "the disruption of perceived experience, the heightening of perception itself, [and] the conversion of

the mind" in ways similar to the modes of the male sublime, but with an important difference, "the external transformative power is perceived as feminine" with the result that "the sublime transpires without the burden of indebtedness, the necessity for physical defensiveness, or the chill of competition" (Diehl 185-86). In place of the Kantian primacy of reason and repression of the body which constructs the sublime moment, the female sublime rejects the separation of mind and body, insisting on a model of relatedness that is inscribed as the "pre-oedipal sublime" by Patricia Yaegar. She names the Romantic idea of sublime as "oedipal" she elaborates:

If what is repressed in the 'oedipal' sublime is the desire for pre-oedipal bonding with the mother's body (which in most Romantic poems is given an imaginative correlative in the chaos and blissful heterodoxy of the cosmos), in the 'pre-oedipal' sublime, those libidinal moments are not repressed, they break into consciousness and are welcomed as a primary, healthful part of the writer's experience, as part of the motive for metaphor. (205)

Marchessault's lesbian sublime is characterized by a return to pre-oedipal bonding with the mother. The woman's writing which she employs and her epic of origins,

her flight through time and space to the moment of her arrival in an all female family of grandmother, mother and the girl child asserts the return to the pre-oedipal sublime.

And then they were busying themselves with my envelope. They were promising me openings through which the silence of thickness, the silence of the mud would enter into me like a beautiful snake. And now they were installing a womb in my envelope -- how careful they were in making it fit! Oh, what a beautiful pudding mould! A lovely mould with its raised and hollow design.... The stars soothed me by promising me every living species, without exception for my womb. All the same, they imposed another generation on me.... I already felt the urge to make other living things moving in this old womb.
(Child 174)

The protagonist relates her birth as the solar "split" (173) when, from the mating of the great she-bear and the polar star, she comes into being as a shooting star. She is a part of the cosmos expelled from the super void.

In the new female language, Marchessault ushers in the matristic myth of origins that would rename all of creation and reinterpret the ancient tales and legends of patriarchy in original gynocentric ways. In her lesbian novels Marchessault exalts the life-giving forces of the Earth, her language reclaims female desire, sexual pleasure and liberates a new-found joy of living. It names the sins of patriarchal religion--its sado-masochistic ritual, its intrusion on woman's space and time, on woman's body and mind and its politics of guilt, exploitation and externalization. Marchessault's radiant images, especially in "The Night Cows" evoke the Promised Land of Female Desire. In this story is introduced the utopian vision of a world of women beyond patriarchal constraints. Here, the lesbians float on the Milky way displacing the heavenly father from his sky kingdom,

And we are off ! And we fly to our rendezvous in the Milky Way. How beautiful ! The great river of milk, the land of birth, where mothers and daughters are reunited at long last so beautiful! ... All the breasted creatures of the universe come to the meeting place... All breasted creatures are uniting with each other in a wave of scales, of hair, of tenderness.

The milk flows ! The milk spurts ! The milk comes in floods ! ... A snowstorm of milk ! Gulps

of milk ! Scents of milk ! Drifts of milk ! Gusts
of milk ! Hurricanes of milk ! Clouds of milk !
Milk clotted with images ! Rainbows of milk...
And from all sides arise rallying cries, a tumult
of emotions stimulated by the milk. (75-76)

Another means to think of the female sublime is through the concept of jouissance, in the Barthesian/French feminist usage of the term as a sexual/textual force that breaks through conventions and limitation to a stage of liberating release. Barthes defines the "texte de jouissance" as, "one that engenders a state of loss, one that discomforts... rocks the historical, cultural and psychological beliefs of the reader, the resistance of his tastes, his values and his memories, brings to crisis his rapport with language" (Pleasure 25).

Marchessault inverts the pre-conceived beliefs of the reader not just by creating a feminine sublime, but also by inverting patriarchal myths of origin. Gloria Orenstein describes Marchessault's birth narrative in Like a Child of the Earth and in "A Lesbian Chronicle from Medieval Quebec" as a feminist-lesbian revisioning of the classic hero myth, in which a male child is imagined to have divine origins, who is abandoned at birth, raised in exile by humble people, and later called to his heroic

destiny as the leader of his people. In Marchessault's version, says Orenstein, "For the first time in its long history... an extra terrestrial heroine makes her appearance in lesbian literature, heralding the advent of a new myth of origins for woman-identified women" (Postface 89).

The protagonist's fall from the sky also re-enacts the Christian myth of the hero's fall from heaven:

Two stars were going to push me. Two stars were going to turn me out of my own home, and dispossess me of my lights and my celestial lands. They were going to pour me out. They were going to reject me in the imperfect tense... That is what it is all about -- it is about rejection. On earth we speak of birth, but the word birth is a word which we have borrowed from the void, from the super-void. (Child 167)

The theme of origins which she introduces is resonant of both the physicality of the universe and its feminine aspect. "The Milky Way", for Marchessault is deeply connotative with the image of a woman, the Grandmother. The moment of her fall is recalled by the protagonist as follows:

Something was being prepared. I heard the music of an ancient dance issuing from the void, or more precisely, coming from the womb of the Grand mother. Her over-flesh, over-earth, over-sea womb was coming towards us, breaking its moorings. (166)

This passage describes not a fall from the father sky to the mother Earth, but rather, "a passage, a birth-giving, from one state of physical/spiritual being into another, through the celestial body of the she-wolf, her ear canal, her mouth, helped along with a swat from the paws of the presiding Great She-Bear of the sky" (Brandt 79). By asserting spiritual as well as physical connections to the cosmos, and its formidable reproductive, regenerative power, Marchessault attempts to redefine our origins.

In Marchessault's mythopoeic universe the figures of mother and daughter create a new image of ecstatic sisterhood.

Hence in "Night Cows" one sees a mythic, celestial, mammalian mother who ritually initiates her lesbian daughter to the mysteries of the spirit and the body and the universe, mothering her with love and desire in ways forbidden under patriarchy. The Cow-Mother, "who is

both Mother-Goddess and Mother-Parent, embarks upon the ultimate female vision-quest journey to seek the truth about the origins and overthrow of female power" (Orenstein 94). Gloria Orenstein further draws our attention to the historical depiction of the Goddess in Anatolia and Crete as a Mother and Daughter pair just as Marchessault depicts her in "Night Cows". In Crete, the Goddess' excavated image was represented by a horned cow with her calf.

The myth of the maternal impulse in the western narrative tradition--as the continually giving, continually sacrificial--with limited choice under patriarchy is inverted in "The Angel Makers". Marchessault presents women, native women, as presented with a choice in all matters. The mother here, is an illegal abortionist (angel-maker). She is related to the "archetype of the Great Mother Goddess, as a weaver and spinner of a heroic new destiny for women" (Orenstein 94). If the three fates in Greek Mythology had control over the lives of human beings, the two "angel-makers" in the story hold the destiny of unborn children in their hands. Moreover, "Abortion is envisaged as a high form of spiritual rebirth in a world where maternity leads to victimization". Orenstein continues that in this story "the Angel-Maker is thus transformed into the

revolutionary new image of the spiritual mid wife, assisting women in giving birth to their new identities as autonomous, liberated women, who consciously make a choice in favour of personal freedom and planetary survival" (94).

The title itself is significant for its inversive potential. The Angel-Maker no longer makes angels, no longer aids birth, but will bestow women with the gift of freedom from the future burden of all births. Eventhough the description of the angel-makers is highly negative: "witches, hysterical women, the bad fucks, old cows, bitches in heat, wild cats, old mares, birds of ill omen, non-virgins, whores, lesbian, unnatural mothers, loose women, crazy ladies, chattering magpies, cock-teasers, the depressed and the sluts" (Triptych 87), the narrator affirms her solidarity with them. She says "My mother exists and that fact makes me ecstatic" (87).

The lesbian child protagonist in "A Lesbian Chronicle from Medieval Quebec" lives out all the motifs of the classic hero myth. She has a celestial origin, like her mythic hero-counterparts, she is exiled--in the patriarchal land where women and especially lesbians were suppressed. In fact she submerges her identity as the daughter of the Mother Goddess as patriarchy demanded that she remain anonymous. Marchessault employs important

reversals in the male mythic pattern to assert her idea of the feminine sublime. The very imposition of God as father is inverted by the protagonist who refers to the church as "the Catholic Multinational Corporation" (33). The girl narrator speaks about her movement from the "sidewalks" to the world outside. In the course of this movement, she roots out patriarchy and moves toward the call of her lost female ancestors. The lesbians in this story are on a mission to reclaim their primordial matristic heritage and these "women heroes... are responding to the same mythical call to a sacred mission that the great heroes of all time have always answered-- the call to justice, to freedom, and to spiritual autonomy" (Orenstein 90).

The lesbian vision of an all-female community is finally crystallized in White Pebbles in the Dark Forests. Here, she constructs an alternative genealogy of the universe to the current scientific one, which derives to a large extent from the Judeo-Christian one, with its mind-body split and attitude of male domination over nature. She writes about the violence towards animals in modern age and about how the animals are the "Mothers of humanity". She writes, "the animal reign of the Mothers began, very gently, to imagine us, the human beings, as a possible ideal" (29). By presenting in "Song Three" a

long list of names of women who participated in the invention of aviation, Marchessault drives home the point that technology is not an all-male domain. But modern science and technology in its relentless pursuit of perfection run the risk of destroying nature and animals, our ancestors. The woman community of the Appalachian mountains, with their tenacity and determination to re-live in the world of our ancestors, ushers in a Utopian world of ecstatic sisterhood.

