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**GENRE EXPLORATIONS:
LIFE WRITING FRAMEWORKS IN THE FICTION OF
MARIAN ENGEL**

by

Lynda Morrissey, B.A. Hons.

**A thesis submitted to
the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research
in partial fulfilment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts**

Department of English

**Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
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Marian Engel"

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in partial fulfilment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "LTR McDonald", written over a horizontal line.

Thesis Supervisor

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Chair, Department of English

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May 17, 1995

Abstract

The current interest in life writing provides an opportunity to renew and reinforce interest in a remarkable Canadian author who has been sadly overlooked. Marian Engel used a life writing format in four of her seven novels, a strategy which illustrates her artistry and contributes to efforts to define life writing as a literary genre. Engel's use of life writing forms in her fiction represented the best way for her to achieve her artistic objective, and her skillful crafting of authentic imitations of the various life writing forms reveals essential characteristics of the genres being emulated.

The introductory chapter situates Engel's work within the context of life writing and offers a summary of Engel's life and career. In the successive chapters, I examine each of her life writing recreations individually: Sarah Bastard's Notebook, a personal notebook; Joanne, a personal diary; Monodromos, a travel diary; and The Glassy Sea, a letter.

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Chapter I

"what is is a subject"

(Engel, "Why and How" 99)

At the University of Ottawa's "The Margaret Laurence Symposium" in 1994 the opening speaker, Aritha van Herk, concluded her paper with a Laurence anecdote that she attributed to Marian Engel. Van Herk then took advantage of the moment to suggest that it was time for a reappraisal of Marian Engel's work. Notwithstanding the fact that Engel's work is delightful reading and a model of brilliant writing, and for these reasons alone should be revived and revisited, I believe that such a re-examination might profitably be framed within the context of the current interest in life writing.

Life writing, a term that was commonly used in the eighteenth century to refer to biography, has been revived and inscribed "with contemporary concerns" to denote a genre which embraces, along with traditional autobiography, non-traditional "'autobiographical' genres of writing, such as diaries, journals, letters" (Kadar, Reading ix). Autobiography became an area for serious analysis when the critical community of the last half of the twentieth century began to value open-endedness, incompleteness and self-reflexivity (Olney 24-26), and to reject "an earlier imperative to mask the self, or pretend one has lost it in third-person narrative" (Kadar, Essays On 155). The diary and journal, however, while they "have served non-literary functions for anthropologists and historians, have not always been taken very seriously by literary theorists" because such personal narratives lack the narrative structure and deliberate motive for self disclosure characteristic of traditional autobiography (Kadar, Reading ix). It was not until the emergence

of alternate critical schools like "American [or Canadian] Studies, Black [or Native] Studies" and, of course "Women's Studies" (Olney 13) that these traditional autobiographical genre boundaries began to dissolve. These critics, arguing that "autobiography . . . offers a privileged access to an experience . . . that no other variety of writing can offer" (Olney 13), maintain that, for marginalized individuals, often the only available mode of self expression is through less structured autobiographical forms, as exemplified in women's writing over the centuries:

Historically, women were drawn to diaries because in them they were able to express themselves in times when they were not encouraged to practise other forms of expression. For this reason alone, the tradition of women's diaries is important because the diaries contribute to our growing knowledge of the history of women . . . in Western and other cultures, and the social history of people in general is given more detail than it might otherwise be because of women's attention to details and the texture of everyday life in their diaries. (Van Wart 22)

Recently, the parameters of life writing have expanded further to include material like court testimonies or oral narratives because these documents, too, often represent the only source of information about life in a particular context. A new literary genre, which includes both "official" and "unofficial" documents about life experiences, is evolving: it has been designated "life writing."

Marian Engel's writing offers significant opportunities for critical pursuits in life writing. In the first place, she left behind a rich legacy of life-writing documents which record her life--the life of an artist, a single mother and a gentle activist during a period of tremendous social change. In the

Marian Engel Archive at McMaster University there are in excess of 30 boxes of documents which include letters to and from Engel, numerous drafts of novels and short stories and more than forty notebooks in which she recorded personal thoughts, ideas for works in progress and future works, as well as shopping lists, recipes, guest lists, etc. In an essay entitled "Between the Lines: Marian Engel's *Cahiers* and Notebooks," Christl Verduyn convincingly posits Marian Engel's notebooks as an operative example of life writing. "Engel's *cahiers* fill in 'between the lines' of Engel's published work" by documenting "Engel's life as a woman and as a writer . . . [and by providing] a unique expression of the concerns and themes that shaped her life and informed her writing" (31).

It is Marian Engel's fiction, however, which is most pertinent to some of the more innovative and provocative areas of exploration in life writing, particularly efforts directed at developing and defining a poetics of life writing. In the first place, there is a strong illusion of autobiographical expression throughout Engel's fiction which lends support to the hypothesis that fictional material "in which we might find an autobiographical voice" (Kadar, Essays On 7) also represents life writing.¹ Secondly, Engel used the structural frameworks of life-writing forms for a significant portion of her fiction, a strategy which, in its overt intent and careful orchestration, illustrates Engel's shrewd artistry and constitutes a contribution to efforts to establish and define life writing as a legitimate literary genre.

In her latest study, Reading Life Writing, Marlene Kadar provides a term for fictional writing that is presented in autobiographical forms-- "blended genres"--and she contends that "from a philosophical and theoretical point of view" these "blended genres" provide the most interesting studies in life writing (xv). Included in this category are such

documents as “feigned letters,” “the fictionalized memoir,” “simulated autobiography” and “the letter as theory”:

It is in reading and comparing these selections that the most pertinent questions about fact and fiction and other generic boundaries emerge. The contradictions implicit in the concept of life writing as unfixed and impure are highlighted when an author aims to fill a ‘factual’ genre . . . with fictional goals.

(Kadar xv)

Engel used a life-writing format in four of her seven novels: Sarah Bastard’s Notebook, a personal notebook; Joanne, a personal diary; Monodromos, a travel diary; and The Glassy Sea, a letter. Engel adopted a life-writing form for each of these works because it was the most effective framework in which to depict her protagonists’ “quest for self-definition or redefinition in the turbulent socio-political context of . . . changing roles and expectations” (Keitner 186). She skillfully crafts an authentic recreation of the particular life-writing form in each text, revealing essential characteristics of the genre being emulated, much like a meticulously constructed replica of a vintage automobile illustrates the composition and workings of the original piece of machinery. Not only do Engel’s works delineate the characteristics common to most life-writing narratives, they also demonstrate that each of these types of life-writing documents is very distinct from the others. Engel demonstrates that personal expression is, at times, possible only through less formal autobiographical formats, confirming that the “less ‘structured,’ less unified, . . . [forms] such as diaries, letters and notebooks” are as valid and communicative as the most formally constructed autobiographical narratives (Kadar, Essays On 21).

Engel's works demonstrate that broad assumptions about the nature of autobiographical documents are untenable and even hinder efforts to delineate the distinguishing characteristics of a dynamic autobiographical genre. As Elizabeth Bruss maintains in Autobiographical Acts:

Faulty or naive assumptions about the nature of a genre impair the criticism of autobiographical writing, since the critical statements which result are either too broad to be explanatory or too rigid to cope with change and development. Such statements as, for example, "autobiography is confessional" or "the autobiographer must trace the teleology of his life," or even "autobiography is an act of artistic memory," all of which have some currency and plausibility, are still only too easy to refute. (1)

Because each of Engel's fictional life-writing creations is distinctly different from the others, she shows the degree to which different types of autobiographical expression either conform to, or deviate from, these generalized characteristics. For instance, in The Glassy Sea, an epistolary autobiography, Engel demonstrates that autobiography can be intensely confessional and that it does strive to "trace the teleology of [the autobiographer's] life," but it is not always completely trustworthy or comprehensive. She suggests that diaries or notebooks, while they are concerned with documenting present experience rather than looking backwards at a life, can be exceedingly more revealing and informative than formal autobiography due to the spontaneous candour and uninhibited reflection which characterize these personal narratives. She illustrates that the role of memory can vary dramatically in autobiographical expression, ranging from immediate recollection in the personal notebook to self-

defense, even rationalization in a diary, or to pragmatic and selective memory in a letter. Engel's works dispute the notion that the classification of "autobiography . . . is dependent on distinctions between fiction and nonfiction, between rhetorical and empirical first-person narrative" (Bruss 8), and the variations in her texts illustrate as well that there is no one "supreme task" of autobiography. While autobiographical narratives "are alike in their almost-exclusive orientation around the individual who is writing" (Bruss 165), they vary greatly in form, intent and effect.

In the theoretical works I consulted, the terms "diary," "notebook," or "journal" were used interchangeably to refer to a range of documents which are characterized by a series of individual entries which recount personal experience. Clearly, though, Engel perceived and delineated a distinction between the type of life narrative which she created in Joanne and the type of personal expression which she herself practiced during her lifetime, and which she emulated in Sarah Bastard's Notebook. When Engel was tasked by the CBC to write a fictional diary, she set out to create a document which would be quite different from Sarah's notebook.

In Sarah Bastard's Notebook, Engel demonstrates that the personal notebook is the most free of the life-writing documents: there are no rules of style or decorum. The notebook is primarily a forum for pouring out raw emotion, unchannelled thoughts and impressions. While it may be the most candid of life-writing documents, it may also be the most obscure--the absence of details or explanations making it very difficult for the intrusive and inquisitive reader to form a comprehensive and reliable impression of the writer.

Engel portrays the diary, on the other hand, as a document that is more regular, coherent and temperate than the random, elusive and indiscreet

expression characteristic of the personal notebook. Joanne's diary writings are much more prudent and calculated than Sarah Porlock's notebook entries, primarily because Joanne anticipates that someday, someone will read her account of the last days of her marriage and pass judgement based on this testimony. The different generic explorations in Engel's works illustrate that the sub-genre of the personal diary is much more complex than literary theory would suggest, that there are a variety of life-writing documents subsumed under the general category of the personal diary--the personal notebook, the journal, the travel diary, for example--which manifest a wide range of distinct and diverse characteristics.

In Monodromos, Engel even suggests that life-writing documents cross genre boundaries to represent ethnographic records. Audrey Moore is keeping a diary of her journey to a strange land. As she describes her impressions and experiences, she documents a burgeoning social awareness and tolerance which demonstrate that personal narratives play as important a role in illustrating, understanding and accepting cultural diversity as the most formal and methodical scientific exploration. Finally, in The Glassy Sea, which is an autobiography presented in the form of letter, Engel confirms the confessional purpose of autobiography and she demonstrates the way in which anticipated reader response can singularly determine the nature of the discourse. She illustrates, as well, however, that while the personal letter can be the most intimate and revealing form of life writing, for an intrusive reader, it can also be the most misleading.

Despite its pertinence to life-writing studies, Marian Engel's fiction has, generally, been overlooked by contemporary life-writing theorists. But, then, as Engel herself pointed out, her work has never received adequate critical consideration: "My biggest complaint is that I often feel that my work is not

taken seriously by the critics" (van Herk & Palting 12). This lack of attention is both baffling and unfortunate, given that during her relatively short life Marian Engel created a respectable body of work and received some distinguished tributes.

Marian Engel won her first prize for writing when she was nine years old, in a church essay contest for a piece "on the evils of drink" (Klein 5). Between 1949 and 1952 she was featured regularly on the "Canadian Girls Own Page" of the United Church Sunday School paper, and in 1952, she was published twice in Seventeen magazine.

Her first attempt at writing a novel occurred at Montana State University, where she spent a year teaching English, after receiving a Master's degree in English Literature from McGill. It was a collaborative effort with a colleague, Leslie Armour, now a distinguished professor of Canadian Philosophy at the University of Ottawa. Armour provided the plot while Engel wrote the text. Many years later, while admitting the novel was terrible, Engel maintained that it was the start of her professional career. The book was sent to a publisher in New York who responded: "This is a dreadful novel but it's very well written so I'll keep whichever one of you wrote it" (Klein 8).

After her marriage to Howard Engel in 1962, the couple moved to Cyprus, where Howard persuaded Marian to try writing a detective novel. The result was "Death Comes for the YaYa," which she sent to the same publisher who had reviewed her first attempt. On this occasion he was less flattering, proclaiming: "This novel's not written in English" (Klein 8). When the Engels returned to Canada in 1964, Marian spent a year working on another novel. Before the work was completed, however, she became pregnant and remembers being too weary during the pregnancy to continue

writing. With typical Engel humour, she remarked in an interview years later: "My wonderful career had been sucked away by my children" (Klein 10). Following the birth of her twins, she resumed writing when time allowed and, finally, in 1968, No Clouds of Glory (Sarah Bastard's Notebook) was published.²

Engel's published works consist of two children's stories, seven novels, two collections of short stories, the text for a "coffee table" book about islands in Canada, and a wealth of other material: numerous short stories featured in a variety of magazines, a multitude of reviews and articles--including a delightful weekly column entitled "Being Here"³ which appeared in The Toronto Star in 1981-82. She has, over her career, received some prestigious honours. She won the Governor General's award for Bear, the Canadian Authors Association Silver Medal for The Glassy Sea, the 1979 McClelland and Stewart award for fiction for a short story called "Father Instinct" and the 1981 City of Toronto Book Award for Lunatic Villas. "She was appointed an Officer of the Order of Canada" in 1981 and "in 1984 was named Metro Toronto YWCA's Woman of Distinction in Arts and Letters" (Brady 184).