Jovette Marchessault has violated the dominant literary traditions with an unusual toughness and her own brand of outrageously disobedient wit. Yet even as she writes against it, she never loses sight of the past, of the lies tradition has repeatedly told women about themselves and of the secrets they have privately whispered back to one another in restless discontent. It was not in content alone that Marchessault sought to invert patriarchy. The triptych form of Lesbian Triptych is an effective subversive tool. The triptych construction of the work functions as a historical and religious referent, evoking the medieval three paneled carvings and paintings used as altar-pieces to tell the story of the sacred trinity through a visual medium. The stories Marchessault tells in her own tripartite narrative are anything but sacred. Moreover, the attack unleashed on the phallic religiosity of the Judeo-Christian tradition

whose ethical models have encouraged women to remain on the "sidewalks" of culture, consciously works to effect an inversion of the power structures. Her portrayal of the churches are anything but affirmative.

Marchessault has fashioned her literary project as a far reaching political critique of patriarchal thought and of the modes of discourse in which it has been disseminated. In doing so, she challenges both the status of women in the discourse of the dominant culture and the primacy of the patriarchal word.

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**COUNTER DISCOURSE IN THE WORKS OF
JOAN CRATE, JOVETTE MARCHESSAULT
AND LEE MARACLE**

*THESIS SUBMITTED TO
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RAJANI B.

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT.**

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Chapter 4

The Deployment of Western Literary Modes

This chapter discusses the texts of Crate, Maracle and Marchessault from a narratological perspective. If the earlier three chapters discussed the points of deviance between native and mainstream writing, this chapter discusses the ways in which the native texts adhere to western literary and narratological standards.

Counter discourse could be made effective by the subversion of the existing dictates of the colonial discourse. At the same time, the redeployment of the techniques of the main discourse for subversive purposes is also possible. For instance, mythical patterning in narratives is a dominant mode employed by many modern writers. The numerous native myths are introduced by native writers to create a native canon of their own. Similarly, the archetypal patterns employed in the native narratives under discussion serve to prove that native reality too is as ordered as that of the colonizers. Again, the equilibrium state in narratives, envisaged by narratologists like Todorov and a reading of the native texts on the basis of this equilibrium could pass a negative commentary on the colonizers.

A structural analysis of the various plots under discussion would show that the presence of the narrator as well as the reader is imperative to the text. Other aspects such as narrative expectations, dialogue, point of view etc, too, will be discussed in this chapter.

Fiction is indeed an attempt to create order out of a chaotic reality. Mythological motifs are often integrated into the general plot line as devices that aid the patterning of both plot and character. A myth introduced by a modern novelist into his/her work can prefigure and hence anticipate the plot in a number of ways. An ideal reader will be familiar with most pre-figurations beforehand, and thus the myth will offer the novelist a shorthand system of symbolic comment on modern events.

Any story, being a succession of events, the event itself is the basic unit of narrative discourse, and the selection and ordering of events is the basic task of plot construction. John Holloway in his Narrative and Structure: Exploratory Essays, discusses the need to have three definite sets of events in a narrative. The first, of course, is the Initiating Event which constitutes the first significant event of the story and which also generates narrative expectations regarding the plot. The Reversing Event is that which counters our supposition --

an event that creates tension by providing some kind of conflict or by arousing the reader's sense of curiosity. The Terminating Event may well not be what comes in the very last page of the narrative; it is indeed what resolves the narrative and finally determines its conclusion, everything that follows it being mere consequence and detail. The Terminating Event often stands in certain formal relations to the earlier items in the series and quite often are found to be in a state of equilibrium vis-a-vis the initiating event. In such cases, the plot movement is found to be circular, the end linked to the beginning by resolution of an opposition or revelation of a similarity.

Todorov extends this analysis further by distinguishing five indispensable elements in a narrative ("Narrative" 39): a state of equilibrium at the outset; a disruption of that equilibrium; a recognition of that disruption; an action aimed at repairing that disruption; and a reinstatement of the initial equilibrium. Sometimes a narrative lacks the first two elements, thus starting from disequilibrium or at times it lacks the last two, thus ending in a tragedy.

A surface reading of the novels of Lee Maracle, Joan Crate and Jovette Marchessault reveal this structure. In Joan Crate's Breathing Water, the equilibrium of a distant

past is hinted at. The happy days of her childhood when her father narrated the stories of the Indian mythology is recalled and Dione's directionless movement could be regarded as an attempt to re-establish this equilibrium. This initial equilibrium is upset when her father disappears from her life. Since the search for the father is the guiding motif in this novel, it is to be concluded that Dione has had a recognition of the disruption of the equilibrium and that she attempts to reinstate that equilibrium. Her search for her father ends in vain, but she learns to narrate her father's stories to her son Elijah. It is while she learns to recognise her father's voice in her stories that she finally gets in control of her life.

In Lee Maracle's Ravensong and Sundogs, the initial equilibrium is a distant racial memory. If the protagonists perceive a false sense of equilibrium in their lives, it is only by way of ignorance. If on the superficial level, the status quo of the village life in Ravensong is disrupted with the entry of the dreaded flu, on a deeper level, Celia's vision of the first flu epidemic long ago -- "somewhere else, in some other time men ... digging, singing desperately, rushing through the digging" (14) informs us that epidemic and whites came hand in hand. Stacey, in her own way, puts up a meek

resistance to win equality and power and her struggle inside the classroom should be seen in the light of Native Indian struggle for empowerment. The suppression of the flu coincides with Stacey's decision to attend classes at the UBC -- both these movements bear the unignorable symbolic meaning of resistance. They are also attempts to reinstate the lost equilibrium.

In Sundogs, on the other hand, it is Marianne's ignorance of facts that makes her live comfortably in her pseudo-equilibrium. Her mother's frequent reminders of "Genocide Pure and Simple" (8) fall on deaf ears. However, it is Elijah Harper's emotional speech that awakens her to the chaotic existence of Native Indians. Her recognition of the horrendous battle her mother fought against terrible odds is brought about by Elijah Harper. "I lack the affection to believe in my mother," she comments, "Elijah restores this affection. The nattering, the abuse, catalyze self-inflicted wounds and I, and children like me, grab daggers, aim them at our mother's hearts, and gash holes in their hopes, dreams, and codes of conduct" (69-70).

Ironically, it is this same recognition that opens Marianne's eyes to the disrupted equilibrium of her people's lives. Marianne's decision to join the Peace Run and her terrifying experiences on the road are certainly

corrective measures aimed at the betterment of Native Indian life, but it is also a means by which Marianne attempts to achieve personal equilibrium. Both Sundogs and Ravensong end with the promise of a better future for the Indians.

In Jovette Marchessault's novels, the plot structure works on a deeper level. Her initial state of equilibrium in Mother of the Grass as well as in Lesbian Triptych is utopian in its vision. The highly autobiographical setting of Mother of the Grass is a special, even sacred place. For the mature female narrator reflecting back on the meaning and psychic impact of her long ago riverside homeland, the world of nature and the world of women appear harmoniously in tune, in equilibrium. In the fourth chapter, the narrative speaks about the movement of the young protagonist to impoverished conditions in the slums of Montreal. The disillusionment and oppression she suffers in the male-dominated city is but a brief interlude. The seeds of the protagonist's regeneration, maturation, and eventual artistic strength are planted during a trip to Yucatan when she is suddenly struck by an unusual and debilitating illness due to an insect bite, then cured by a wise old woman and her mysterious herbs. The subsequent death of her grandmother forces her return to the banks of Ouareau River and the imminent restoration

of her equilibrium. The novel ends with the following lines:

I went to live on the banks of the Ouareau River... to give myself a chance, to dive splashing into the navel of the world. And then, I told myself, perhaps one day I shall be able to create something, to testify to hope and life. Perhaps, I will even write a few lines about a grandmother, myself, Earth, the Mother of the Grass.... (173)

The three stories of Lesbian Triptych, too celebrate a utopian equilibrium of the distant past. They also look forward to the creation of a new feminist era which would fight the heterosexual ideology of male supremacy. "The Night Cows" is about a mythical cow and her daughter in a pre-patriarchal world. The first story "Lesbian Chronicle" is a forward movement in time which narrates the history of patriarchal violence in Quebec. That this world of jouissance has been disrupted is clarified by the narrator at various levels in the text. In Marchessault's vision, only a lesbian world where women are conscious about their choices for personal freedom and about the quality of life on this planet, will reinstate the equilibrium.

The surrealistic opening of Like a Child of the Earth does not deny the existence of an initial state of equilibrium. The novel which depicts the narrator's travels around "Native" North America in the "belly of a dog" (31) is an attempt to appropriate the native land imaginatively for herself and for aboriginal people. By reliving the torture inflicted by Columbus and the subsequent western explorers, Marchessault asserts her indignation at the rupture of the holistic world view of Native Indians. In the surrealistic plane too, the novel plots a circular structure. If "Song one" boasts of her celestial origin, the final chapter "Song Twelve" informs us of the protagonist's quest ending with a memory of celestial origins. The journey motif circles around, geographically and in time; there is not the linear narrative line from "away" to "home". Rather, by the end of the novel, the entire North American continent and the universe itself come to be recognized imaginatively as home by the narrator.