Bear is clearly her best known work, but according to certain notables in the Canadian literary world it is not necessarily her best work. George Woodcock insists that The Glassy Sea is her finest work, describing it as "a book exceptional in its intensity and its almost perfect crafting" (46). Timothy Findley calls The Honeyman Festival "quintessential Marian Engel. He maintains that "in order to reach you--to touch you--the words and sentences in books have to have stopped somewhere along the way and taken in the view", and The Honeyman Festival, he insists, "has . . . done all these things. It is such informed writing: . . . every single word has been

somewhere and taken in the view--and that, above all . . . is what makes writing great" (Room 39).

Regardless, no other Engel book equalled the sensation of Bear. Praised for its magnificence and denounced for its notoriety, it put Engel for a time at the forefront of literature in Canada and internationally. While favourable criticism outweighed unfavourable about three to one (Brady 193), the separation between the two camps is astounding. The opinions ranged from defining the work as "second rate pornography" to a "mythic tour de force" (Brady 216). It was praised for its brilliant technique and marvellous writing, and derided for belonging to the "'See John run. See Mary run.' category (Ontario Methodist school primer literacy)" (Symons 7). Bear, however, is not typical of Engel's work. It is a departure from the works before and after that place the heroines in very "human" interactions, involved in or intensely motivated by urban civilization, however uncivilized it might be.

While Engel's other works do not compare to Bear in terms of success or style, they are alike in evoking a wide ranging diversity in critical response. Particular aspects of her work may be condemned by one source and enthusiastically praised by another. Plot is criticized for being unstructured and unresolved, and applauded for being imaginative and provocative. One critic complains that Monodromos "doesn't go anywhere in particular. The book ends . . . with a sense of endings and frustrations" (Buitenhuis 32). Another critic notes appreciatively of the same book, "Marian Engel doesn't solve anything. She does something more profound; evokes a mystery" (Dobbs G20). While one review describes Sarah Bastard's Notebook as an "emotional wastebasket" (Grosskurth 18), another proclaims that "the author has achieved [a] rarity: a convincingly intelligent character, who is able to spit

on her own boundaries" (Sayre 38). Annie Gottlieb complains that the narrative in The Honeyman Festival focuses so intensely on the workings of Minn's mind that it lacks the perspective required to create a "really good novel" (40-1), while, of the same book, another reviewer maintains: "Engel uncovers, through deep psychic incision, the dreams and nightmares of the everyday housewife caught between an intolerable present and a faded but persistent memory of a more glorious past" (Parker 111).

By far the most prevalent criticism levelled at Engel was that she wrote "women's books"—a feature also regarded very differently among critics. At one end of the spectrum her works were considered trivial, while at the other, they were declared feminist tracts which denounce men for repressing and victimizing women, and which threaten "to escalate a new and lavish sex war" (Sayre 39). While "the basic patterning of Engel's fiction . . . is always 'about' women caught in crises" (Woodcock 46), struggling to combat personal pressures and social inequity, only one of Engel's books could be construed as taking a strong feminist stance, The Glassy Sea, which towards the end includes a tedious exhortation on the impending threat of patriarchal society to legitimize the destruction of all women who cannot, or will not, bear children. Engel regretted that a feminist perspective was carried to excess in this particular novel: "I got stuck in The Glassy Sea with the subject of feminism. . . . I lost my grip on it. It didn't turn out quite the way I wanted it to" (Adachi D12).

Ironically, on more than one occasion, Engel attempted to distance herself from the radical element of feminism. In one interview she declared "the party line" unacceptable (Klein 24), and in an earlier interview rejected some of the methods of the radical feminist approach. "To a certain extent," she says, "you have to look at sexism as a historical and sociological accident;

you can't start mucking up the English language in an attempt to redress that accident" (Corbeil E3).

If Marian Engel rejected an extreme feminist stance, she unequivocally and proudly accepted the criticism that she was a woman's writer, insisting that the term "woman's writer" should not be considered pejorative. Gender, she explained, is "part of my particular regionalism . . . and is important in determining what I write about. Women's experiences are a different place" (van Herk & Palting 40). Engel's persistence in writing about "women's experiences," however, given the critical milieu in which her works were judged, often resulted in the opinion that her work was unimportant. At the "Women and Words Conference" in 1983, Margaret Atwood presented a brief paper entitled, "Sexual Bias in Reviewing," which was based on research she had conducted in conjunction with students in "a senior course in women's writing" at York University in 1971. Atwood observed "that most reviews" contained a preponderance of language that conveyed "assumptions," and "hidden metaphors," which she called "genital language":

[If] a book was being put down, it could be called a book by "a housewife." That was supposed to be a really crushing insult in 1971. . . . A "masculine" prose style was vigorous, vivid, energetic, clear, etc. and a "feminine" prose style was weak, pastel, wishy-washy, and vague. . . . If a woman was being denigrated, it was done by emphasizing supposed feminine qualities such as overemotionalism [and] solipsism. (152)

Atwood pointed out that, while most reviews "were written by men," likely because "more men were writing books," most books written by women were "assigned to female reviewers" (151). Engel's works were among those being

judged during the time Atwood conducted her study, and reviews of Engel's work illustrate that even women reviewers tended to use the language unveiled by Atwood during her study, suggesting that the gendered parameters were adopted by most of the critical world.

Phyllis Grosskurth maintained that "The Honeyman Festival reads like a feeble imitation of a Margaret Drabble novel" (Globe and Mail 5 Dec. 1970) and Mary Gordon claimed that "the diction [in The Glassy Sea] is right out of True Confessions" (New York Times 9 Sept. 1979). Atwood could not say whether or not the situation had improved by the time she delivered her paper in 1983, but if Barbara Amiel's review of Lunatic Villas in 1981 is any indication, not much had changed by the time Engel's last novel appeared.

Marian Engel writes about women we know. At best they are unremarkable, at worst they are dreadful, and on the whole they are what the English call "wet." They talk about their abortions, affairs and menstrual problems over lunch in the company cafeteria or on a neighbour's doorstep.

This is the stuff of life. It is also the stuff of soap operas (62)

Engel's social awareness, however, was in no way devoted exclusively to women's issues. She evidenced a keen awareness of, and genuine interest in, a wide range of social concerns. She was the first president of the "Writer's Union" and up to her death fought to secure financial and legal rights for Canadian writers. In her weekly column "Being Here" she discussed a wide range of subjects: the education system, the health system, care of the disabled, child rearing practices, euthanasia, the troubles in Ireland, anti-semitism and pornography. Many of these social concerns are voiced in

her fiction, but they are overshadowed by the intense introspection of her protagonists and their preoccupation with matters which, to a considerable portion of the critical world at least, were not important. As a result, the amount of critical attention paid to Marian Engel is disappointing.

While a number of interviews and articles about Engel have been published, usually coinciding with the appearance of a new work, or during the time leading up to and following her death in 1985, the only appreciable compilation of tributes to Marian Engel's accomplishments is an issue of Room of One's Own magazine which was published the year before her death. No book has been published which is solely dedicated to a study of Engel and her work.⁴ No doctoral dissertation pertaining to Engel's work has been undertaken, and only two M.A. theses have been completed,⁵ both appearing back in 1978 when Bear and The Glassy Sea had put her in the limelight with two prestigious awards.

If recent developments are any indication, unless Aritha van Herk's call is heeded, there is a chance that Marian Engel's works will dissolve into oblivion. A 1989 collection entitled Celebrating Canadian Women: Prose and Poetry By and About Women, features selections by 87 Canadian women writers. In the Introduction to the collection, the editor, Greta Hoffman Nemiroff, states that the book addresses the way in which "women experience contemporary Canadian life, explain our history and define our reality" (xvi). She goes on to describe Celebrating Canadian Women as:

a collection of works written by a diverse group of women scattered across this land in variable situations. Many of the works show women questioning their terrible situations, redefining them to themselves and consequently recognising the

possibility of change or transcendence in their own lives. Even if change does not result in immediate action, a changed perception is the first step toward empowerment. (xvi-xvii)

It is both unfortunate and inexcusable that Marian Engel is not part of this celebration, given her deep concern for, and penetrating insight into, every aspect of women's lives.

Late in her career, Marian Engel wrote: "in narrative it is important to remember that *what is* is a subject; *what should be* is for fantasists and essayists. *What might be* is romance" ("Why and How" 99). She consistently wrote about "what is" as she experienced it and witnessed it--the daily struggle of real and ordinary women to come to terms with the conditions of their existence. In her exploration of "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions . . . [which shape her protagonists'] sense of . . . self and ways of understanding relations to the world" (Weedon 33),⁶ Engel exposed a world that had been concealed behind a curtain of patriarchal values and expectations. She de-romanticized myths about love, marriage and motherhood and she made taboo subjects like abortion, menstruation and infidelity topics for public consideration. Confirming that abortion was an option, she also offered women who had suffered the guilt, anguish and pain of abortion the comfort of knowing that they are not alone in their suffering. She pointed out that adulterers are not necessarily bad people. She demonstrated that separation and divorce can actually provide a woman with the opportunity to become an individual in her own right. She confirmed that mothers sometimes resent, even dislike, their children. She presented pregnancy in all its indignity, marriage at its most grotesque. She confirmed that women do regularly have menstrual periods which are untidy, and untimely, but not shameful. While such earthy topics are

commonplace today, as Alice Munro eloquently points out, such was not the case some twenty-five years ago:

And here was a woman writing about the lives of women at their most muddled, about a woman who can't quite believe in the world of careers, academic strivings, faith in work, and another who is just managing to keep afloat in the woozy world of maternity, with its shocks and confusions and fearful love and secret brutality. You have to remember how shunned, despised, misused, this material was at that time. All sorts of writers deal with it now, not only women. But before people like Marian Engel . . . gave their attention . . . to such material, most of us thought there was no way to deal with it except to turn it into the layer-cake fiction of the women's magazines, or hype it up to the manic level of the humour of the professional harried housewives who write newspaper columns. That is, there was no way to deal with it, nobody wanted to hear about it, unless you sugared it up or turned yourself inside out with wisecracks or wheedled your way around the reader with the most insistent irony and self-deprecation. Marian Engel's bravery, in tackling this, her skill in pulling it off, seemed to me quite revolutionary. (33)

While critics were dismissing Engel's works for being over-emotional, obsessive or trivial, they were failing to recognise the achievement of her writing, which was not only very clever but extremely effective. The recent interest in life writing, I believe, provides an opportunity to renew and reinforce interest in Engel's work. In the next four chapters, I examine each of Engel's fictional life-writing documents individually, Sarah Bastard's

Notebook, Joanne, Monodromos and The Glassy Sea. By exploring Engel's technique and achievement in each of these texts, we might discover many interesting features, and dispel some long-held, erroneous assumptions about the genre of life writing. Most of all, we may rediscover a formidable artist who has been overlooked, misunderstood and underestimated for far too long.

Chapter II

"memories of my own patterns"

(Sarah Bastard's Notebook 114)

From its inception Marian Engel referred to her first novel as Sarah Bastard's Notebook,⁷ but her publishers, concerned that the word "bastard" would have a negative impact on sales,⁸ selected the title No Clouds of Glory. This title, which stems from a comment Sarah makes to a reporter during a very candid and rather injudicious interview, "what I trail behind me is not clouds of glory . . . but memories of my own patterns" (114), probably did more to hinder than further the success of the book. In order to appreciate the novel fully, it is essential that it be viewed from the outset as a personal notebook. The publishers' choice of title does not promote this inherent design.

Engel herself kept a notebook from the age of nine, and, in an entry dated October 10, 1968, she describes her need to continue the practise "regularly as an act of self-discipline & sanity. Only my pen will run out," she writes (Marian Engel Archive, Box 6, File 13). In her first novel, Engel creates the impression that her protagonist, Sarah Porlock, has acquired the same life-long habit for the same therapeutic reasons. If Engel's preference for the title of this book had been respected, critics like Phyllis Grosskurth might have applauded her achievement, the cogent portrayal of the personal notebook as a site for intense personal expression, rather than faulting Engel for "using a first novel as an emotional wastebasket" (Grosskurth 18).

The personal notebook is not distinguished from the diary in the theoretical considerations I consulted, but Marian Engel establishes a difference between the two life-writing forms in her work. Sarah Bastard's

Notebook is structurally and thematically quite different from Joanne and Monodromos which are presented as diaries. Firstly, Audrey's and Joanne's diaries represent closed and singular documents which describe a particular adventure or a phase of life. In Monodromos, Audrey keeps a record of her trip to a foreign land. Joanne chronicles the dissolution of her marriage. Both women begin their diaries in order to record a new and unique experience as it unfolds and both bring their testaments appropriately to an end when the episode is over--in Audrey's case the end of her journey, in Joanne's the end of the life that was defined, or confined, by her marriage.

Sarah Bastard's Notebook, in contrast, is not the record of a particular time or experience, but the latest utterance in a long running personal discourse. Sarah's opening words, "I have had, now, time to recover" (3) strongly suggest that she is resuming a deliberation that is already well underway. The closing words, "Jump, or you'll die, Sarah. And there'll never be green landscape or a sweet face again" (181), suggest that the notebook has come to an end simply because Sarah has run out of blank pages and promise that a new notebook will shortly be the instrument for working through many more personal dilemmas.

In The Autobiographical Subject, Felicity Nussbaum refers to the diary as a "private serial autobiographical narrative" (23), a description which applies to Joanne's and Audrey's writings, but not to Sarah's. There is a sense of order, purpose and narrative logic in Audrey's and Joanne's diaries which is not apparent in Sarah's notebook. Audrey's and Joanne's diary entries are distinguished by temporal indicators and they follow a logical progression, recording experience "on a 'daily' or at least a 'regular' basis" (Kadar, Reading xiii). In contrast, there is no indication that Sarah writes in her notebook according to any particular pattern of regularity. Her entries are not dated or

demarcated in any recognizable manner. There is a noticeable disregard for elaboration or explanation and no consistently logical progression from one thought or idea to another. She moves back and forth in time and significant incidents or impressions are incessantly repeated and reconsidered, so that it is difficult to determine clearly the chronology of events or to establish cause and effect.

Sarah's notebook is primarily a form of self-analysis, an attempt to explain and interpret experience to herself, to achieve some sense of personal understanding and to relieve feelings of guilt and anguish. Joanne's and Audrey's diaries, as well as being "tool[s] for self-analysis" (Kadar, Reading xiii), document personal experience for posterity and public consideration. They invite their "readers to make something smooth and finished of the text to reproduce a recognizable and full human being" (Nussbaum 27). Written with the understanding that someone, someday, might read the document, some measure of discretion or decorum shapes the nature of the disclosure in the diary in a way that does not enter into the evolution of a personal notebook. There are no restrictions on expression in the personal notebook because there is no implied reader, other than the writer, to be informed or convinced. In Engel's portrayal, the personal notebook is infinitely more candid than the diary.

Engel used the framework of the personal notebook for her first novel because it represented the most effective way to portray Sarah's distress and desperation. Sarah Porlock is suffering from an overwhelming combination of anger, grief, guilt and remorse. She is still reeling from a tumultuous affair with her brother-in-law, Sandro, which resulted in pregnancy and an abortion. Just recently, Joe, an old friend turned lover, has left her to care for his wife, who is being released from a psychiatric hospital. Shortly after Joe's

departure, Sarah's father died. Then, her cat died. She hates her job and she believes she is a disgrace to her profession. The very texture of her life has become intolerable. In order to relieve the anguish which is consuming her, she needs to talk about her pain, to confess her indiscretions, but a combination of shame, fear and uncertainty prevents her from revealing the nature, or the cause, of her distress to another human being.

Many of her experiences are too intimate to discuss frankly, others either too humiliating or incriminating to divulge because they involve a violation of well established social taboos. In some cases she is simply unable to find a receptive audience for her complaints. Her family would be outraged if she were to admit either the illicit affair with Sandro or the abortion, and, having never really acknowledged nor understood the nature of her relationship with Joe, she is too confused and hurt to discuss their separation rationally. Although devastated by her father's death, she has been incapable of expressing her grief, and perceives that it would be untimely to do so now. "All of us by the time he died offered Death a guilty welcome" (144). While she may be loath to discuss these matters with another human being, she is desperate to restore some sense of serenity and dignity to her existence. "I want, I hear myself feeling, to lead an ordered and abstract life" (137). With no other outlet, she instinctively turns to her notebook to vent her feelings and to confront honestly and purposively the factors which have led to her despondency. Sarah's notebook is her confessor, her confidant, her therapist and her mentor.

By using the framework of the personal notebook, Engel is able to portray her protagonist's struggles with an intensity that could not be achieved, or tolerated, in another form of narrative. Only in a personal notebook could someone indulge in the obsessive melodrama and repetition

which characterize Sarah's expression. Yet it is this portrayal of excessive self-indulgence, the irrational vacillation between self-interest and self-deprecation, which so adeptly demonstrates Sarah's state of mind.

Sarah's incessant preoccupation with the crude image of her abortion reveals that she is, emotionally, very fragile.

Ach, Antonio, your almost mother is a fool. . . . O would-be child who could not grow up to be his mother, after the visit to Barbados and Sandro, I went to Montreal and had you, like my tonsils, out. . . .

I still want my Antonio. . . . he would be strong to smile, and loving and--oh, unborn. . . .

But poor Antonio went into a basin after the universal mechanical screw. Me retching yellow morphine. (79-80)

She continues, repeatedly, to lament the loss of her "would-be child" in a manner that would be less acceptable in other narrative presentations, even in other forms of life writing. As Engel demonstrates in her other works, the diary and letter demand considerably more restraint in their communication than does the personal notebook. Joanne, for example, vividly and emotionally describes the shock she experienced when her mother-in-law kidnapped her children, but once the episode has been dealt with adequately, the narrative moves on, because Joanne's purpose is to recount experience, intelligibly, as much as to relieve her suffering. While Joanne loses control temporarily, she pulls herself together, for the sake of narrative, and describes the incident logically and rationally. In The Glassy Sea, the deformity and death of Rita's infant son is a comparable, if not greater, tragedy than Sarah's abortion, but once Rita has related the experience, she does not refer to it again. Rita, however, is writing a letter, and in compliance with the

conventions of letter writing, she resists unduly belabouring personal tragedy. The personal notebook, on the other hand, is ruled only by personal consciousness and self-interest. Sarah has not reached the stage in the process of grappling with her ordeal where she can move beyond the feelings of guilt and desolation. At this point she is responding only with raw emotion. When reason once again prevails she will be able to affirm the sagacity of her action, the balm which will heal her wounds. By the time Rita discusses Chummy in her letter to Philip, the grieving process has run its course; in Sarah Bastard's Notebook, it is just underway.

Engel injects frequent references to Freud and clinical terminology to establish the psychoanalytic purpose of the personal notebook. On the opening page Sarah mentions returning to the womb and "the wreck of her Oedipus complex" (3) and throughout the narrative refers to Freud and the Oedipal factor to describe or explain her behaviour and her state of mind. Allusions to a number of therapeutic techniques, like free association and dream analysis, reinforce the self-analytic purpose and illustrate the recuperative effect of keeping a personal notebook. For a time after her father's death, Sarah is disconcerted by her inability to confront and express her grief appropriately. Her family's awareness of her distraction only aggravates her distress: "the circle of red eyes had found me out. My sisters and my mother . . . knew I was thinking of something else. I wanted to argue, convert them to another reality. Instead, I hurried away" (7). Later, however, through a sequence of cognitive reactions similar to free association, Sarah begins to understand her dysfunctional behaviour and to reconcile it with the grieving process. The sounds of a familiar song provoke a chain of memory sensations.

From another stage in my life, I have a Greek record; a raucous boozouki band jiggles: *Thalassa, pos me pikranes*, O sea, how much my sorrow They sing it as if sorrow were some sort of party, and they are probably, as usual, right. Pre-Freudian psychology, the need for catharsis.

And, I was playing it the day my father died, among a web of tubes. (75)

This thought leads to another sad memory:

The little cat died too, gave up its rodents and roaches, his moanings, his red flannel catnip mouse, puked green, sat in a draft. The Vet shook his head--hadn't I known about distemper shots? (75-6)

Finally, recognizing the cathartic release of her grief, she absolves herself of any suspicion of insensitivity:

Feelings of loss transferred themselves, I invested this wet fur with all my mourning. It shivered and vomited, lost its gloss. We were alone and destitute, it knew, and as I was forcing glucose down its skeletal jaws, expired.

Thalassa, me pikranes

I have seen a man grow old in hospital, I have held twitching, spattered fur. There are things which do not matter anymore. (76)

Dream analysis also figures as a source of illumination, signifying the source and illustrating the gravity of Sarah's emotional instability. While she longs for peace of mind, her subconscious prevents her from putting the affair with her brother-in-law Sandro behind her:

Sleep, and into my sleep, familiar, pillaging Sandro. Pillaging or pillaged. I feel him slapping against me, I pant myself awake, almost deliberately unwishing him, making myself celibate.

(140-1)

Already disturbed by the intrusion of this erotic dream, as she replays the image in her mind, she is even more shocked and dismayed to realize that the dream is not about Sandro, but about Eldon, another far less appealing, but none-the-less imposing, brother-in-law:

I put my head under the tap, full of the fustiness of an afternoon sleep, empty, dirty-mouthed, crumby about the eyes, and remember sharply. Not Sandro: Eldon, with his fat slapping.

So there we are. (141)

Through these psychic sequences, Engel portrays the personal notebook as part of a continuing, evolving present, the mechanism that leads to and facilitates understanding or resolution. As Sarah recounts her thoughts and her dream visions in her notebook, the very act of writing forces patterns, associations and retrospectives to emerge, shaping and re-shaping consciousness. As she confronts this new and discomforting sensibility, the notebook becomes an instrument of constructive provocation. Sarah had already acknowledged the paranoia created by her liaison with Sandro: "after this lotus-position affair with Sandra, I was terrified when my sister Peg married Eldon" (114). This dream convinces Sarah of the need to curb her obsessive preoccupation with the past, or with events beyond her control, and to move on with her life:

Listen , Sarah, I'm sick and tired of you. Sick. All dreams and possessions and pretension. Yes, pretensions. Pretending to be this woman and being that. Truth, stupid, truth, scream it at

yourself, the truth lies somewhere in between. You've dreamed yourself into some sexpot, you've decided to live as a professor, you're not that, you're not this. Kill yourself, or decide. Babble about leaving a corrupt society, dreaming of running away. It's not this or that, it's nothing or both, learn to resolve, go crazy, or die. (141)

Even with this resolve, Engel portrays Sarah's journey to a new life as a lonely, arduous struggle against social conventions and expectations, and her only reliable ally in this conflict is her notebook. Sarah is convinced that the first step to recovery is quitting her job. She realizes that "the image of this wonderful, bright, intelligent, gorgeous Sarah, . . . universal favorite, everything a woman should be and a Ph.D. to boot" (34) is a fraud, and the pretense is becoming increasingly difficult to sustain. She even admits that it was faulty ambition that led to her career: "There are girls who marry at nineteen to marry . . . to have the title Mrs. I got my Ph.D. for the same reason" (120-1). Her decision to turn her back on her illustrious career is received with unanimous disbelief and disapproval, which Sarah now sees stems from the inherent fallacy in the notion that a career is a viable alternative to marriage. She perceives that in the eyes of a vast proportion of society, for a woman, a career is only an acceptable excuse for not being married. She yearns "for some radical means of escape from the quagmire into which gender has thrust [her]" (Keitner 187) but finds progress blocked by the complicity of her family, her friends and her colleagues in on ongoing social coercion. Virtually everyone seems convinced that the root of Sarah's discontent is not professional dissatisfaction, but feelings of desolation at not fulfilling her "natural" instinct to be a wife and mother. While Sarah does not deny a longing for some comfort and solvency which may or may not

come from marriage and motherhood, she also sincerely believes that she is not suited to her career, and that a change is essential. The ultimate outrage occurs when her mentor, Dr. Lyle, herself a dedicated and competent professional, rather than confirming the folly in Sarah continuing to live a lie, callously echoes the shallow sentiments of the less illuminated majority. Sarah painfully explains her position to Lyle: "I have no interest in the academic now . . . I can't rationalize what I'm teaching, I feel false, phony" (119). Lyle claims to respect Sarah's feelings, but she questions their validity: "I think they are passing and masochistic. You need either marriage, or a career. Possibly marriage. Certainly marriage, but you are forgetting that since we cannot all have what we like we must try to like what we have" (120). Lonely and frustrated by her inability to find a receptive audience for her grievances, Sarah pours a familiar lament onto the pages of her notebook. "I may have hit her, and I want to hit her now as hard as I wanted to strike out at my mother when I thought she knew me, when I thought she cared about me, the inside, personal, lonely me" (123).

Despite the strong opposition, Sarah gives up her position at St. Ardath's, and her notebook becomes the sounding board for her feelings of nostalgia and trepidation.

I allow myself a moment of wistfulness for St. A's; its framework had saved me years of time, thought, and effort. . . .

Well, I was off. No doubt later I would panic and long to be on again; meanwhile, the thing to do was to get over self-satisfaction. So I was off, and so what was I going to do? (133)

She decides to leave Toronto, and, determined to make a clean break, auctions off all her worldly goods. It's not as easy, however, to unload the emotional baggage she has acquired over the years, but in moments of

faltering progress and weakening resolve she turns to her notebook for encouragement.

Stop mewling around, Sarah, forget it. That's *the* answer, isn't it? Forget the corpulent past, move out, move on. You said you were going to. . . . Live cleanly, live abstractly, stop mucking your life up with details. . . . Why moan, mourn, or remember. . . . Remembering is masturbating. Stick the past in the ground, keep your memories chill and stylized, start again, afresh, a-roving. (137-8)

In the midst of her isolation, there is one person who serves as a source of encouragement and inspiration to Sarah, albeit in a manner inconsistent with his intent. Her brother-in-law Eldon, with his cloying solicitations and condescending admonishment, unwittingly becomes the principal outlet for her anger and resentment. On the one hand he embodies everything she does not want to become, "a self-elected personage, a gossip of secondhand values and an impressive range of half-truths" (115), and on the other he symbolizes the social forces that have made her into the "cynical, formless, immoral wretch" (34) she is today. He represents the ineffectual father, the irresolute Joe, the oppressive and abusive Sandro, and the inequities of society. He figures repeatedly in her deliberations, a scapegoat for total vindication, for universal retribution:

There are men I want to castrate. Why should Eldon McBreen's rumbustious balls give him an initiative I lack? Take him to the vet, that's what I'd do, have him fixed, remove the bits that allow him to patronize me. (31)

Once again, Engel's use of the framework of the personal notebook offers greater latitude than might other narrative forms for dramatizing Sarah's

anger. It would not be nearly as convincing, for example, to present Sarah's solution for Eldon's sexist tendencies as part of a dialogue in a third person narrative. Realizing that such ambitions would elicit staunch disapproval, few individuals would be willing to risk voicing these sentiments openly. It is entirely conceivable, however, that such thoughts could occur to someone in Sarah's state of mind. It is just as plausible that she would express these desires in her notebook, achieving a sense of personal amusement, a kind of sexist catharsis, with no discernible injury to herself or to her surrogate gelding.