Marchessault's third novel, White Pebbles in the Dark Forests, at the first glance appears to be a novel without a plot structure. But then a narrative without a plot is a logical impossibility. It is not that there is no plot, but rather that the plot is not an intricate puzzle, that its events are as Barthes puts it, "of no great importance", that "nothing changes" (S/Z 17). In the

traditional narrative of resolution, there is a sense of problem -- solving, of things being corrected in some way. White Pebbles in the Dark Forests seems to fall under the genre which Seymour Chatman calls the modern plot of revelation (47). Here, the function of the discourse is not to answer the question regarding the events in the narrative nor even to pose it. Early on we gather that things will stay pretty much the same and that events will hardly be resolved.

A Structural Analysis of the Narratives

Following Todorov's analysis of narratives on two broad categories, namely, the story (which consists of a logic of actions and a syntax of characters, and discourse (comprising tenses, aspects, and modes pertaining to narrative) ("Categories" 126), an attempt is made to carry out a general analysis of the narratives under discussion. To understand a narrative is not only to follow the unfolding of the story (equilibrium --> disruption --> equilibrium) but also to recognize in it a number of strata, to project the horizontal concatenations of the narrative onto an implicit vertical axis.

The first level -- that of the story -- could be further broken up into "level of functions" and the "level of actions" (Barthes, "Narrative" 243). The

breaking up of a narrative into smaller narrative units necessarily introduces the idea of function. The "soul" of any function, writes Barthes, "is its seedlike quality, which enables the function to inseminate the narrative with an element that will later come to maturity, on the same level, or elsewhere on another level" (244). Since enumerating all functional units of all the narratives would be impossible, the most prominent functional units are discussed.

In Lee Maracle's Ravensong, the bridge that separates the reservation from the "white town" (15) serves as an important functional unit. The bridge represents not just a physical and geographical separation between the Native Indians and the Whites, it also signifies the mental barrier between the two. In order to emphasize the essential differences in the sensibilities of the two communities, Maracle introduces several related points. The communal life of the Native Indians where every single person served the community is compared to the white community where "no one individual was indispensable" (26). The artificiality of the white life style (especially in the Snowden household) is contrasted with the jovial, genuine atmosphere in Stacey's house. The Polly incident and the epidemic further bring out the ever-widening gap between the two worlds. The bridge functions as a metaphor throughout the novel, but it

becomes functional only when Stacey perceives the unbridgeable fault between the two worlds.

The functional units in Sundogs are never too hard to find, for the very core of the novel is related to it. Elijah Harper's emotional speech addressed to Native Canadians leads to changes on two levels. Marianne recognizes the trauma her mother must have suffered in the past to groom her children, she also recognizes the truth element in her mother's never-ending complaints against the whites, the end result being Marianne's conversion from a shallow, vain girl into a native activist.

In Joan Crate's Breathing Water, the numerous Indian myths act as functional units. The myth of Blue sky is related to Dione's sexuality and her nymphomaniac phase. The myth of the wife of son of the sea is related to the claustrophobic existence Dione leads in her husband's house. The latter becomes a true functional unit when the protagonist gives a twist to the otherwise tragic tale -- when she learns to breathe in water. In Jovette Marchessault's novels, the grandmother certainly functions as a functional unit, for it is her flood of words and her gynocentric vision that shapes the young protagonist's character. Again, in Mother of the Grass, the river Ouareau acts as a functional unit, for the movement away

from the river destroys the tranquil life of the protagonist. The novel begins with a recollection of the happy days of the protagonist's childhood, "In those days, we lived beside the river" (5) and ends with a movement back to the riverside after the soul-stifling life in the cities, "I went to live on the banks of the Ouareau River" (173). In "Lesbian Chronicle," it is the definition of choke which the young girl obtains from her cousin -- "the strangler" -- (36) that forms the functional unit. The girl grows up as a lesbian because of her misplaced parallelism between the two words, choke and bloke.

In addition to the functional units, one also perceives events with the integrative function. Barthes calls them "indices" or "indicators" which "instead of referring to a complementary and consequential act, refers to a more or less diffuse concept which is nonetheless necessary to the story: personality traits concerning characters, information with regard to their identity, notations of 'atmosphere', and so on" ("Narrative" 247). Narratives in which the indices play a predominant role are also called "psychological novels" (247) because of their accent on the development of characters. The novels of Lee Maracle, Joan Crate and Jovette Marchessault could be considered as psychological novels as the protagonists move along a cycle of discovery or anagnorisis. Paradoxically, in the novels of Maracle, one also finds that

characterization often takes a back seat, for, what the author attempts to convey is not just the tale of a girl's development, but also the harrowing story of a people's struggle for liberation.

Structuralists have further divided the functional units into two -- the "cardinal functions (or nuclei)" and the "catalysis" (Barthes, "Narrative" 248). All the events hitherto discussed as functionals could be branded as cardinals because of their significance. The catalyses on the other hand, are functional, in so far as they enter into correlations with a nucleus, but their functionality is toned down considerably. Barthes enumerates the functions of catalysis thus: "It is not redundant. Though a particular notation may seem expendable, it retains a discursive function: it precipitates, delays, or quickens the pace of the discourse, sums up, anticipates and sometimes even confuses the reader" (249).

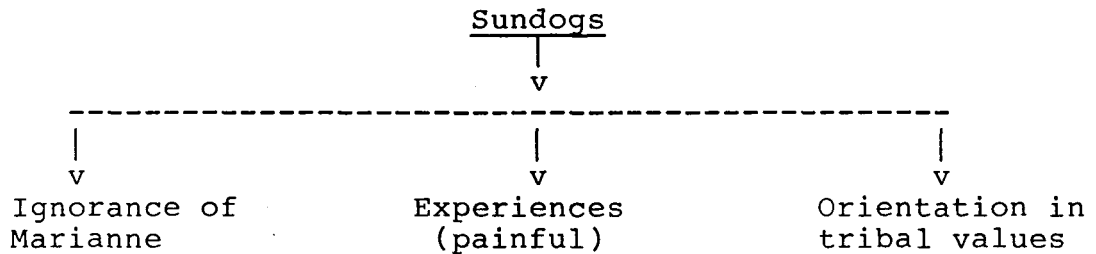
The Mark episode in Sundogs and the Steve episode in Ravensong function as catalyses as they serve to delay the pace of the discourse. While Stacey in Ravensong refuses to give in to the whims of adolescence in order to pursue her dream of starting a school in the Reservation, Marianne's affair with the native Mark in Sundogs delays the discourse and yet speeds up her movement towards

native politics. In the aftermath of the knowledge of Mark's marriage, the disillusioned protagonist makes a decisive move to join the Peace Run. These two episodes are certainly not the nuclei in the two narratives for, the main plot line in both the narratives is about the young heroines' awakening of native self. But the two incidents do help us to pass a comment on the protagonists' attitude towards life and hence are integral to the story line. Again, the story of the lives of Marianne's brothers and sisters do not function as the nucleus of the story, but they do succeed in building the image of a native family lost in the wilderness of city life.

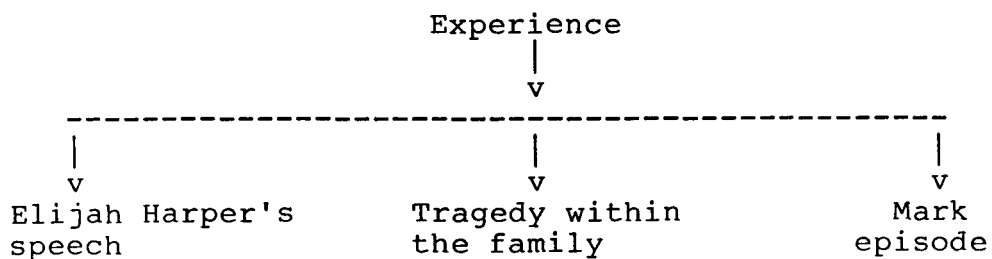
In Breathing Water, Dione's numerous sexual encounters function as catalyses while her search for the father is the true nucleus of the narrative. In Marchessault's Mother of the Grass, the suicide bid of the young child protagonist functions as the catalysis. The event precipitates the building tension in the family, and it also quickens the pace of discourse, for, the reader must have perceived the trauma of the young girl.

The wide span of functional arrangement in narrative imposes an organization based on relays, whose basic units can be no other than a small group of functions. The sequence thus formed is a logical string of nuclei, linked

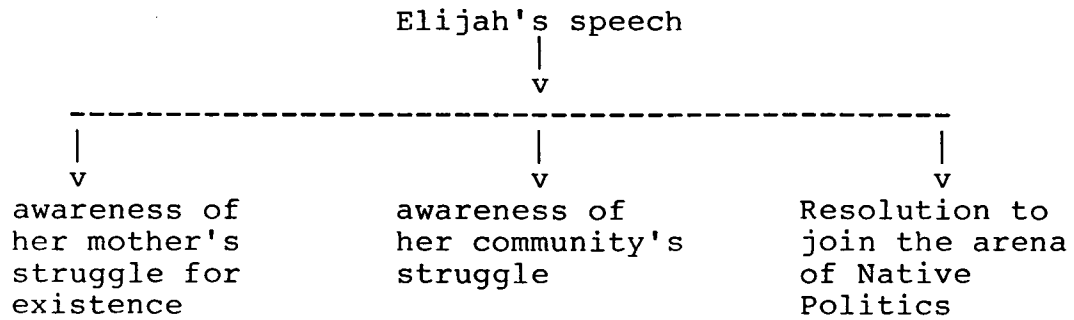
together by a solidarity purpose. A whole network of subrogations binds together the narrative from the smaller matrices upto larger functions. It is only when the narrative has reached a greater expansion, one connection leading to another -- the movement from one functional unit to another -- that the analysis of the narrative can be considered complete. The "stemma" of the main plot line in Sundogs could be represented thus:



The Experience segment could further be represented as:

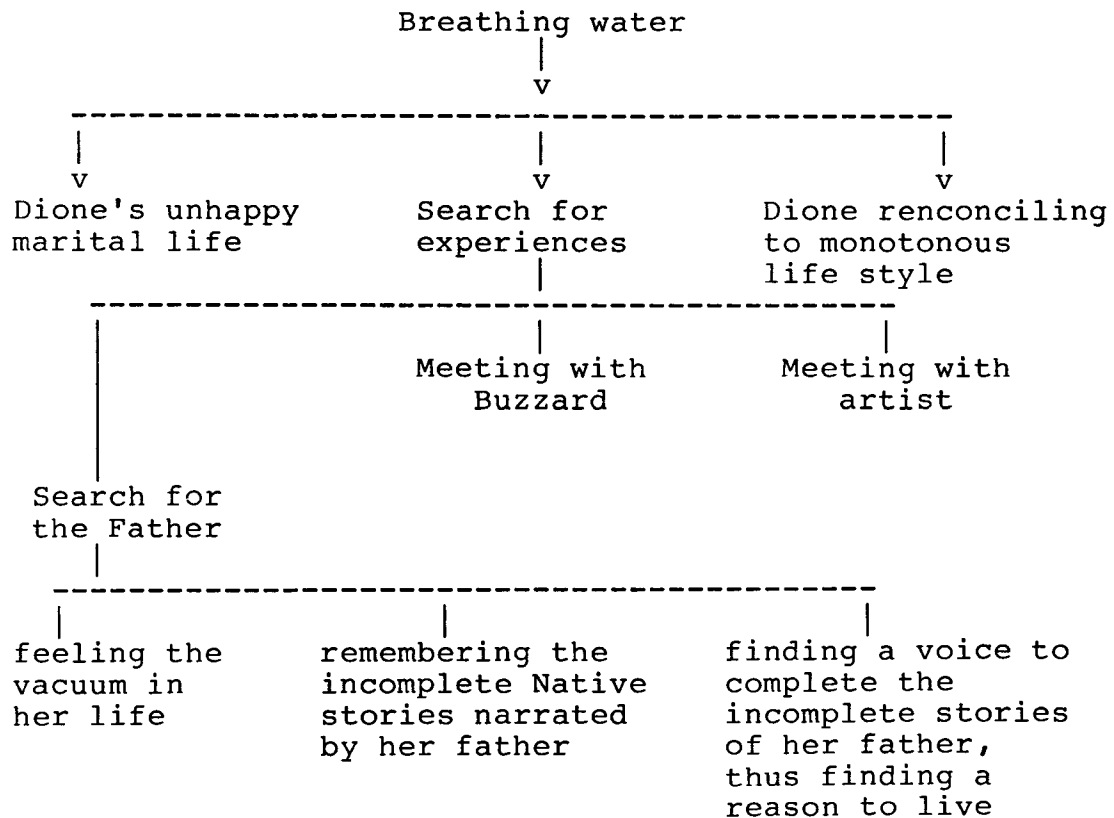


Again, Elijah Harper's speech and its effect on the protagonist could be shown as:

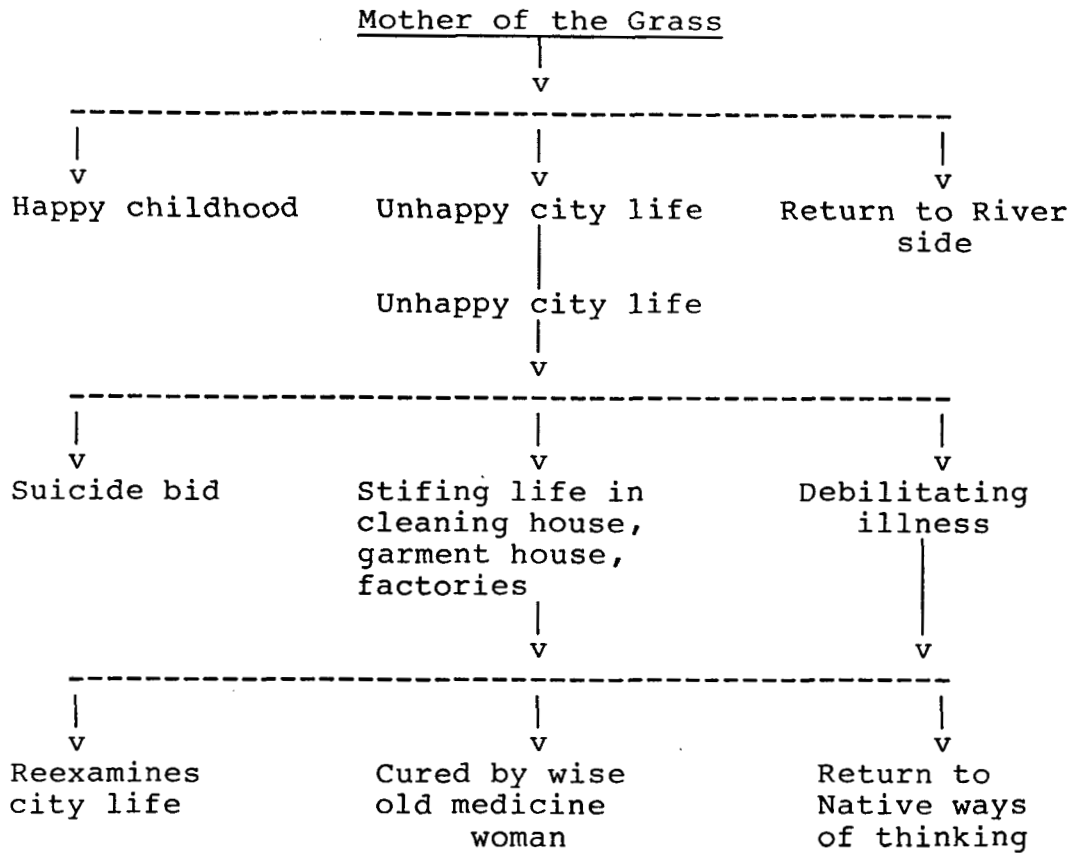


This representation is obviously analytical and before a sequence is completed, the initial term of a fresh sequence can be introduced.

The "stemma" of the main incidents in Breathing Water



The tree diagram of the important incidents in Mother of the Grass

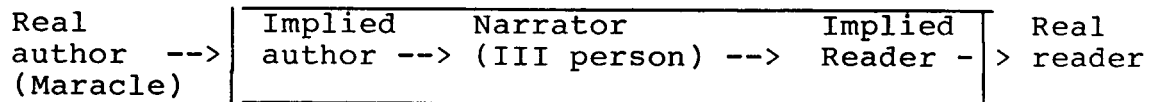


The second level of a narrative -- that of discourse -- seeks to study the aspects and modes pertaining to narrative like point of view, narrative expectations etc. The story teller's stance vis-a-vis events of a narrative can be usefully comprehended under the rubric of point of view. Any tale implies a teller (not necessarily the author), a fictional persona who perceives, selects,

recounts and sometimes comments upon the events of the plot. The implied teller very often knows the movement of the story and this privileged knowledge allows him/her to vary the chronology.

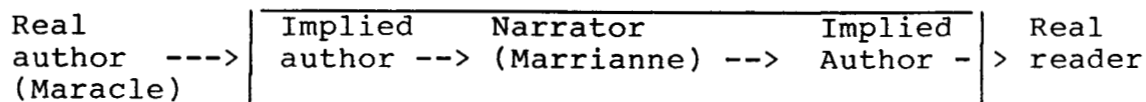
Omniscient narrative is employed by Lee Maracle in Ravensong. This mode gives the narrator the freedom to move through the minds and actions of the two characters in the story, Stacey and her sister Celia. Many of Stacey's actions are perceived as wrongful by Celia. Thus the readers are given ample help to judge the character of Stacey. In Chapter 1, the narrative begins with Celia's vision of the impending epidemic. Stacey's perceptions of a funeral scene are also recorded. The Raven, the unavoidable element in native stories further provides a comment on the character of the two sisters. The Raven praises Celia for "[the] child had the courage to look while Stacey... refused to see" (15). Later we find Stacey disturbed by the squawking of the Raven: "She had the feeling Raven was mocking her, bragging, telling her she wasn't very clever, scolding her for something she had about what had happened at her grandmother's funeral" (16). A comparison of the activities of the two girls on the day of the funeral helps us to recognize that Stacey "judged the world through a pair of glasses whose colours did not match reality" (22). The omniscient narrator

through his/her privileged access to the characters' thoughts, motives and feelings assist the reader to draw broader conclusions. Following Seymour Chatman's analysis, the diagram of narrative-communication situation (151) of Ravensong may be represented thus.

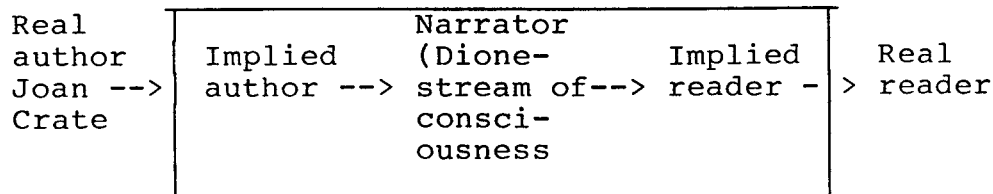


The narratee is absent in Ravensong

In Sundogs, on the other hand, the first person narrative technique is employed. The primary advantage of limiting the means of perception to a single character is that the reader is more readily drawn into the story. This is partly due to the sense of identification with that of the character, a feeling which should not be confused with sympathy, respect or even approval. At the same time, the sentiment that Marianne is an unreliable narrator is expressed in the novel. Her values are strikingly divergent from that of the implied author's. Marianne's insensitivity to her mother's feelings, her capricious behaviour and her biases are all made evident in the first few pages and the implied reader is expected to have a disparaging opinion of the narrator.