While the personal notebook is intended to be a private outlet for uninhibited personal expression, there is no guarantee that such a document will remain private. There is always a possibility that this material will fall into the hands of a curious or critical readership, as is evidenced in the tendencies of feminist, native or other special interest groups to study such documents as a way of increasing our knowledge of life experiences which have been repressed by the dominant social and literary traditions. In her recreation of the personal notebook, Engel warns this unfamiliar, unintended, but interested and well-intentioned reader, that a life-writing document can be as misleading as it is revealing. The self expressed on the pages of a personal notebook may be quite different from the public self constructed in response to the dictates and conventions of social behaviour. A life-writing narrative, like the personal notebook, provides the reader with a glimpse into the private recesses of its writer's consciousness, allowing the reader to construct an image of the private person who is concealed from the outside world. Engel illustrates as well, however, that there is no guarantee that the impressions gleaned from the pages of a life-writing document represent a definitive or totally reliable portrayal of the individual who has

created the written testimony. The self directed discourse which characterizes a notebook omits many significant details which might alter the representation, and by extension, the reader's interpretation, of the 'truth'. For example, Sarah never explains her reasons for having an abortion when she apparently wanted the child desperately, so, while we are aware of her emotional reaction, we have little insight into her motivation. And is it not possible that something more tangible than dissatisfaction has occasioned her decision to leave academia? One might hope so, or the obvious conclusion might be that she is, as Lyle suspects, "flippan't" (118). In many respects, therefore, the reader's perception of Sarah's character and demeanour are based on conjecture.

But if the portrayal of the self in a life-writing document is incomplete and selective, Engel demonstrates that the portrayal of other individuals is even less reliable. While small but pertinent facets of Sarah's persona may be missing from the narrative, in the case of other characters, it is only very limited and selective aspects of their make-up which are presented. Sarah's depiction of all secondary characters is one-dimensional, delineated simply to exemplify essential elements of her own nature or to depict the essence of her experience. Each of Sarah's sisters represents a particular type of woman-- Leah, the "Carnival Queen" (13), Peg, the frail little woman and Rosemary, the perfect mother--each is juxtaposed against the multi-dimensional Sarah: "the homely sister" (51), the independent academic; the promiscuous, childless, spinster. Sarah's thoughts and words suggest that she experiences a measure of envy at the complacency of these other women, but they evidence as well a greater sense of disdain. Sarah insinuates that these other women have stagnated within the confines of their chosen, or imposed, roles while she has evolved, putting her in a more progressive, if more difficult, position.

Such a presumption is both unreliable and unreasonable. The insular nature of Sarah's discourse completely disregards the dynamics which govern the actions and perceptions of these other individuals. She considers these characters only as they relate to her personal concerns and presents them exclusively from her biased perspective.

Even those individuals who are given extensive coverage in Sarah's notebook are presented very subjectively. Throughout the text Eldon emerges a pompous, interfering blowhard, his concern and advice seeming both irritating and insincere. But Sarah doesn't like Eldon. She has never liked Eldon--"I came, I saw, I disliked" (32)--and her unwavering portrait of Eldon is a direct outcome of her contempt. The image of Sandro is equally unappealing. Whether he is interacting with Sarah or discussing Leah, his wife, he is portrayed as a selfish, domineering, insensitive, egotist. Given Engel's portrayal of Sarah's impassioned feelings towards Sandro and the turbulence of their relationship, it is obvious that Sarah is incapable of presenting a fair or reliable description of Sandro. From the moment she meets him, Sarah's feelings for Sandro are charged with passionate hostility. "So there was a sudden close feeling I did not want to analyze. Because of this, furthermore because he was imperious, there was hostility" (60). She is both enthralled and intimidated by him. "First impressions of Sandro: power, impudence (a king can say anything), grace" (70). Not surprisingly, she is incapable of resisting his advances, and enters into a tumultuous relationship which reaches obsessive proportions before coming to an acrimonious end: "I had such a passion for him that it wrung the identity out of my ears. I lost myself, I lost everything for three years" (136). In the final analysis, she is a woman scorned and bruised, and the hurt and anger which persist undermine any sense of objectivity in her consideration of Sandro.

By raising questions about the reliability of her narrator, Engel raises doubts about the ability of the personal notebook to represent a comprehensive portrait of either the writer or the circumstances of her experience. To illustrate the misapprehension which can ensue on the part of a reader who has access only to the unmediated self-interested expression characteristic of a personal notebook, Engel includes information in her fictional creation which would not be available to an intrusive reader of a 'real life notebook'--information which can alter perception of events and individuals.

Frequently throughout her narrative, Engel deviates from the idea of a notebook entry and relates the dynamics of social intercourse, providing not only Sarah's reaction, but presenting the actual details of the communication which likely would be omitted in Sarah's written retrospective. Sarah continually complains that she is misunderstood. Yet, on a variety of occasions, what she says does not correspond with what she is thinking, suggesting that this misunderstanding is largely her own doing. For example, when Sarah learns that her sister Peg is pregnant, while she privately entertains rather contemptuous thoughts about Peg's "out-of-date" euphoria, her verbal response is: "Oh, I'm so glad. . . and jealous" (165). It is little wonder, then, that Eldon responds, "Sarah, we're going to have to marry you off" (165). It is entirely possible that Sarah may have expressed the same sentiments to others, even if only out of politeness, so that there may be good reason everyone thinks that the solution to Sarah's problems is marriage.

Perhaps the best illustration of the misrepresentation in a personal notebook occurs when Sarah reads a letter from Sandro. In her novel, Engel quotes the entire letter, providing the reader of the fictional creation with

information and a perspective which would not be provided in an authentic life-writing document. In the case of a real notebook, the letter, at best, would be paraphrased, more likely, simply criticized. As Sarah reads the letter, her derision of Sandro's explanation demonstrates that she is not receptive to his communication. (Italics are mine, in order to distinguish Sarah's comments from Sandro's letter.)

"Dear Sarah"--*let me hold my breath.*

"Dear Sarah, I have been thinking more and more about our meeting in New York"--*you should, you ramping monster, you turned me into a small green turd--*"and that I owe you an explanation"--*you don't, you don't, remember your Waugh, never apologize, never explain --*"and that I have now quite comfortably stopped loving you." *Thank God. Love is a claim, Sandro, I don't want your claim, I'd rather make them.* (153)

The letter continues, interspersed with emotional and irrational comments from Sarah. While the reader of Engel's fictional novel may hear Sandro's argument, it is highly unlikely that his position would, in "real life," be objectively related by Sarah either vocally or on the pages of her notebook. As she finishes the letter, she exclaims, "Well, *requiescat*, and with a wreath of cape flowers you-know-where" (158), and, I imagine, crumples Sandro's defense into a ball and tosses it into the wastebasket. Quite clearly Sandro will never have his day in court as long as Sarah is in charge of the proceedings.

Engel used the notebook format for her novel because it provided the most conducive medium for portraying Sarah's state of mind. Sarah is immersed in self-pity and paranoia, plagued by extreme recrimination and obsessive meditation, extremely resentful of pervasive social oppression. No

other narrative form could plausibly and tolerably portray the intensity of this emotional distress. Confident that her words are for her eyes only, Sarah is not bound by any moral or social constraints and wantonly expresses her deepest fears, obsessions and desires.

Engel demonstrates the power and the facility of the personal notebook to fill a debilitating need for personal expression, but she also reveals some obscure properties about the form itself. Because the personal notebook contains the most intimate disclosures of its author, it can reveal a private person very different from the public persona. As it is very often repressive social conditions--which give rise to fear of condemnation, reprisal, or simply misunderstanding--which preclude the individual from sharing this private life, the personal notebook can reveal covert information about the social and historical conditions against which this life is lived and shaped. It must, as well, be viewed as a singular vision within a multiplicity of possible perspectives. Self-serving and obsessive by nature, life-writing documents, particularly the personal notebook, are neither definitive nor totally reliable. While illustrating the expansive candour which characterizes this particular form of life writing, Engel also exposes the intensely biased nature of life writing, demonstrating that for every honest, personal story, there is another, just as honest, personal story, despite the inherent and evincive contradictions.

Chapter III

"I'll tell you who I am"

(Joanne 1)

In the "Preface" to Joanne, Engel explains that the book was written in response to a request from the office of CBC's *"This Country in the Morning"* to write "a *fictional* diary--that of a woman whose marriage was dying." While Marian Engel did not choose the form for her fourth novel, she considered the task an exciting challenge and approached the assignment with diligence and superb acumen. In this convincing and illuminating imitation of the personal diary, Marian Engel demonstrated that she was indeed up to the challenge.

While I was unable to find any theoretical considerations which make a clear distinction between the personal notebook and the diary, a comparison between Engel's two works illustrates that, in her estimation, they are quite different documents. To recap briefly, Sarah Bastard's Notebook is a record of random, emotional, uninhibited expression, with no apparent regard on Sarah's part for logic, elaboration or explanation, and certainly no concern for discretion. Sarah's notebook represents the latest of an apparently life-long accumulation of notebooks which reflect her deepest thoughts and obsessions and reveal her most intimate experiences. Sarah's notebook is her conscience and her confidant, the only mechanism she has to relieve the anguish and guilt which is consuming her life.

Joanne's diary, like Sarah's notebook, has a therapeutic purpose. It is a forum for self-analysis and her only outlet for personal expression. In contrast to Sarah's notebook, however, Joanne's diary is a closed and singular document which chronicles one particular event in her life, the dissolution

of her marriage. The entries in Joanne's diary are logical and sequential, each one picking up where the last ends, and they attempt an elaboration and explanation of daily events so that a clear sense of the experience, and the emotional and physical effect it is having on Joanne, emerges as the events unfold. Finally, Joanne exercises a measure of decorum in her narrative that is not evident in Sarah's notebook.

Admittedly, Engel was creating Joanne's diary for a radio audience, which precluded her from using the indelicate or graphic language she used in Sarah's notebook, but there was nothing to prevent Engel from presenting Joanne's plight with as much melodrama and obsessive self-interest as she presented Sarah's experience. What is more, the careful attention to narrative elucidation in Joanne is not necessary for capturing the radio audience's attention. Sarah's irrational and emotional revelations would have been just as intriguing and compelling to the CBC's listeners as Joanne's meticulous and logical discourse. The differences between Sarah Bastard's Notebook and Joanne have very little to do with the medium for which Engel was writing in each case, but arise primarily from her differing perception of the diary and of the personal notebook. Sarah's notebook is illustrative of the life-writing narrative that is not expected, and surely not intended, to become public. Joanne's document, on the other hand, is an example of those personal narratives which record experience for posterity, frequently intended to stand as testimony to some personal triumph over adversity.

Joanne's narrative conforms to the concept of the diary as it emerged in the late nineteenth century, when the practice of publishing diaries became more prevalent. The type of document Engel creates in Sarah Bastard's Notebook is similar to the notion of the diary as it was known prior to the

nineteenth century, and which exists still today, but is distinguished by its predisposition for secrecy. As Felicity Nussbaum explains in The Autobiographical Subject: "the diary . . . was largely a private document in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, but by the nineteenth century it was both a private and a public document, no longer confined to secrecy" (24). The evolution, Nussbaum contends, was the outcome of changing "ideological assumptions." The assumption in the earlier period being "that a private 'self' . . . which conceals dangerous and even criminal thoughts" is relayed in the personal diary, and this "private subjectivity should remain private, its only legitimate reader the diarist or the journalist" (25). This attitude intensified in the eighteenth century as the introduction of the practice of publishing personal diaries raised serious questions about the motives of the diarist and the reliability of the revelations in the diary. In some reviews of the time, "publishing autobiography [was] compared with a violent and insane malady that strikes writers who are hungry after fame" (Nussbaum 25). In others it was contended that this material "seldom provided a frank picture of one's motives or interests, [but] merely satisfied vanity" (Nussbaum 26). Towards the end of the eighteenth century, however, this attitude changed dramatically, largely as a result of the work of individuals like Isaac D'Israeli, who argued that the diary is worthy of consideration "because it recounts the experience of a fellow being, [and] . . . 'nothing which presents a faithful relation of humanity, is inconsiderable to a human being'" (Nussbaum 26).⁹ The original belief that the personal diary should under no circumstances be read by someone other than the author had evolved into the opinion that the diary is not only interesting, but profitable reading.

The distinction between Sarah Bastard's Notebook and Joanne parallels this theoretical analysis proffered by Nussbaum, but with a subtle difference. What distinguishes the nature of Sarah's revelations from Joanne's is not whether or not the personal record should be read by someone other than the author, but, rather, whether or not it was likely that it would be read by someone else. I am not suggesting that Engel is implying that Joanne intends to publish her diary, only that her protagonist sees a need to compile an accurate record of this pivotal event in her life, perhaps in anticipation of that fateful moment when her children want to know why she left their father. Nussbaum observes that "throughout [D'Israeli's] essay [about the subgenre of the diary] there is a somewhat coy contradiction between the requirement to keep one's 'self' private and yet make it readable enough to tantalize a public readership" (27). Such a strategy does not enter into Sarah's behaviour. She writes with abandon, with no consideration of exposure. Joanne, however, seems to be preparing for the possibility that her diary will be discovered and read by an interested, pliable and discerning reader.

Nevertheless, Engel presents the basic incentive for keeping a diary as comparable to the reasons for writing in a personal notebook--the need for personal expression. Like Sarah, Joanne sees no alternative outlet for this personal expression. Joanne needs to talk but she is reluctant to confide in another human being. She doubts that even her closest friends will treat her disclosures with the requisite discretion and compassion: "My good friend Myra . . . would tell everyone," and "Heartha . . . is too bound up in her own life and besides she doesn't understand about married people" (1). A psychiatrist is out of the question: "I'm not paranoid, I'm being persecuted" (1). The need to ventilate her feelings is so extreme, however,

that she is actually concerned that she might “go to some party or other and spill it all to a stranger” (1). The only solution seems to be to keep a diary.