Joan Crate employs the stream of consciousness mode in Breathing Water. This happens to be the most subjective form of writing and the purest form of the first person narration. Crate succeeds in creating the illusion of listening to the character's thoughts without any interruption from the outside world. The resulting narrative is wandering, disjointed, highly personal and the connections are by association rather than by logic or narrative sequence. A pure stream of consciousness tends to cut the reader off from valuable devices like action, dialogue, setting etc., but Crate has balanced all these devices quite commendably and has also incorporated these elements into the narration. Flashbacks are also inserted into the narrative to recount events of the past. The flashbacks in Breathing Water are not a simple reference to the past seen through Dione's thoughts or dialogue. The scenes with her Indian father are presented with setting and very often with dialogue. The reader is informed of the fact that the story is moving back to an earlier time by the movement of the tense from present to the past.



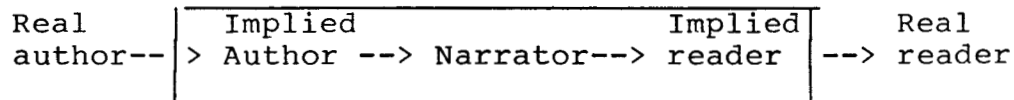
Marchessault's Mother of the Grass is considered to be the most autobiographical of her works. Since the novel attempts a revalorization of the feminine, Marchessault deviates constantly from a purely autobiographical discourse in order to insert mature feminist observations and philosophical argumentation alongside her own youthful experiences. The first person narration conveys very well the reminiscences of the protagonist. This first person point of view gives the narrator a kind of double viewpoint -- the older narrator and the younger self going through the experience. This preserves all the advantages of the single means of perception, yet a different viewpoint is offered as well. In Like a Child of the Earth, a version of the stream of consciousness mode, the interior monologue is attempted. The protagonist/ narrator's self-reference is in the first person. The current discourse-moment is the same as the story-moment; hence any predicate referring to the current moment is in the present tense.

I am thinking about you, dear Francine, and I am thinking about our friends from the old days, actors, tight-rope walkers, strolling players who, with heads high and ardent mouths, carried their fervour into forgotten places on the banks of the Jupitagan River.... (73)

Memories and other references to the past occur in the simple past, not the past perfect:

You were no longer here -- around me, time made no sound and Mexico was already dissipating in my memory. (67)

The language -- idiom, diction, word -- and syntactic choice are those of the narrator's and all allusions to her experience are made with no more explanation than would be needed in her own thinking. Or, in other words, in Like a Child of the Earth, there is no presumptive audience other than the thinker herself, no deference to the ignorance or expository needs of a narratee. The narrative moves in a pace decided by the Greyhound in which the protagonist travels and the shifts in the focus of narrative is left unexplained. For instance, in "Song Four," after narrating the events in Mexico, the narrative suddenly shifts its focus to Christopher Columbus. This digression certainly forces us to drop the idea of a narratee existing in the text.



The three stories in Lesbian Triptych, too, appear in the first person narration mode. But very frequently wherever the collective lesbian experience is hinted at, the first person plural "we" is inserted into the narrative. This is especially so in the second story "Night Cows". In these narratives, we also find that the implied reader is a kindred lesbian soul. It is not the flesh-and-bones ordinary reader who is addressed, rather the narrative presupposes a sympathetic audience. The note of complaint is clearly discernible in the first passage from "Lesbian Chronicle".

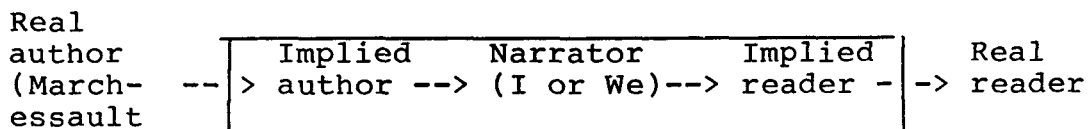
In that period in medieval Quebec, lesbians competed with beings from outer space for sheer horror value. They were even in competition with monsters from the European Middle Ages. (31)

The implied reader is very often taken into confidence by the lesbian protagonist. In the moving passage that describes her visit to normal society from the fringes that constitute homosexual life, the protagonist writes,

They did not listen to me; they wanted to hear nothing at all. My friends, my sisters, all

averted their heads. If I came too near them, they pushed me away with angry, even disgusted gestures. But most of all, they were afraid ! They made threats, they warned me, they made pessimistic predictions, while all the time continuing to march backward. (69)

This knowledge that her erstwhile friends were marching backwards is shared by the lesbian protagonist with the sympathetic audience.



White Pebbles in the Dark Forests is perhaps the most complex of the novels of Jovette Marchessault. Eventhough the novel could be regarded, in a general way, to be an attempt at first person narration, we also find the negative pole of narrator-presence in the narrative. In some sections, the narrative purports to be untouched transcripts of the protagonist's dialogue with other people. The minimal marks of narrative presence or tags like "Noria says" and "I say" are attached. At times, a free style is attempted with the deletion of such tags.

The most prominent passage in free style is to be found in "Fourth Song":

"I thought of punishment, sacrifice, immolation and purification."

"I thought of veiling my face, covering my head with ashes and lamenting."

"I thought of all the poisons we had spread."

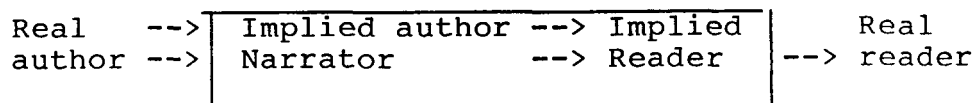
"I thought of duality."

"I thought of the manifest worlds."

"I thought of revenge." (78)

In such narratives which are predominantly dialogic or rely heavily on it, the implied reader is required to do more inferring than in other kinds. To a greater degree than normal, the reader divines for him/herself the illocutionary force of the sentences spoken by characters to each other. Since there are not many direct reports of events, not many authorial comments on the inclinations of the various characters, the implied reader has to supply, metatextually, the information that would aid comprehension. Moreover, each speech or thought (within quotation marks) of a character also presupposes, in Bakhtin's words, two "speech centers and two speech unities" (Poetics 154). In such cases, the struggle for dominance between the implied author and the narrator also becomes prominent. That in dialogic texts, the dialogues

convey information is indisputable. But on another level, the dialogues are objectivized when viewed from the contextual plane of the implied author, too, is certain. But the fact that an "ultimate semantic authority which requires a purely object-oriented understanding... exists in every literary work" (Bakhtin, Poetics 155) makes the implied author usurp the position of dominance.



Story within the Narrative

The discussion upto now was concerned with the narration of the story. At times, one finds that there may also be narration inside the story. A character whose actions are the object of narration can in turn engage in narrating a story. Such narratives within narratives create a hierarchy whereby each inner narrative is subordinate to the narrative within which it is embedded. The speech acts of the character(s) may differ logically from that of the implied author or even that of the narrator. For, the narrator-narratee relationship, in stories within the main story, is unbalanced. The speech acts of the narrator, during the course of the inner narrative, directly interact with other characters, not with the narratee and/or implied reader.

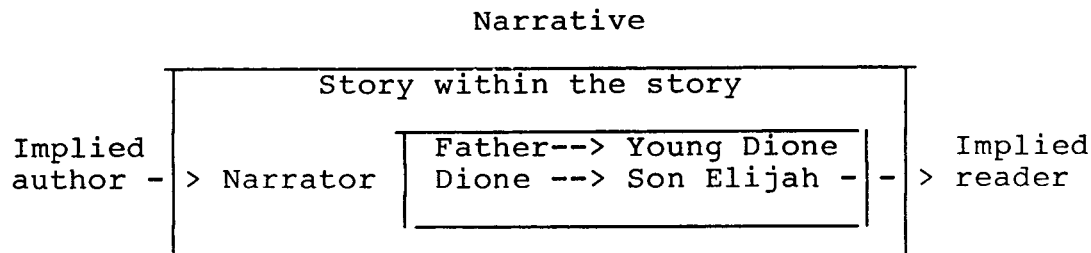
In Joan Crate's Breathing Water, one finds many instances of Dione's Indian father narrating stories. Dione's reactions on hearing her father narrate the stories are also recorded. The stories are narrated in the past tense and the quotation marks have been removed. Dione in the midst of her stream of consciousness, remembers the story of the Blue sky, narrated by her father in the past. Again, earlier in the novel, Dione narrates the story of the son of the Sea. Here, too, the narrator's (Dione's father) speech is not recorded within quotation marks. The story becomes a part of her thoughts and perceptions. The narration begins:

Father, tell me your story. She was the chief's daughter, and he loved her as he loved the land he ruled over. I remember Jewell quipping, was she beautiful? and Father stopped to describe her raven hair, her red berry lips, her doe eyes and shell ears. (23)

Halfway through the story, while narrating the incident when the sea's son proposed to the chief for his daughter's hand, the dialogues are reported in direct speech, again without quotation marks:

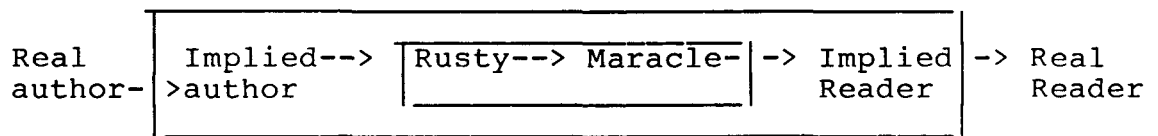
No ! they cried, you cannot marry the chief's beautiful daughter. No, the chief told him, you cannot have my daughter, and the son of the sea returned to water. (23-4)

In the final chapter of the novel, Dione herself attempts a retelling of her father's stories. The sentences are not as simple or the diction as easy as in her father's narrative. The stories are also complete and end with a sense of finality. The differences in the narratorial style of both Dione and her father are evident here. The diagram of the story within the story in Breathing Water can be represented thus.



In Lee Maracle's work of non-literary prose, I Am Woman, one can see another instance of a story within a story. In this book, which attempts to bring together the impacts of racism, sexism and national oppression, one also notices the author's attempt to narrate a love story -- "Rusty". Maracle writes, "Rusty, I didn't ever want to know your story, but since you gave it to me, I am going to give it back to the people responsible for it" (44). As the alcoholic Rusty narrates her tragic story, Maracle intersperses the narrative with her own comments. Maracle also registers her fear that Rusty might tell her

unpleasant details from her life, "I knew that you were going to tell me all about it, Rusty, that you weren't going to spare me" (48). Rusty's story is narrated in the present tense, while most of Maracle's comments are in the past tense. This ushers in the feeling of deja-vu in the mind of Maracle even as she listened to Rusty's story.



In both these cases, one finds that the implied author/narrator of the primary narrative controls the discourse of the narrative, while the narrator(s) of the secondary narrative only play a minor role--their function being only that of explicating things from a different viewpoint to the reader.

Role of the Reader

The role of the reader is very important in narrative communication and the reader gets to recognize and interpret situations by way of narrative expectations. It is when the events of the narrative fit in with the schema of the reader's mind that a narrative expectation is fulfilled. At every stage in the action, some new experience is added or some of the established ones are

eliminated. The reader's narrative expectations are usually turned topsy-turvy with the advent of the reversing event. But at times, in the case of specific works, like plots of revelations, even the reversing event falls within the parameters of narrative expectation. That is the reason why in Ravensong and in Sundogs, the reader searches for the reversing event even as he/she browses through the text.

Readers come to recognize and interpret conventions by naturalizing them. As Seymour Chatman puts it, "to naturalize a narrative convention means not only to understand it, but to 'forget' its conventional character, to absorb it into the reading out process, to incorporate it into one's interpretive net" (49). Naturalization is also the means by which the reader fills in the gaps in the text, adjusts events and existents to a coherent whole, even when ordinary life expectations are called into question. Thus when the lesbian protagonist in "Lesbian chronicle" decides to step out of the sidewalk and walk through the streets, the reader is not shocked. Again, when Marianne in Sundogs decides to join the Peace Run, the reader reacts almost as if he/she had expected it all along.

In verbal narratives, in creation of the story space, the readers play a vital role. For instance, in Maracle's Ravensong, the bridge that separates the Reservation from the white town will represent, to any perceptive reader the metaphorical content. Verbal story space is what the reader is prompted to create in imagination on the basis of the character(s) perception and/or the narrator's reports. Thus, in Marchessault's White Pebbles in the Dark Forests, the reader gets a fine description of the setting from the character's perception.

Before the geologic drama, the mountains of the Appalachians... were as tall as the Himalayas today. But one day, a force unknown, clashing and spurting with trap doors and cyclones of ice, cut off their hands to a depth of nine kilometres of rock. This glacial sheet, breaking over them like one stride of a colossal sheep... past the beaver pond where the undergrowth of moss and ferns begins, the ghostly site of a village. (42)

It is here that the utopian community of women is formed. This is also a fine instance of providing mental images of verbal spaces by direct definition. Similarly, the Riverside in Mother of the Grass, the Reservation in Ravensong and the North American landscape in Like a Child of the Earth are all framed by means of definition.

The presence of an active reader sometimes helps also in the creation of irony. For instance, in Maracle's Ravensong, the narrator, through the perception of the Raven show us that Stacey is immature. Again in Sundogs, Auntie Mary tells us early in the novel that Marianne, too, is naive. She says:

You are a sweet, blind baby aren't you. You wander about this world, the youngest of five kids with both eyes closed and your eyes shut tight, then you make judgments on all and sundry.

(30)

While the first case is a brilliant example of dramatic irony, the second is a case where the author attempts to warn the reader about the over-confident heroine, the unreliable narrator. In Marchessault's novels, on the other hand, the reader is taken into confidence when the narrator attempts a vehement and pointed satire against patriarchy, religion, heterosexuality and capitalism.

Functions of the Mythical Pattern

As pointed out in the introduction to this chapter, mythological motifs often aid the fulfillment of narrative expectations. Modern novels with the mythological content do not retell the ancient myths. For the modern writers,

myths are not even the scaffold upon which their stories are erected. They are used in most cases to offer some kind of a loose analogy, as a means by which the reader could be made aware of the prefigurations within the narrative or in other words, it is a means to attract the attention of the reader and to add significance to a theme or situation by means of illustration or parallel.

Critical opinion has been divided on the issue of the use of myth in modern novels. Frank Kermode finds the use of myth to be a sign of regressive tendencies. He observes:

A yearning for ritualistic satisfactions can have a bad effect in literature... and it is a common enough complaint that the search in novels for mythical order reduces their existential complexity. It remains something of a mystery, this anachronistic myth-hunt. ("Time" 40).

The criticism here is directed more against the presence of myth, in the archetypal sense, in modern literature. Rene Welleck expresses similar sentiments when in Concepts of Criticism, he writes about the "obliteration" of the "boundary lines between art and myth and even art and religion," the result, he insists, is "a feeling of futility and monotony" (361).

In spite of these attacks, the fact remains that the presence of mythological motifs exercise an essentially ennobling effect upon modern fiction. They often challenge the reader to figure out for him/herself just where the modern narrative stands in relation to the myth. Moreover, a mythological novel is accepted only when it presents the reader with a realistic theme and makes him/her feel the chosen analogy has enriched his/her understanding of the primary material.

Northrop Frye in his Anatomy of Criticism proposes to speak for the status of literary criticism as a science, whose techniques and approaches could be systematically evaluated and categorized. His method demands that a concept of order be established in literary studies and the mythical frame work often helps in the establishment of this order. In a structural analysis of a narrative, a study of the employment of myth as a principle of order thus becomes inevitable.

A pattern is something which both genuine myths and mythological motifs share. Hence in a modern novel which attempts to use a mythological motif, both the narrative and the character is expected to complete a pattern. In the narrative where the order of events is of crucial concern, a unilinear model would seem to be the best one with which to approach the subject of establishing a

motif. Sometimes attempts are made right at the beginning of the narrative, to establish a highly ambiguous prefiguration which activates in its turn an extensive set of expectations about the course the plot is likely to take.

Mythical Patterns in Narratives

The theme of rebirth is often found to exist in the level of mythic significance. This, in turn could be related to the story of Proserpine, who disappears into the underworld for six months of every year. The pure myth is certainly one of death and revival but its parallel in modern narratives might be slightly displaced. The young homicidal girl in Marchessault's Mother of the Grass and Dione in Crate's Breathing Water follow the rebirth theme.

In Marchessault's novel, further parallels are proposed since the child protagonist also happens to be a child of Nature. The disruption of her serene life-style and the pressures of city-dwelling disorient the young protagonist who attempts to gas her family to death,

I felt full of initiative. I examined the stove all over, picking out its knobs and taps. Then I turned it on, turning each knob and tap full on.... I heard the hissing and recognized that

odour which is so eloquent that every thing else is just its shadow.... I waited a little while, out of caution, my last caution, then went back to my own room and closed the door. (96-7)

The next chapter "Song Five" begins with the statement "They were not dead" (98). The incident brings her closer to both her mother as well as her grandmother, with both attempting to bring her back to her healthy spiritual self.

If the "rebirth" pattern is introduced by the suicidal protagonist into the narrative of Mother of the Grass, in Breathing Water, the case is different. In an attempt to become pregnant again, Dione visits the doctor for the removal of IUD. She nearly bleeds to death. After this incident, Dione never once goes after erotic adventures. True to the reborn protagonist, she finds consolation in her normal life. Again, the mythical story of the wife of the son of the sea is narrated time and again in Breathing Water. One of its versions is about a chief's daughter who is married off to a strong and handsome youth who had come for her from across the sea. On their homeward journey, the young girl realizes that she had married a dead man -- "a grinning skull with empty socket eyes" (287). Taken to the land of the Dead, the

young bride pines for her family. With the birth of a child, the young woman is given a chance to lead a life in her own homeland. Another version pertains to the return of the girl who was sacrificed to winter, the girl who after her return seemed to possess extraordinary powers. In yet another version, we are told about Kumush and his daughter who go to the underworld to collect bones and return to the Above World. When the bones are brought to the earth, they become people. After each character returns to the real world, one find a transformation or rebirth of the personality.