From the beginning, Engel differentiates the style of the diary from that of the personal notebook. Firstly, she establishes that Joanne’s diary represents a first-time, likely one-time, endeavour. Keeping a personal record book is neither an obvious nor a natural choice for Joanne. “I suppose it’s foolish and oldfashioned to keep a diary these days. Nobody else does that I know of. . . . But, I’m going to try now. After all, if I don’t tell a lined school exercise book . . . whom will I tell?” (1). Secondly, Joanne’s diary does not read as a dialogue with herself, as does Sarah’s notebook, but rather as an account for an anticipated reader. Joanne begins by addressing this reader directly and by painstakingly introducing herself to this unknown, and unknowing, reader: “So I’ve decided to keep a diary and now I have to explain who I am. I’ll tell you who I am” (1). She then proceeds to provide a brief, but succinct, synopsis of her life.

As pointed out in the previous chapter, the random recollection and the repetitive, obsessive thought patterns which characterize Sarah’s notebook do not conform to the notion of a diary as “a private serial autobiographical narrative” (Nussbaum 25). The format and style of Joanne’s diary, however, are consistent with this definition. Each entry is introduced by the day of the week and is well structured, clear and comprehensive. Joanne writes in her diary with precise regularity, and maintains a sense of continuity throughout the narrative, clarifying issues and tying up loose ends. She even adds information which might have been overlooked in a previous report. On one occasion, preoccupied with giving an account of her first date in over twenty years, she fails to note her estranged husband’s

reaction to the incident. The next day, recalling Bill's behaviour, she includes it in her report:

Bill was a riot last night. He hung around. He hopped up and down. He was jealous. I should have gone out for lunch with somebody years ago. It was lovely. I had him on the hook, I could have asked him for anything. . . .

I think he went to bed in his study almost regretfully.

(40-1)

Only when this particularly self-gratifying encounter is recorded for posterity does Joanne proceed to discuss the events of the day at hand.

This morning Bill's partner Phil called, not for him but for me. I had given Creative People, their agency, as a reference to the employment agency. (41)

To emphasize the diarist's responsibility to produce a comprehensive and accurate record of her experience, Engel's narrator evaluates the merit of each entry, and, if warranted, provides an explanation or rationalization for not measuring up to her own expectations. She introduces one uncharacteristically brief entry with, "I'm so tired I can hardly hold my pen to write" (86), thereby explaining her brevity and warding off any suspicion of negligence. The record for the following day, a considerably longer and more comprehensive account of that day's events, reinforces her commitment to the project. Momentary lapses in her performance are acknowledged before they are discarded, confirming her determination to be communicative. After reading one such entry she comments: "It's meaningless. Domestic chatter. No wonder Bill's sick of me. The closer I get to the page, the further away I get from what's bothering me" (7). In reference to another she admits, "Just tore today's page out. What's the use of keeping a diary if I can't write

down what I'm really thinking" (26). By admitting these shortcomings in her performance, she gains and sustains the confidence of her reader. In that these comments from her narrator do not contribute to the sense of the story being told, they appear to be a deliberate strategy on Engel's part to enunciate the "narrative" purpose of the diary, to foreground the sense that her narrator is creating this document with a reader other than herself in mind.

Still, diaries are deeply personal documents and Engel does not discount the fact that they tend to be self-indulgent forms of expression. From time to time, Joanne succumbs to emotion and melodrama. Her greatest crisis occurs when her mother-in-law kidnaps her children, and the entry for that frightful day begins, "I can't believe it. I didn't think the world worked that way any more" (54). She incredulously relates Bertilla's threat to take her children from her, her own naive lack of concern, and finally her horrified realization that the woman has carried out her threat. As Joanne describes her reaction, it is obvious that her despair could only be worse if her children were dead, a possibility she does not rule out:

I stood in the kitchen, not knowing where I was or what to do. I felt I needed water, large quantities of cold water. I drank glass after glass of cold water, and then I vomited. My life, my personality, my whole being went down the kitchen drain. I became a transparent entity, Mrs. No-One. The lady who used to have children, and had no more. A person who had done one thing only in her life, and that was bringing those two children into the world, and they were hers no more. (54)

Unlike Sarah, who repeatedly and irrationally dwells on the crude image of her abortion, Joanne endeavours to describe the events which have taken place clearly and rationally, and to articulate her reaction. Joanne's brevity

and lucidity can be attributed to the fact that she is creating an official record of this horrendous experience, as well as working through the emotional trauma.

The account of this event, more than any other in the text, depicts the literary purpose of the diary. The particularly engaging narrative strategy is designed not only to describe the events intelligibly, but to sustain the interest of a reader--a strategy that does not enter into Sarah's personal record. For fourteen pages Joanne describes the exhaustive and desperate search for her children, introducing drama, tension and intrigue. Then, the children still missing, Joanne mad with worry, her thoughts consumed with "dead children, lost children, Dickens children" (68), she abruptly and irresolutely interrupts the momentum of the saga with the following entry, clearly designed to capture the attention of her reader:

We don't live in Toronto anymore.

We live behind high, dirty windows in an old, cheap hotel in a town Stanley taught in when I was in Grade Four. I have just registered Andrew and Jennie at a big grey stone school. In half an hour I go to see Manpower about a job. At eleven, there's an apartment I want to see. We don't live in Toronto any more. (68-9)

Then, addressing this anticipated reader directly, "This is what happened" (69), she proceeds to describe the very dramatic events of the past few days which include kidnapping back her own children, leaving their comfortable home in Toronto and seeking refuge in a remote Ontario town.

As Felicity Nussbaum argues, the popular concept of the diary, which has persisted since the late eighteenth century, includes the idea that it "produces a sincere yet changeable "self" that asks its readers to make

something smooth and finished of the text, to reproduce a recognizable and full human being" (27). Engel's narrator is clearly striving to portray the image of a human being who is not only moral, but exemplary in many ways--a being who is humble and honest, worthy of compassion, understanding and admiration. Unlike Sarah, who discloses the most intimate details of her life and the most reprehensible intentions with abandon, Joanne is careful not to divulge anything that may be incriminating or unseemly. She even avoids discussing contentious matters unless she can do so with civility. The account for one eventful day is simply: "We had the worst fight of our lives last night. It's over. I'm not going to write about it until I cool off" (19). This fight represents the turning point in Joanne's marriage, the moment when divorce becomes inevitable and the moment when her hostility towards Bill is at its peak, but she resists further reference to the incident, preventing an unsavoury emotional outburst. The following day, still furious, she does write a rebuttal, addressing Bill as "you bastard," itemizing his faults and outlining her conditions for separation, but she maintains a remarkable measure of decorum. Joanne might secretly entertain thoughts of retribution for Bill's adulterous and patronizing past in a manner commensurate with that Sarah envisions for "Eldon McBreen's rumbustious balls" (Sarah Bastard's Notebook 31), but Joanne would never be so imprudent as to put such outrageous thoughts on paper. Sarah does not consider the possibility of detection or reproach, but, for Joanne, it would be unthinkable for such indelicate evidence to appear in her diary. It would not conform to the self image she is striving to portray.

Her testimony is so consistently innocuous, in fact, that even her children could be privy to it if they felt so inclined. On the one occasion she

acknowledges sexual longings, the admission dissolves into a melodic tongue twister reminiscent of a child's nursery rhyme:

I'm lonely, I'd give anything for a little touch of Tom, Dick or
Harry in the night. I want someone in the house. I want a
lover. Maybe that man I met in a dream once, graceful and
smiling. Wendell Nocturne, his name was.

Yes, I want witting Wendell waltzing in on a Wednesday,
wonderful Wendell wending his way wantonly to my
wingchair, Wendell unwinding in the waiting-room displaying
winsome. (26-7)

Another time she admits feeling guilty, "sluttish and horrible [because she] was going out to lunch with another man" (37). This thought is probably more indicative of the fact that marriage to Bill has consumed her life, or of nervous anticipation, than it is of compunction, but it is still an ingratiating touch.

Sarah's deprecation of her adversaries is merciless. Joanne, on the other hand, is the image of magnanimity. As unbelievable as it may seem, she blames herself for provoking her mother-in-law's enmity towards her. After reading a letter from Bertilla, a "pathetic piece of invective," she thinks: "I feel awful that I made her hate me quite so much" (87). Even Bill, who is the real villain in this story, the person responsible for destroying Joanne's family and for the hardships which ensued, is spared serious recrimination. His composure when the children are missing is incomprehensible, and his lack of cooperation, abominable, but Joanne resists casting aspersions on his character beyond suggesting that his paternal tendencies are sporadic: "Bill is wonderfully fatherly once in a while" (72).

A common misconception about the diary is that "the diarist [is] simply [transcribing] the details of experience. But clearly some events are more important to the narrative 'I' than others, and the minute particulars of an interiority increasingly become the diarist's focus" (Nussbaum 28). If Joanne is sparing with her censure of Bill, she virtually ignores the possibility that he too might be suffering: "Long, sad letter from Bill this afternoon. He wants me back. Nobody loves him, nobody will look after him." Despite his appeal, she realizes, "it would be plain idiotic to get into that mess again," and as for his distress: "He'll get over his bad patch" (109). It does not serve Joanne's purpose to afford Bill's perspective any palpable consideration. While more delicately and eloquently expressed, Joanne's diary is even more self-serving than is Sarah's notebook, and there is no place in her story for Bill--neither his pain, nor his blame.

Engel demonstrates that the diary, as well as providing an opportunity for self-explanation and vindication, is an occasion for paying homage to notable persons in one's life, attesting once again to the anticipation of possible public disclosure. Joanne feels inestimable love, loyalty and gratitude towards Frieda and Stanley, the aunt and uncle who raised her after she had been abandoned by her mother. When Frieda and Stanley's son, Faber, unleashes "a torrent of venom" against his parents, claiming that "they'd never loved him . . . [that] Frieda was a prig and Stanley a horny old goat," Joanne does not waste her rebuttal on Faber, but renders a written defence of her aunt and uncle in her diary: "I lived with those people, too, and loved them, and they were not like that" (117).

Engel implies that Sarah's practice of keeping a notebook is a habit which has endured for many years and which promises to continue for years to come. Joanne began her diary at a particular time in her life, with a precise

mission--to talk about her problems, to find some answers, and most of all, to tell her personal story: "I started this diary in order to tell what was the matter--get it all down on paper" (7). When the time is right, Engel brings Joanne's narrative to an end. Although provisions in Stanley's will offer Joanne and the children the option of living in his house in Toronto, Joanne decides, instead, to return to their humble, rural apartment. Her last entry declares the emergence of a renewed subject, wiser, healthier and more content, bringing this chapter of her life and her diary to a close:

We're home again.

Our home is the garden flat, and it's good to be in it. . . . we've started a new life here. It's not easy and privileged as the old one was, but it has its own flavour. We have a few friends, we'll find more, we can go to the Y and the library, and out in the country to Rosie's and Merrill's. We've a landlord, a doctor, Mrs. Brodhurst, and a list of babysitters. Why, we exist. That's a miracle.

It's halfway to seeing life steadily and whole and probably as far as ordinary mortals like Jen and Andrew and me will ever get. (134)

Tasked with the challenge of writing a fictional diary, Engel set out to create a document which would be quite different from the type of personal expression which she herself practiced during her lifetime and which she emulated in Sarah Bastard's notebook. She demonstrates that, like the notebook, "the diary affords a place where one can converse with 'that other Self . . . [and set] out an alternative self to ponder" (Nussbaum 27). But, as Engel presents it, the diary is also "an occasion to address the reader without reserve" (Nussbaum 27) and she illustrates that a dialogue with an "other,"

even an "other" as allusive as "Dear Diary" or a generic "you," provokes a mode of expression which is more finely tuned and carefully orchestrated than the expression in a personal notebook. It is certainly more cohesive than the personal notebook, both in terms of form and intelligibility, but also in terms of deliberately creating a construct which will withstand public scrutiny.

Chapter IV

"one of those opaque lady travellers, after all"

(Monodromos 236-7)

Monodromos, Marian Engel's tale of travel, adventure, and personal discovery, is yet another illustration of the variety which exists among documents included within the sub-genre of the diary. A candid, intimate, but comprehensible account of personal experience, and "a tool for self analysis" (Kadar, Reading xiii), Monodromos manifests characteristics of both the personal notebook and the personal diary. It is, as well, quite different from Sarah Bastard's Notebook and Ioanne. In Monodromos, Engel moves beyond the realm of individual experience to depict an experience with cosmopolitan relevance--an inter-cultural encounter.

Monodromos represents a travel diary which chronicles a woman's journey to a strange land. Engel's use of the framework of the travel diary for her novel challenges the authority of traditional scientific discourses, and supports the contention that personal narrative is a legitimate, and perhaps more authentic, form of ethnographic representation. In an interview with Graeme Gibson, prior to the publication of her novel, Engel alluded to her purpose in Monodromos:

[T]he kind of things people want to know about . . . things that are meaningful because they go beyond the social sciences . . . we could not possibly know unless we had derived them from our own experience. I'm doing an interesting new book now and trying to lick this problem in certain ways. (96)

She indicated that it was the pragmatic approach used by social scientists to study and interpret human behaviour which was most disconcerting: "I met

a sociologist-anthropologist in Cyprus. . . . I found what she knew was fascinating, but it wasn't the sort of thing I could have settled down and done at all. I couldn't have approached experience in that cold orderly way" (Gibson 100). In Monodromos, Engel portrays this learning experience as a deeply moving and unpredictable process.