In Marchessault's Mother of the Grass, there is yet another archetypal pattern. The valorization of the grandmother as the Mother of Grass is similar to the veneration of the Virgin Mary -- who as Magna Mater, Stella Maris, Our Lady of the Vineyards, our Lady of the Barley, Our Lady of the Caves, etc. combined the qualities of pre-christian virgins alien to the Roman Catholic conception of chastity. The rebellious grandmother could certianly be related to the ancient mother goddess, for as Markale puts it, "Apart from a tendency to restore the ancient mother goddess in the guise of Virgin Mary, there have been a great number of heresies within Christianity itself that have sought to implement the female rebellion" (qtd. in Pratt et al 170-71). The grandmother in Marchessault's fiction with her system of values -- her

empathy with the living creatures of nature, and her rebellion against all forms of oppression -- with the marvellous descriptions of the mother spirit in plant, beast and growth and with her blasphemic twist to the story of creation, could be seen as the true Mother Goddess.

The Grandmother is depicted, through the protagonist's eyes, as an artist of great skill and imagination. Her piano music, recalls the narrator, was "one with the Earth, with its underground springs, its caverns, its earthworms, its thunder lizards, with germination, that vegetal and mineral epiphany ripening in the womb of a volcano or the palm of an ice floe" (14). The grandmother views nature as a constant reminder and superb mediator between present experience and the ancient origins of life. For it is through nature that the world of the beginnings still, speaks to her, through the constellations of the evening sky, the moonlit domain of "la mere des herbes", through the all too-frequently maligned beasts of the forest, woods and prehistoric landscapes, and finally, through the feminized grottos and caves, the matrices of Mother Earth.

In a closer parallel to the Demeter myth, one finds the grandmother in spring collecting herbs. The protagonist narrates, "In the heavens, the Mother of the

Grass was creating her flora, weaving without haste all kinds of herbs.... The Mother of the Grass was giving birth to her daughters of vegetation, her daughters venerated in the spring sky" (24). Di Brandt in her essay "These our Grand-mothers" writes that the Mother of the Grass in Marchessault's fiction is also what could be identified as Primavera, goddess of spring, and Demeter, goddess of harvest. She writes, "it is interesting that, while the goddess figures in the Greek myths are differentiated by function and location, all are conflated in native mythology in the figure of the Mother" (92).

The mothers in the works of the native women writers are dignified and are presented as independent women with choices and preferences of their own. In Sundogs, the mother very effectively pulls the strings in Marianne's life. The open sexuality of Stacey's mother and her courage during the epidemic further proves the strength of character of these women. In Marchessault's "The Angel Makers", the Mother is related to the archetype of the Great Mother Goddess, as a weaver and spinner of a heroic new destiny for women. The protagonist exclaims, "My mother is a legend!" (84). Abortion is envisaged as a high form of spiritual rebirth in a world where maternity leads to victimization.

In Like a Child of the Earth Marchessault creates the myth of a divine being, the protagonist herself. Eventhough her divine origin makes her a component of myths, her actions relate her to what Frye calls "romance". In romance, Frye writes, the hero's "actions are marvellous" but he is "identified as a humanbeing" (Anatomy 33) And further,

The hero of romance moves in a world in which the ordinary laws of nature are slightly suspended; prodigies of courage and endurance, unnatural to us, are natural to him, and enchanted animals... and talismans of miraculous power violate no rule of probability once the postulates of romance have been established. (33)

In Like a Child of the Earth, there is a heroine who conquers obstacles. She fights with a host of obstacles: from the thoughts of her travelling companion, Francine, to the technocratic excess of the state; from her own anguished moods to the story of Quebec; from the love and sense of humour of her grandmother, who would sketch hens, to the tavern of Joe Beef, who revelled in senselessly killing animals numbed with fear. The struggle or the fight is cosmic in nature.

In travel mythologies ascendant and descendant schemes in space are typical. Marchessault uses both

vertical and horizontal schemes in her novel. The horizontal schemes follow her trip across the Amer-indian continent and back to her native Quebec. The vertical schemes are those of the fall, the descent into hell, the trauma of birth. There are also the schemes of an ascent towards celestial life (172). Again, in the dragon-killing romances, we find images of hero moving inside the monster's body. Frye writes,

Secular versions of journeys inside monsters occur from Lucian to our day, and perhaps even the Trojan horse had originally some links to the same theme. The image of the dark winding labyrinth for the monster's belly is a natural one, and one that frequently appears in heroic quests.... This theme may become a structural principle of fiction on any level of sophistication. (190)

This motif is to be seen in Like a Child of the Earth as well, where the protagonist is "travelling in the belly of a dog" (20). Marchessault writes about the Grey hound, "that grand baroque orchestra", about "the Herculean energy" of the bus and even comments on "what immortal hand or eye dare frame thy fearful symmetry" (62). She also writes about her in the bus experience: "I was

swallowed up in a bus which was completely deserted... and at once a diabolical vibration swept over me" (67).

The quest motif is found in novels like Breathing Water and Sundogs as well. In the romances, we often find characters who tend to "be either for or against the quest" (Frye, Anatomy 195). If they assist the protagonist, they are idealized as courageous and if they obstruct the protagonist, they are caricatured as villainous. Every protagonist in a romance tends to have a moral opposite - sometimes benevolent to the extent of being an active participant in the quest. Frye in his "Theory of Myths" writes about "a potential bride like Solveig in Peer Gynt, who sits quietly at home waiting for the hero to finish his wanderings and come back to her" (Anatomy 195). Similarly, while speaking about the "polarization... between the lady of duty and the lady of pleasure" (196), Frye makes a comment on the light and dark characters of Victorian romance. According to him the simple way to represent this is to create the daughter-in-law/mother-in-law relations: a theme of reconciliation after enmity and jealousy. At times, where there is no reconciliation, the older female remains sinister.

The benevolent characters in the romances discussed above include Francine, the protagonist's fellow

traveller in Like a Child of the Earth; Sophie and Jo-Jo in Breathing Water and Lacey in Sundogs. In Breathing Water, one can perceive the polarized relationship mentioned above. While Dione, the quest heroine represents the lady of duty, her mother-in-law appears as a dark character who is never happy in her company. On Elijah's birthday, when the mother-in-law pretended to be fastidious, Dione remarks, "[she] will not let the old bitch get [her] down" (257). There is indeed some kind of a reconciliation in the end when Dione decides to confront her:

You may like me. You may not. If doesn't matter. You won't speak about me as if I don't exist when I'm in the room. You will talk to me directly, not through your son. (269)

Reconciliation is certainly hinted at as the conversation ends with Dione saying "Mamma... my name is Dione" (270).

William Righter in his book Myth and Literature gives a structural analysis of the cyclical sequence in a romantic hero's life. 1) Mysterious birth 2) innocent youth 3) undertaking of the quest 4) vision of happy society 5) moral stratification in a detached and contemplative view of society and 6) which contains the

movement from active to contemplative adventure (70). While in Sundogs and Breathing Water, all the sequences except the first are present, it is only in Marchessault's fiction that one finds perfect adherence to the sequence of a romance. In Like a Child of the Earth, one gets a fine description of her mysterious birth. Her innocent youth is best portrayed in the first half of Mother of the Grass. The actual quest is introduced in Like a Child of the Earth; in "Night-Cows" one finds the protagonist's vision of happy society. In Mother of the Grass and in "Lesbian Chronicle", one gets the protagonist contemplating society and finally in White Pebbles in the Dark Forests, one can perceive the movement from active to contemplative adventure.

Trevor Blackwell and Jeremy Seabrook in The Politics of Hope have constructed a diagram relating the Christian story beginning with Eden and ending with Jerusalem and the Marxist myth that moves from the primitive communism of tribal society to the advanced communism of post-capitalist society (iii). A similar, if not a mathematical parallel might be established between these myths and the lesbian myth of deliverance created by Marchessault.

1. Eden/Primitive Communism (memories of lesbian community in "Night Cows")

2. The Fall/the development of private property (the movement from Riverside to the city in Mother of the Grass).
3. The Wilderness/class society (The patriarchal oppression within the family and without narrated in Mother of the Grass).
4. The Crucifixion/the oppression of the proletariat (the experiences the protagonist suffers in the factories in the city as narrated in Mother of the Grass).
5. The ressurection/the rise of class consciousness (the discrimination against female sex the protagonist perceives in the Papal Bulls in "Lesbian Chronicle").
6. The Day of judgement/the revolution (the movement from the "sidewalks" to the streets in "Lesbian Chronicle" and the activity of the abortionists in "The Angel Makers").
7. Jerusalem/classless society (the lesbian community envisioned in the locale of the Appalachian Mountains in White Pebbles in the Dark Forests).

Many methods are employed by writers of modern mythical novels to create an awareness of the myth in the minds of the readers. One mode is that of using the title to draw attention to the motif. Titles remain the most direct narrative device the modern author can choose to trigger off a prefigurative pattern. The problem associated with this device is that the reader is often accustomed to associate titles with main themes and may be unable to see the modern use of prefigurative titles in the right perspective. An example of this mode could be perceived in the titles "Breathing Water" and "Mother of the Grass".

Water traditionally belongs to a realm of existence below human life, the state of chaos or dissolution which follows ordinary death. Hence the soul frequently crosses water or sinks into it at death (Frye, Anatomy 146). The death-in-life existence which Dione learns to lead in Breathing Water is closely associated to the condition of the heroine in the Native Indian myth of the Wife of the son of the sea. The significance of the element water is left ambivalent in the novel -- the water symbol, in apocalyptic symbolism, represents "water of life". Yet, it has the connotation of the destructive element as in Conrad's fiction. In Mother of the Grass, the title has prefigurations in Christian as well as Native Indian myths. The revalorisation of the Grandmother finds

parallel in the veneration of Virgin Mary and also in the Indian myth of the Plant Mother. Elsewhere we are told that the "Mother of the Grass" is a mythical reference to moon (154).