In an essay entitled "Anthropological Lives: The Reflexive Tradition in a Social Science," Sally Cole articulates the problem Engel addresses in her novel:

[Social scientists] travel (generally alone) to places . . . usually far away from their university offices, where they share the daily lives of people whose culture, history, and material conditions tend to be different from their own. . . . They then . . . write about the lives they have seen, participated in and come to understand. The "doing" is called "fieldwork"; the writing is called "ethnography." (113)

Cole points out that while fieldwork is "based upon . . . personal, subjective and sensual experience," the academic community has traditionally demanded a condition of "self-effacement" on the part of the scientific reporter. This "difficult discursive shift from the position of subjective face-to-face with the 'Other' to the scientific position of observer looking in and/or down upon the 'Other'" deprives the text of "the authority of the personal experience out of which the ethnography was made" (Cole 121). Recently, largely as a result of "the contemporary concerns of postmodern and feminist practitioners" (Cole 113), this personal experience is being recognized as an essential element in ethnographic experience and description.

[F]eminists and postmodernists . . . are interested in difference and experiential knowledge. . . . Both recognize that

objectivity is a relative concept, that what one sees or experiences depends upon who one is, individually, socially, and historically. Both consider that much of what was formerly considered irrelevant (anecdotal, self-indulgent, subjective, personal, and idiosyncratic) about doing fieldwork--the experience of fieldwork--and that was excluded in the writing of "scientific," ethnography is now highly relevant. (Cole 121-2)

A corollary of this increasing interest in the personal element of inter-cultural studies is that life-writing narratives are being viewed as legitimate and highly illuminating forms of ethnographic reporting.¹⁰

Engel's Monodromos represents just such a narrative. Audrey Moore, a Canadian living in England, receives a telegram urging her to come to the aid of her former husband, Laddie, who lives on an unspecified Mediterranean island.¹¹ Reluctant to leave Max, her ailing lover, Audrey only agrees to take the trip when Max informs her that he is planning to seek solace from his chilly London apartment with his wife in her heated dwellings in Scotland. During her stay on the island, which lasts more than nine months, Audrey becomes deeply involved in the daily life and the traditions of this country. Monodromos is her personal account of this experience.

From the outset, Engel establishes Monodromos as a travel diary by using a temporal pointer as the heading of the opening chapter, a Sunday in January, and by beginning the narrative with a description similar to an excerpt from a guidebook:

The bastions of the city are called D'Avila, Tripoli, Roccas, Mula, Quirini, Barbaro, Loredana, Flatro, Caraffa, Podocataro and Costanza. They are shaped like arrowheads, and they project

level with the top of the walls into the broad ditch that was the city moat. The Venetian Savorgnano designed them, and Barbaro engineered them. They were supposed to save the city from the Turks. (1)

Engel sustains the concept of a travel diary throughout the text by presenting the narrative, largely, in the form of diary entries, and by using a number of clever devices which reinforce the sense that the document is recounting a travel experience. One method is the inclusion of descriptive passages reminiscent of travel notes or comments hastily scribbled on souvenir articles or on the back of photographs to capture and preserve an impression:

Seen at the corner of Baffo and Bulgar-Slayer: a sheik in one of those head dresses with cords around them, wearing a heavy dark robe. The selvedges of the material met on his chest and ran down to his feet reading "100% British Woolen, 100% British Woolen." (81)

Another technique is the frequent injection of correspondence between Audrey and people in England--one of the most effective examples being the recreation of a familiar travel item, the picture postcard. After describing the scene on the face of the postcard, Engel imitates the characteristically brief message inscribed on the back of a postcard:

(Picture postcard: gothic window, crenellated walls, mountains, exaggerated sea, lemons hovering in the blue:)

IT DOES LOOK LIKE THIS. COME AND SEE. YOU CAN DO IT ON THE CHEAP FROM MARSEILLES. SPERIDAKIS IS OK AND HAS BETTER PEOPLE THAN IN AFRICA. CAN YOU GET DOWN TO BOOSEY HAWKES AT LUNCH HOUR BUY MODERN PIANO LESSONS I & II THREE COPIES EACH SEND

POB 2978? WILL REMUNERATE SOONEST. PYE CAN SEE
THIS. L. IS OK BUT AS WE THOUGHT DEEP IN DEBT.
REGARDS TO PYE. LOVE A. (68)

Engel's strategy prompted some critics to fault Monodromos for being "more of a populated travelogue than a novel" (Jackson F7), or as Peter Buitenhuis claimed in a review in The Globe and Mail, for being "fragmentary":

Often the writing takes the form of diary entries, random notes, oblique scribbles in the margins of life, all of which serve to emphasize the chaotic and random nature of Audrey's experience . . . but [do] not emerge into a pattern. (32)

This criticism actually confirms Engel's accomplishment in Monodromos, for the book is intended to represent a personal "travelogue," and Audrey's experience, which is more aptly described as spontaneous and unpredictable, rather than "chaotic" and "random," precludes emerging "into a pattern." In her fictional recreation, Engel is documenting a living experience, and life experiences seldom emerge into patterns, except, perhaps, in scientific journals.

While the experience in Monodromos may not emerge into a pattern, Engel does present Audrey Moore's intellectual progress from ignorance to burgeoning social awareness as a very precise journey of personal discovery, measured by specific and recognizable cognitive and emotional milestones. Initially, Audrey approaches her adventure with an attitude of arrogant expectation, and, before finally accepting the social conditions which characterize this alien society, she proceeds methodically through stages of resistance, indignation and resignation. By presenting the narrative in the form of a travel diary, Engel demonstrates that this perceptual process is

profoundly influenced by individual expectations, convictions and prejudices. As Audrey records her candid thoughts and impressions alongside her ethnographic observations, it is apparent that everything she "sees or experiences depends upon who [she] is, individually, socially, and historically" (Cole 121), suggesting that, when it comes to studying human behaviour, scientific distance and objectivity are, at best, illusory concepts.

As her journey begins, Audrey arrogantly and naively presumes that she can prepare herself for the cultural experience ahead, but, as Engel illustrates, her efforts are more likely to impede than to facilitate her apprehension of this foreign land. Audrey, who works for "Pye Information Ltd. . . . a credit business," which has business interests in the island, manages to spend a day "on the files referring to the island," learning what she can about the economy, the major industries and the nature of the islanders from her employer's point of view (17). As a financier, her employer's perspective is limited, and his opinion, which has both racist and slanderous undertones, could create adverse expectations on the part of a prospective traveller. He characterizes the major business of the land, "import-export," as "the ant-like business of the Wog," and he attributes the lack of evidence of disreputable business transactions to the islanders' shrewdness rather than their honesty (17). Audrey, a discerning researcher, recognizes the restrictive and biased perspective of Pye's assessment, and attempts to ameliorate the quality of her information by referring to a highly recommended guidebook by Rupert Gunnis, but this type of material, too, can be a principal source of inter-cultural misinformation and misunderstanding. As Edward Said argues,

Travel books or guidebooks are about as "natural" a kind of text, as logical in their composition and in their use, as any book one

can think of, precisely because of this human tendency to fall back on a text when the uncertainties of travel in strange parts seem to threaten one's equanimity. . . . And of course many writers of travel books or guidebooks compose them in order to say that a country is like this, or better, that it is colourful, expensive, interesting and so forth. The idea in either case is that people, places and experience can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than the actuality it describes. (93)

Audrey's initial descriptions of this new land, which sound suspiciously like a travel critique, indicate that her perception has been influenced by her research. "The first thing you learn about this place is that no one is satisfied. . . . It's one of those regions prey to passionate dissatisfaction, like Ireland" (5). She notes, as well, that the island is "culturally stranded, like Australia" (6).

She quickly realizes that the information she has acquired through her research has been misleading:

All the *English* travel books prepare you for a disappointment, they expect you to be some kind of purist for whom everything must be the Taj Mahal--phooey on them. This is much, much better, not a monument but a whole place with its evolution showing. (38)

Her arrogance prevails, however, for she now anticipates that her personal investigation and observation will succeed where that of others has failed. "[T]he town was beginning to develop itself for me as a compound of indigestible images, fragments of eye-shapes, cornices, siren-songs. I began to want badly to know it, in that intimate way which consumes time" (42).

While the task, as Engel portrays it, is extremely difficult, and the ambition elusive, Audrey's diary does seem to be a more informative ethnographic report than travel books or formal scientific reports. Audrey's account of her exposure to this cultural "other" is much more than a detached summary of her observations. As she recounts events in her diary, she describes her own actions and reactions, as well as those of the islanders, vividly illustrating that the inter-cultural encounter is a complex and dynamic interactive process. Her candid admissions confirm that the conclusions she reaches and the opinions she expresses are a direct outcome of her personal interpretation of these events, demonstrating that perception is a very subjective process, influenced by individual predisposition and circumstances. As well, because it is a "private serial autobiographical narrative" (Nussbaum 23) which records experience "on a 'daily' or at least a 'regular' basis" (Kadar, Reading xiii), Audrey's diary reveals that, over time, her assessment of this alien society undergoes gradual but profound changes, demonstrating that ethnographic impressions are neither definitive nor conclusive.

Engel illustrates that, in the beginning, the strength of Audrey's cultural conditioning renders her incapable of being receptive to the underlying convictions which guide this island society. She repeatedly violates taboos, sometimes due to her innocent ignorance of the subtle nuances of unspecified but ancient and well-established traditions, but more often as a result of her blatant disregard for the unwritten laws of the land. As a result, she frequently finds herself in compromising situations. When Laddie, who has been living on the island for some time and who presumably has learned something about the social conventions that prevail,

warns Audrey that it is neither acceptable nor prudent for a woman to "go out alone at night," she is contemptuously defiant:

"Just to a movie."

"They'll rape you and cut you up in little pieces."

"For godsake Laddie, I'll wear my running shoes and take my bow and arrow."

"It isn't done, you know."

"Nobody anywhere really gives a shit what other people do. You just think so."

"They watch everything you do here."

"You're paranoid."

"When in Rome . . . I thought you were the experienced traveller." (43)

Ignoring his advice, she ventures out on her own, only to be intercepted by members of the local police force, who insist on providing an escort and who reiterate Laddie's warnings in their own vernacular:

"Lady, we are the tourist police, are you losted?"

"Just out for a walk, thank you. . . ."

You must not walk out in the night by yourself,
Lady. . . ."

[T]hey hand me into the jeep . . . repeating [the] lecture against nocturnal peregrination. "The Turks is a very violent people, they rubs their bodies with blood from the bladder of a pig before they goes to war, they loves women too much." (46-7)

Audrey still may not be convinced that such peril exists, but this event does convince her that she is indeed being watched, and that the locals will not, as Laddie indicated, tolerate her aberrant behaviour.

She makes some minor concessions to the island's code of conduct, particularly in respect to gender restrictions. She poses as Laddie's sister to legitimize their cohabitation and is careful to dress in a manner which will not provoke rage (120), but she is, after all, a "liberated" Anglo-American woman, and, for the most part, her behaviour continues to be ruled by a Western European / North American value system. She asserts her independence by travelling about unattended, and she even has an affair with a married man, an islander, refusing to acknowledge that, in this society, a sexually liberated, lone woman traveller gives a clear and particular signal. Her imprudence has serious and far reaching repercussions. On one occasion she is attacked in her bedroom by a taxi driver who had taken her to a secret rendezvous with her married lover (127). Another time, she is falsely and deliberately implicated in an extra-marital affair with her employer, Loizos Speridakis, who apparently discerns that, since Audrey herself had, thus far, evidenced no concern for her reputation, she would not be unduly bothered by the suggestion of one more indiscretion. His strategy, Audrey discovers, is to conceal the identity of his actual paramour, thereby sustaining their illicit relationship a little longer. When Audrey asks, "I suppose you were going to see someone else and you said it was me" (157), Loizos confirms her suspicions, but his only regret is over the unfortunate spectacle which ensues. For an untold number of days and nights his grandmother parks herself at the entrance to Laddie's house, "lamenting [Audrey's] sins" and blocking her passage (138). While Audrey does not discount her own culpability for this incident--"I felt an awful withering guilt. I have, after all been dining out with someone else's husband . . . my desires have been vast. . . . I have indulged myself . . . committed, in short, the usual thousand sins a day. At first I felt I'd earned her" (139)--she is both indignant and appalled to discover

that, despite her innocence in this particular instance, and despite “a [local] law against public nuisances” (158), no one in this society, not even the police, will attempt to oust the old woman. “She is too old,” they claim, and while they tell “her not to shout words anymore,” they simply shrug and walk away explaining, “She is somebody’s grandmother” (141).

Audrey concludes from these unpleasant events that she is in the midst of a very misogynist, regressive, and oppressive society. Following the taxi driver’s assault, she decides that this land is not a place where she can lie “adrift in intellectual pretensions with [her] legs open and [her] door unlocked” (127); and she declares the community’s reluctance to challenge the old lady’s behaviour, far from being a show of respect for elders, indisputable evidence of a systemic disorder known as “ingrown matriarchitis [which] comes of being in purdah” (158). Because these episodes are described in the form of candid and extensive diary entries, it is apparent to the reader of Engel’s novel that Audrey’s behaviour was instrumental in provoking both incidents, and that her verdict in both situations was not based on detached, objective observation but on her emotional response to these particularly bewildering and disturbing experiences. By demonstrating how profoundly and distinctly individual circumstances determine cognitive response, Engel confirms that perception and representation can vary widely among people, suggesting that the conclusive and objective claims of formal ethnography are untenable.

Engel further illustrates the variability which can characterize cultural representation by demonstrating that, over time, individual attitudes and impressions change. As the novel progresses, Audrey’s assessment of this island society alters significantly. Very early in her adventure, Audrey becomes cognizant of the nature of gender relations in this land. “In this

society I am handicapped by my femininity, I can't take on any male enterprise at all" (80). As pointed out previously, except for some minor concessions, she initially resists the restrictions prescribed by these gender conditions, but when it becomes apparent that resistance is both impractical and ineffective, Audrey's defiance turns into resigned indignation. When Loizos' wife, for example, complains to Audrey about her husband's frequent infidelities, Audrey, perceiving that the women, as much as the men, are responsible for engendering and sustaining this social inequity, replies disdainfully, "'But didn't you expect that? Aren't you from here?'" (172).

In an interview prior to the completion of Monodromos, Engel described Cyprus as "a society which is completely sexually divided, where the woman's role and the man's role is worked out very clearly according to a pattern that was laid down a thousand years ago" (Gibson 97). Engel's personal experience convinced her of the futility of attempting either to understand or to challenge such an established social order, but in her novel she demonstrates that harmonious coexistence is possible even without complete understanding as long as there is awareness of, and a reasonable measure of mutual tolerance for, these irreconcilable differences. Resigned to the immutability of the social inequity, Audrey is less resentful of the oppression she has been forced to witness and endure, and begins to assume a more conciliatory stance. As she becomes more familiar with the islanders as individuals, she finds it increasingly difficult to be openly critical of their way of life. Audrey still does not understand or approve of Loizos Speridakis's behaviour, but she is, nevertheless, amused and touched by his attempts to justify his infidelities by appealing to her English sensibilities. "'Is there not a play in English entitled 'All for Love?'" (187), he asks, obviously unaware of the significance of Dryden's tragedy. Audrey muses, fondly: "I still don't

know whether he's an honest man or some kind of charlatan, he's full of play-acting. He goes down the stairs restored, almost swaggering. But how can you dislike someone you have come to know" (188)?

Further evidence of Audrey's growing tolerance is her increasing inclination to react to untoward events not with recrimination, or by attempting to impose her own values on her opponents, but by trying to understand these incidents in terms of their different cultural context in order to avoid further mishaps. During a violent rain storm, while on a solo journey into the interior of the island, she seeks shelter and sustenance at a monastery. After dinner, she innocently accepts the Bishop's invitation to join him for coffee and cognac in the Abbot's apartment. To her horror, he assaults her. Reconsidering the incident later, Audrey concedes that her imprudence and her naiveté were contributing factors. "I was dirty, I did not want to be wanted. I was tired. I was also, even a little, respectful of his blue-purple cloth. Why did I go there, how did I get into that? How did I get to be so dumb?" (236). In comparison to her reaction to the taxi driver's assault or to her public condemnation by Lozois' grandmother, it is obvious that Audrey has become increasingly lenient toward her aggressors and more critical of herself.

Audrey's attempts to understand issues from the emotional and intellectual vantage point of her hosts increase her level of tolerance for their behaviour. At the same time, her efforts reveal to her that she is, by virtue of her own social conditioning, intuitively unequipped to grasp the factors which motivate their behaviour. Even her once very clear sense of morality is blurred by circumstances. Audrey realizes that the islanders would never abide either Laddie's homosexuality or his practice of importing "foreign boys" for his sexual pleasure. While she is more tolerant of his sexual

orientation than the citizens of his adopted homeland, she cannot condone his relations with the children anymore than the islanders can.

Nevertheless she recognizes that while this island society would be extremely censorious of Laddie's illicit behaviour, it is also, socially and economically, directly responsible for promoting and sustaining this activity, and she watches helplessly while the practice continues. She knows that her efforts to prevent Laddie's impropriety could jeopardize the children's livelihood. After witnessing a sensual moment between Laddie and one of the children, she realizes despondently:

There is no understanding. There was a dancing boy. In him I saw heresies and visions and infinite mocking subtlety beyond . . . all the people I have ever known, beyond the twos and threes any of us have been taught to think and sing in.

This boy was a child fulfilling a combination of instincts and lessons. (239)

Finding her prevailing sense of alienation increasingly difficult to endure, Audrey decides that her stay must come to an end. "What is there for me here? I can't belong by birth and I won't do the sort of genteel things Florinda and Petronella do to make themselves belong" (203). In a final effort to apprehend this strange but fascinating land, she takes a donkey trip into the interior--an episode that satirizes the fundamental dissociation between the foreign visitor and the indigenous people. From the outset, Engel portrays Audrey's side journey as a romantic and frivolous escapade. She includes chocolate in her stock of provisions "because kids in English adventure books were always eating it" (220) and she eschews the convenience of a bus for a donkey, explaining, "I want to wander around the roads by myself. I'm always stuck with someone else with something else in

mind. I never see what I want" (206). To her lingering dismay, however, Audrey is far from being her own master as the willful donkey takes charge of both the route and the pace of the journey. In the end, Audrey admits: "Five days I lasted. I intended to travel a fortnight. The route I travelled you could cover in a car in two hours" (236). Her efforts are, obviously, an unending source of amusement for the islanders. "There is music in the cafes, and the perpetual quarreling noise of street conversation. Everyone I pass waves and laughs" (235), and she even learns during a stopover in Marseilles on the journey home, that her trek into the countryside has become the subject of a satirical poem (247).

Underlying the hilarity, though, is a poignant and powerful message. Audrey's brief mountain excursion convinces her that she and these people will remain forever experientially, philosophically and intellectually strangers. At the same time, she discovers that she has acquired a deep and lasting respect for the islanders' way of life, and she knows, indubitably, that her lack of understanding has no bearing on either their intrinsic right, or their natural inclination, to maintain their ageless traditions:

I don't understand anything. . . . There has to be more than greed, even the peasants know there is more than greed, they cling to their old ways, but I don't know where it is or what it is and here I have heard the bellowing of the blood enough to know it is real, more real than I was taught to think. . . .

I don't understand anything. Not sex, not religion, not art. not beauty, not even Foreign Debt. There has to be more to that big abstraction we call life for want of a better word than food on a plate, cash in the till, legs in a bed, there is more, the people here know it. But I don't know what it is. I am one of those

opaque lady travellers after all, who sees, but does not understand. (237)

It is crucial to Engel's achievement in Monodromos that the life-writing framework of her novel be apparent, for, as well as tracing the lengthy, complex and individually determined process of personal discovery, she wanted to demonstrate the inestimable contribution of life-writing narratives to ethnographic representation. In order to prevent the text from ever actually lapsing into a conventional first person narrative, Engel intermittently inserts passages which reinforce the concept of the travel diary. Chapter IV, for instance, entitled "March: Bloc-Notes," consists primarily of individual, short, personal and unrelated observations on a variety of aspects of the island--the climate, the culture, the politics, the people--which contribute nothing to the plot structure, but do confirm the format of a travel diary. In the final chapter, appropriately entitled "Leaving," Audrey's ruminations on her departure are abruptly and momentarily interrupted by a short passage in which Audrey records her impression of each successive port of call, effectively creating a sense of her slow homeward journey:

Rhodes: restored ruins, peasant women in high yellow boots, a carved wooden spoon.

Athens: dandelions in the stone floor of the Acropolis.
Terrifying traffic. They laugh at my accent.

Genoa: Aphroulla and I trying and failing to speak Italian.
Good food in the old quarter; a smart new art gallery full of
ghastly 19th century Old Masters. (247)

By continually situating the source of the narrative--the quandaries and the revelations which take place--in Audrey's consciousness, Engel demonstrates the relevance of life-writing narratives to inter-cultural studies.

By extension, Engel's success in depicting personal narrative as a highly illuminating form of ethnographic reporting effectively challenges the authority of traditional scientific methods, but not content to rely solely on the powers of inference or allusion, Engel includes a narrative episode which deliberately enunciates her apprehension over the unquestioned accreditation granted the scientific community. Beatrice Wender, a social scientist, who according to Audrey is "an obvious descendant of the old woman who lived in a vinegar bottle," (149) inexplicably arrives on the scene. The essential purpose of this character is to illustrate the supremacy of personal narratives over formal scientific reports. Wender, who "teaches archaeology at a mid-Western university in the States" (149), has been conducting research on the island each summer for years. Wender's continuing interest in this land seems to stem from the desire to feed her obsession, the "iconology of pots" (149), and she makes her contempt for the people, the amenities, the customs, even the climate abundantly clear. Audrey realizes with dismay, however, that, by virtue of her professional standing, Beatrice Wender is considered an authority on this island society:

Two weeks from now she will stand . . . preaching the iconography of Late Minoan birds to sons of potato farmers from Petosky and daughters of car dealers on the Big Two-Hearted river. Her voice will ring over my inland sea with news of Syrian and Mycaenean prototypes. . . . On the edge of the Laurentian shield, on the shores of its pocked lakes, she will speak of Cretan and Attic bird-types taking wing over Oak Acres, or tripod cauldrons like maple sugar pots, Phrygian bowls with vertical lugs, and the agate mace-heads of Amathus. She will sing the rise of Tyre, the migration of itinerant craftsmen, the

plunder-love of ancientness. The notes she took as faun-faces smiled at her from the ground she will pass among serious old soldiers: the perverse sun-lipped smile that gleamed at her from the yellow earth will be described in a language so technical that it seems one of a new religion. The idea enchants me, that bag of bones a link between my two shores. (185)

As Engel portrays it, Beatrice Wender's detached, methodical scientific observation is infinitely inferior to Audrey's honest, perplexing but illuminating chronicle of inter-cultural encounter.

Clearly Engel's agenda in Monodromos was to explore inter-cultural experience. She wanted to demonstrate that the "cold orderly" (Gibson 100) approach of scientific methods and scientific reporting fail to reveal the knowledge which is most significant to human interaction and inter-racial acceptance—the kind of information which arises from personal experience, "anecdotal, self-indulgent, subjective, personal, and idiosyncratic" (Cole 121). Engel's skillful recreation of the travel diary proved to be a highly effective technique for achieving her purpose in Monodromos. In contrast to a scientific strategy which legitimizes "the appropriation of the other" in the name of knowledge, Audrey's candid, emotional and spontaneous record demonstrates that "we can know *and* respect the other . . . [through] a relation of sociality, whereby the self instead of assimilating the other opens itself to it through a relation with it" (Young 14).¹² As cultures clash in Monodromos, mishaps occur, some touching and tragic, others fantastic and hilarious, but over time, in the midst of the dissonance, a measure of tolerance and understanding emerges, if only in terms of an acquired sense of respect for the differences which cannot, and indeed need not, be resolved.

Chapter V

"Life . . . a sentence between brackets"

(The Glassy Sea 146)

The Glassy Sea manifests a number of the life-writing features evidenced in the novels discussed previously, but it is also distinctly different from each of these works. It is as intensely personal and self-interested as Sarah Bastard's Notebook, but the narrative expression is characterized by a sense of decorum and logic quite unlike Sarah's obsessive ramblings. There is an implied reader in The Glassy Sea as there is in Joanne, but this reader plays a more deliberate and determinate role in the narrative than does the unidentified, anticipated reader of Joanne's diary. The "other" figures prominently in The Glassy Sea, but not as a subject of consideration or a source of illumination as in Monodromos; rather, as the "epistolary 'other'" (Buss 46), it serves as the direct object of the discourse defining the texture of the narrative. Finally, perspective in The Glassy Sea is not limited to a particular phase of a life, or a single adventure, but encompasses an entire lifetime.

Engel emulates two life-writing forms in The Glassy Sea, autobiography and the personal letter, illustrating distinct characteristics of each type of document. In her fictional creation, Engel demonstrates that autobiography is intensely confessional and that it strives to "trace the teleology of [the autobiographer's] life" (Bruss 1); and while she portrays the personal letter as an intimate and revealing genre, she also demonstrates that letters can be one of the most contrived and potentially misleading of life-writing documents.

The bulk of the narrative in The Glassy Sea consists of a personal letter from Rita Bowen to Philip, the Bishop of Huron, responding to his request that she reestablish an order of Anglican nuns. Her reply, which begins, "Dear Philip, you must realize why I can't do what you ask for the church" (20), turns out to be the story of her life.

Engel discussed her authorial intentions in The Glassy Sea a number of times. In an interview in 1978, prior to the completion of the book, she explained:

My next novel is about alternate lifestyles, about Mary and Martha,¹³ about whether to be contemplative. Sometimes I'm afraid it's a feminist tract of the nastiest kind. But I want to go beyond kitchen sink realism. I want to write a mad surrealist novel. (I hope it will provide a new perspective for women.)
(van Herk & Palting 40)

Three years later she reiterated the "work/contemplation split," which posed a problem in her own life, as a theme in The Glassy Sea (Twigg 200), but added:

I think one of the things I was trying to get rid of when I wrote that book was a certain level of cynicism. . . . I was trying for myself to clean things up. I don't mean sexually. I don't even mean morally. I mean in the sense of starting to like things again. (Twigg 203)

Then, in an interview published in 1984, only a few months before her death, she agreed with interviewer Carroll Klein's perception that she "was talking about hope" in The Glassy Sea:

[My] books generally come out of some kind of personal struggle and an attempt to organize experience. I'm always dealing with

the perfectionism in this country. This is a very puritanical country and almost all our institutions are about perfectibility. . . . I had been worried as a child and as a young adult growing up in a small town, being United Church, going to a Baptist University, by this eternal insistence that we ought to try to be perfect. . . . [Philosophies] of perfectibility . . . can really poison lives. . . . I was trying to take Rita [in The Glassy Sea] through this whole course in the hope of finding a situation for her where imperfection was sufficiently acceptable that she could be involved with the world again. . . . The important thing is how you deal with an imperfect world when you have been brought up to look for perfection. There is no universal confession and absolution, although individual confession and absolution are possible. (Klein 28-30)

In order "to take Rita through" the process of becoming "involved with the world again" Engel places her protagonist in the act of writing her autobiography. Engel described the task of writing a fictional autobiography as especially challenging, and comparing The Glassy Sea to her preceding novel, Bear, admitted: "You can't possibly do as neat a job on forty years as you can on one summer. I haven't learned to deal with forty years skillfully, but it has the defects of its qualities" (Twigg 202). Still, Engel chose a most expedient strategy for this ambitious project. Helen Buss describes the personal letter as an "address to a beloved 'other' that meets several psychic needs at once while conveniently disguising itself as practical information to family and friends" (44). It would be implausible for an ordinary person like Rita Heber to write her autobiography, an act usually reserved for individuals who have experienced or accomplished something extraordinary in the

public eye, but by casting the narrative in the form of a letter, Engel forestalls criticism that the scope of the novel is unrealistically self-indulgent. As Buss's description implies, whatever form a personal letter takes, it is presumed that an interested "other" has deliberately evoked this personal expression.