The relation of this type of analysis to the study of modern narratives may be hypothetical, but the use of myth as an organizing principle is an effort to give shape to structural principles underlying literature. The archetypal patterns in women's fiction provide a ritual experience for the reader containing the potential for personal transformation and the novels discussed above constitute literary variations on preliterate folk practices that are available in the realm of the imagination even when they have long been absent from day-to-day life. The feminist revisioning of myths is a popular feminist strategy and has been discussed in an earlier chapter.

The adherence of the native narrative techniques to the western literary modes is only superficial. The seemingly strong similarities are used by native authors to further their designs of proving that they, too, are capable of creating stable fictional worlds out of a chaotic reality. The native versions of the creation myth and the death-rebirth myth all prove that the native world too is as complex as the world of the colonizer.

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**COUNTER DISCOURSE IN THE WORKS OF
JOAN CRATE, JOVETTE MARCHESSAULT
AND LEE MARACLE**

*THESIS SUBMITTED TO
THE UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT
FOR THE AWARD OF THE DEGREE OF
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RAJANI B.

**DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH
UNIVERSITY OF CALICUT.**

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Conclusion

Native Indian authors often face the dilemma of a privileged discourse charged with the value of Indianness. For a group of people who are writing within the confines of a non-literate culture, this privileged site could be a burden. In the past, native writers had attempted to write in English and their works have often fallen into the mould of overt resistance. Maria Campbell's Halfbreed, Beatrice Culleton's April Raintree and Jeannette Armstrong's Slash are some of the literary works where the native-white conflict is overtly portrayed. In this thesis, an attempt has been made to prove that there is a development, and certainly a change, in the native perception of counter discourse.

The overt literary resistance is very much visible in the writings of Lee Maracle. In her sociological work, I Am Woman and especially in her novels, Sundogs and Ravensong, the growth of native consciousness is the central theme. The resistance is subtle in Joan Crate's Breathing Water and the counter discourse is dependent on the subconscious mind of the protagonist. In Jovette Marchessault, however, one finds the intersection of

feminism and nativism and the resultant discourse is much more complex. The lesbian voice of dissent is more vitriolic in its attack on patriarchal assumptions.

The literary devices employed by these writers include revisionary historiography, reversal of myths, revisionary ethnography and valorization of native elements without a direct attack on the colonisers. But as shown in the preceding chapter, a complete negation of the colonial aspect would be impossible in this discussion. Lee Maracle's argument that her book, I Am Woman, does not concern the whites, is undermined in almost every page of the text, since she frequently addresses the whites albeit in an accusatory tone.

Again, the question as to whether a counter discourse should fall into the trap of binary oppositions, is, as any one could see, a topic that demands further discussions. Since a dialectic between a discourse and a counter discourse would be more productive, an attempt has been made to define the latter in relation to the former. However, the modes employed by the native writers to deconstruct the "Indian" of the western canon is discussed in this thesis. The protagonists in most of the novels discussed here are not hard core native enthusiasts. They are women living in metropolises, caught between two worlds that pursue different ends. The materialism and

solipsism of western life are condemned in all the texts and native spiritualism and family bonding are valorized, but not at the expense of verisimilitude. For instance, in Ravensong, the strong communal bonds are portrayed as bestowing physical and spiritual strength on Stacey, but the mystical experiences usually associated with Indian communities are never mentioned. The effort of the writer is to clearly delineate the travails of an Indian family trying to come to terms with modern life.

The reading of native texts in the context of western literary theories is not without drawbacks. In the native story telling context, a story teller's audience consisted of tribe or clan members who could be counted on to contribute a wealth of intimate knowledge to the telling of any story, and thus to actively participate in the dynamics of the story's creation. In other words, the performer and the audience shared an implicit knowledge of language and ways of speaking and the context. The narrative distance in the native texts as far as a non-native reader is concerned, is great. Thus, in Breathing Water, the introduction of numerous native myths confuses the reader. The predicament of the native author is no better. He/she will have to engage in a hybridized dialogue -- with the native reader and then with the non-native reader.

The approach of the writers discussed here towards feminism is also diverse. Lee Maracle's feminism has its roots in native militancy. Her anger towards native men for belittling native women is expressed well in her novels too. Joan Crate's approach seems to be almost antifeminist, but touches a deeper chord when one studies it in the context of Coucault's "different" loves. The extremely erotic "squaw" image of Dione may not be in keeping with the strong female image that native feminists wish to project. But it is the freedom of sexuality, a sexuality that does not bind that is expressed in Breathing Water. Jovette Marchessault's feminism is closer to the Cixousian brand of feminism with its accent on l'écriture feminine. In her creation of feminine myths and all-women communities, one can perceive a slant towards radical feminism. The colour bias of white feminism is brought to the forefront only by Lee Maracle.

The writers discussed in this thesis speak from the strategic position, at the intersection of the discourses of both feminism and postcolonialism. The "otherness" inherent in woman as well as in the colonized, helps both to manipulate the marginal status to suit their own needs. Ever since the deconstructive view claimed the margins to be the new loci of power, the marginalized have been regarded as the real power-wielders -- people who really control the discourse. The increasing influence of both

postcolonialism and feminism in the arena of literary theory would establish this.

The creation of a native canon is yet another issue to be discussed. The attempts to create a native canon similar to the western literary canon have had their repercussions. Dependency on western critics and western literary techniques are some of them. This apparent weakness could, however, be justified, for, the context of Native Indian reality is unique. Living as minorities in their own land, the native Indian cannot but help use the master's tools and present their works for the approval from the masters.

The canon of Canadian literature formed in accordance with the white notions of literature is devoid of "regional, ethnic, native and female difference" (Fee 22). Robert Lecker observes that the preferred texts of the canon makers are those that are "set in Canada" and focus on Canadian events and issues (687). Eventhough native writers write about Canada and focus on Canadian aboriginal reality, very few have been represented in the Canadian canon.

The efforts of the native Canadian women writers are indeed commendable, since they were writing against all

odds. The mustering up of courage to bring themselves to write, overcoming the fear of rejection, finding a sympathetic audience, keeping away from the temptation to romanticise native ways of living and finally attacking the white colonisers for the evils perpetrated by colonialism have all been extremely difficult steps for them. Since native stereotypes had already been created by the dominant discourse, it was essential that these writers steer clear of such characterisations. The fetishisation of native traditions has been a favourite tactic deployed not just by non-native writers but also by native writers themselves. Lee Maracle, Joan Crate and Jovette Marchessault have all kept away from such tendencies. With their feet firmly planted on the ground, these writers have written about the condition of native women caught between two cultures.

The texts discussed here also answer Gayatri Spivak's question, "Can the subaltern speak?" The vehement writings of Maracle and Marchessault affirm that native women can not only speak but also spit venom through words. Crate's writing may be more sober, but there is a distinct message hidden in her work -- that any attempt to submerge the native self by a native could prove to be disastrous.

The three writers discussed here do not show any semblance of homogeneity in matter or style. From the meandering volatile style of Crate to the overtly articulate and pointed criticism of the dominant culture by Lee Maracle and Marchessault's lesbian voice of dissent, there is little scope for a comparative work. But then, these writers who are writing from the margins of the margin cannot but reflect the social, economic, historical and cultural differences in their writings. If there is indeed something that holds them together, it is the element of resistance. Regarding themselves as outsiders, these women have taken on the subversive roles of women warriors, wild women and guerilla tacticians in order to engage in a critique of the multiple systems of domination.

Jovette Marchessault's lone voice of anti-patriarchal, anti-church, anti-establishment stand might not win her readerly sympathy. Her flight through fantasy and her attempts to create a matriarchal society might be scorned by many. However, her faith in 'women-power' and the consistency with which she levels her attacks certainly ought to vindicate her vitriolic writing.

The counter discourse of these women writers have surely made a mark in Canadian literature. The editors of anthologies of Canadian literature can no longer ignore

the vibrant force of native literature. In their attempts to voice their opinions and to escape the stereotyped native image, these writers have reshaped their identity -- as one that is diverse, multiple and ungraspable.

By translating their marginality into their works, Maracle, Crate and Marchessault transform the margins into sites of power. As they destabilize the binary oppositions between margins and centre and locate the other within both themselves and their readers, they open up new inter-subjective spaces, or what Bhabha describes as "a space of 'translation': a place of hybridity... where the construction of a political object that is new, neither the one nor the other" can occur (117).

The resistance literature offered by the native women writers demand to be read in the context of resistance to the structure of colonialism in Canada. The texts resist the normal conventions of literary classifications and hence they resist placement in the categories conceptualised by the dominant mode. For many of the native women writers, writing has represented a personal struggle with womanhood, culture, traditional spiritual beliefs and certainly, historical knowledge. They have realized that the unlearning of colonialist assumptions produced and reproduced by the dominant culture and its

replacement in order to provide living space for aboriginal culture is a daunting task. They are also certain of the fact that counter discourse is important for their survival and sustenance. In Maracle's attempt to develop her brand of militant feminism, Crate's experiments with free sexuality as a means to escape her schizophrenic existence and Marchessault's demand for the creation of a lesbian world of jouissance, one could discern attempts to move from the margin to the centre. The recording of their perceptions and their experiences of oppression under racism, heterosexism and other forms of discrimination is undoubtedly an ineluctable part of native liberation, decolonization and feminist activism.

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