Philip, the Bishop of Huron, has written to Rita, asking her to reopen Eglantine House, the former residence of an order of Anglican nuns, and to assume the position of sister superior. As she explains in the "Envoie,"¹⁴ Rita believes that she is spiritually and morally unsuited to Philip's proposal:

Spiritually, I decided, I was a fake and a failure. If my faith had been true, I should never have left Eglantine House. In my encounter with the world, I had failed profoundly to add anything to the equality of life. In fact, judged by any moral standards, any at all, I had soiled both the world and myself. (147)

In order to convince Philip of her inappropriateness, Rita tells him the story of her grim life. Arguably, Rita's behaviour is motivated more by a desire to achieve a sense of personal well-being than to justify her refusal to Philip. As Georges Gusdorf argues in his essay, "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography":

The man who recounts himself is himself searching his self through his history; he is not engaged in an objective and disinterested pursuit but in a work of personal justification. . . . [The] task of autobiography is first of all a task of personal salvation. Confession, an attempt at remembering, is at the same time searching for a hidden treasure, for a last delivering

word, redeeming in the final appeal a destiny that doubted its own value. (38-9)

Engel contextually and dramatically confirms the confessional theme of The Glassy Sea throughout the novel. The ecclesiastical overtones are obvious--Rita's correspondent is a Bishop and the entire discourse revolves around her decision to return to religious life--and Rita's behaviour is reminiscent of a spiritual quest. When Rita receives Philip's letter, she is living alone in "a cheap, grim and isolated [but] . . . shabby and comfortable" (16) place by the sea, where she has perforce retreated following a bitter divorce. The tranquillity and meditation, eventually, begin to have recuperative affects: "I feel as if I were alone in one of the hymns about resurrection and quite justified, after all these years, in simply counting my blessings, which have turned out to be many" (15).

When Rita is ready to end her seclusion, she erects a mailbox, and, as she explains to Philip later, is astounded at her auspicious timing: "I lugged the mailbox out and stuck it in. Five minutes later the mailman came by in a red Volkswagen and I heard from you: hey, presto, complete: one life. As in Life and Letters of course" (16). Philip's petition provides the perfect opportunity for Rita to confess the transgressions and foibles which have characterized her sullied life. As Stephen Spender suggests, "Confession must always be to a confessor. The measuring rod of the human instrument is morality. And the human soul can only be measured adequately if there is an adequate confessor" (121). A superlative confessor, Philip, the Bishop of Huron, offers Rita "the hope of finding a situation for her[self] where imperfection [is] sufficiently acceptable that she [can] be involved with the world again" (Klein 29). In Stephen Spender's words,

Indeed, the essence of the confession is that the one who feels outcast pleads with humanity to relate his isolation to its wholeness. He pleads to be forgiven, condoned, even condemned, so long as he is brought back into the wholeness of people and things. (120)

Rita begins, "I was a child, once, a little female child" (20), and she renders an expository account and reflective analysis of her life before concluding with, "And I guess that's why I have to turn down your offer now, Philip. I was forty-two years old yesterday and I am just beginning to look at what is" (143). Rita grew up in rural Ontario, the youngest child of a rather sickly, ineffectual father and a distant, disapproving mother. Introspective and generally a non-conformist, she tended to be an outsider, suffering from feelings of inferiority and bitter loneliness throughout her life: "I suppose growing up is simply a process of successfully incorporating one's inculcated values with those one finds oneself among, and I never have managed it. Too many cymbals clash" (37-8). She remembers feeling most content during episodes of her life when she was segregated from the outside world: the first time, when studying English literature under the private tutelage of "a retired Anglican clergyman" (59) after a serious illness forced her to leave college; and the second, when she belonged to the Eglantine sisters, which she describes as "the happiest and most innocent ten years of my life" (73). She left the convent only at the insistence of the sagacious and benevolent mother superior, Sister Mary Rose: "Mary Rose knew the Order was dying and was right to push me out of it while I was still young enough to start another life" (95).

Unfortunately, the life she assumed included the dashing, resolute and overbearing Asher Bowen, whom she encountered shortly after leaving the

convent and married out of desperation: "I invested Asher with all my emptiness, I made him God, home, Mary Rose, family" (109). "[A] very foolish marriage" (111) from the start, it noticeably began to deteriorate when Rita deviated from her pattern of passive "wifely obedience" (115), and was completely shattered by the death of their hydrocephalic child. Asher, unable to cope with Rita's grief and concomitant emotional instability--and incidentally also involved with another woman--requested a separation. When Rita began to drink heavily, "pick up men" (137) and generally to make "an exhibition of [her]self" (135), Asher, then a prominent member of the provincial legislature, became concerned that her behaviour might reflect upon his reputation. As a condition of their divorce settlement, he agreed to purchase a house for Rita, if she promised to stay out of his life. For added insurance, he purchased this house in a remote location in another province, which is where Rita is living when she receives Philip's letter, and where, as she declares at the end of her response, she intends to remain: "Open your house again, Philip. . . . There must be a hundred women who would love to retreat from their noisy, empty lives to the cloister and fill it once more with roses. But leave me here, please, to dream my redemptive dreams" (144).

The compunction Rita displays confirms the confessional purpose of her autobiography, and Engel's precise crafting establishes and sustains the impression that Rita's confessional autobiography is being presented in a letter. As Marlene Kadar points out, "All letters have a date, an apostrophe, a signatory, but they also have substantive characteristics depending on the intention and the recipient of the letter" (Kadar, Reading xiv). Engel begins her epistolary exploration with a salutation and ends it with a signatory, and she illustrates, throughout the text, that "the intention" and "the recipient of

the letter," distinctly shape the course of the narrative. She demonstrates as well, that, regardless of these specific determinants, there are formalities which all casual letters share.

A personal letter is less structured than formal life-writing narratives like autobiography or memoirs, but the message must still be explicitly and logically formulated in order to communicate ideas to a particular "other". In this respect, "the letter as we know it has inherited the potential to be like an address" (Kadar, Reading xiv). It usually transpires in response to an inquiry or an invitation to speak about a specific subject matter, and it allows the writer to construct a coherent, convincing and compelling account. Unlike a public address, however, there is no interactive audience which might disrupt the expression. A letter, therefore, has the capacity of being more cogent than a public address. In Engel's novel, this isolation allows Rita to relate the experience of forty-two years of life, and to proclaim her position, "My heart is not clean. I can't do what you ask, Philip" (118), without interruption, or objection.

The absence of an immediately responsive audience can also lead to excessive and irregular volubility or inappropriate emotionalism. Engel's portrayal of Rita's efforts to forestall these tendencies points out that these inclinations must be curbed or reconciled in letter writing in order to sustain the interest and the commitment of the reader. At times, in Engel's text, it appears that garrulity is difficult to resist when writing a letter, but Engel illustrates that, by affirming the relevance of seemingly superfluous expression, the letter writer might diminish the deleterious effects of this tendency. On one occasion, when Rita's explanation seems excessive or immaterial, she assures Philip that the information is crucial to her exchange: "Oh, this is nonsense; it can't interest you. . . . But . . . I have to tell you

this so you'll understand" (40). On another occasion, when the logic of her story is compromised by the premature and inappropriate introduction of events, Rita moderates her expression by deliberately calling attention to the problem: "Let's go back; I'm going too fast, rushing headlong down the halls of my story" (109). Rita's strategy, in both instances, is to reassure her reader of her commitment to intelligible and germane communication.

Quite clearly, in Engel's estimation, excessive self-indulgence is inappropriate in a personal letter. Despite the series of misfortunes which have beset her, Rita's narrative never turns into the lament which characterizes Sarah Porlock's private notebook. Rita concisely and serenely describes her sorrows only as they fit within the context of her story. While Sarah incessantly bemoans the loss of her father, Rita relates the regrettable circumstances which accompanied her parent's deaths with remarkable composure: "My father had died during my second year in the convent. Mother had not invited me home for the funeral. I had to mourn him after the fact" (98). Remembering her mother's death a few years later, she explains: "When she died . . . I was again deprived of ceremony. Shirl . . . did not find my address until after Mother was buried" (99).

The death of her child, Chummy, was excruciatingly painful for Rita, but her account of his passing, while sensitive, is stoically brief and prosaic:

That fall, Chummy took a turn for the worse. He'd always been prone to seizures , but they came more and more quickly. I knew what it meant . . . I insisted on an operation that didn't help. When he came home, I nursed him day and night. . . .

But after the operation he receded from us. He spoke to us as if from very far away, and then he died. (126-7)

Rita suffered a severe emotional breakdown after Chummy's death, but, characteristically, her reference to her debilitation and hospitalization is simply, "they sent me away somewhere for a rest" (127).

By exploring the possibility that the existence of an acknowledged reader serves as a check on impertinent expression or excessive emotionalism in letter writing, Engel challenges the traditional notion that personal letters are an inferior form of personal narrative, not worthy of the attention afforded formal autobiography or memoirs for instance. In Engel's presentation, it is obvious that letters are not simply a form of self-indulgent random, obsessive expression, but can be thoughtfully and methodically constructed narratives which provide as coherent and as informative an account of a life experience as any formal personal narrative. She supports Marlene Kadar's contention that

[the] letter . . . is as significant a literary document as the more impersonal (i.e., less private, intimate) prose forms in which . . . public and audience are requisite. . . . [By] viewing the letter as a form of life-writing in its own right, we afford ourselves of a valuable resource for the compilation of literary . . . or cultural, history. (Kadar, Mosaic 145)¹⁵

In Rita's case, the self-control and diligence she exercises are more than measures which are designed to hold the attention of her reader, they are also essential components of her strategy for achieving the intention of her letter. As Kadar contends, "Letters provide the perfect opportunity for the written self-portrait" (Kadar, Reading xiv-xv), and in line with her quest for "individual confession and absolution" (Klein 30), Rita must prove that she is worthy of forgiveness. Her remarkable restraint indicates that she has faced adversity courageously, and that she deserves admiration and respect as

well as sympathy and understanding. Her self-portrayal must demonstrate, as well, that she is aware of her shortcomings, sincerely penitent for her misdeeds, and genuinely merciful and compassionate enough to "forgive those who trespass against" her. Accordingly, she readily admits her vices, expresses genuine remorse for her misdeeds, and displays astounding magnanimity towards those individuals who most grievously offended her: in particular, her mother and her husband.

"Ellner" Heber was seldom a source of support or encouragement to her daughter. She opposed virtually every endeavour Rita pursued in a manner that was both cruel and debilitating. Despite the callous accusations and cruel rejection, Rita does not discredit her mother; she attempts to understand and to rationalize her mother's behaviour:

I was able at last to reconcile myself to some of her goings on, though not always to forgive her. . . . I think now that she was a difficult woman because she had had a difficult life.

It does not do to blame. We are our own creatures as well as God's. . . . But I wish she had been a happier woman. (71-2)

Rita "could never live up to [Asher Bowen's] aspirations" either (Klein 28), with the result that life with him, too, consisted of constant criticism, cold disregard and brutal repudiation. Recalling the time Asher arranged for his best friend to commit adultery with her, in order to secure his own freedom to start a new life with another woman, Rita admits to feelings of hostility. At the same time, she expresses remorse for these feelings. "He was a snob, Ash. A spoiled brat. I'm still angry at him. Angry at myself for marrying him. My heart is not clean" (118).

In Rita's estimation, she does not possess the moral rectitude to be worthy of the task Philip proposes. She sees no option but to refuse: "By all

means open Eglantine House again, Philip. . . . But without me. I'm not the strong vessel you need; . . . I won't do" (144). If the correspondent had been someone other than Philip, Rita would likely still have refused the request, but the nature and the manner of her response would have been decidedly different. The reader is implicit in letter writing, more than in any other narrative expression, and Rita's discourse is distinctly shaped by the fact that Philip is both a clergyman and a close personal friend. Her communication, while it is thorough and explicit in order to explain the rationale for refusing Philip's request, is also extremely delicate, so as not to offend him. Also commensurate with their personal friendship, Rita's letter is casual and intimate, but, in accordance with Philip's station in life, it bespeaks a measure of decorum not usually required in friendly correspondence.

Personal letters, such as the one Engel recreates in The Glassy Sea, are frequently objects of scrutiny: scholars and the merely curious often turn to these narratives to uncover information about the correspondents and the social setting in which they lived. While Engel's exploration of this life-writing form supports the merit in such pursuits, it also demonstrates that due to the unique circumstances which characterize the relationship between correspondents, personal letters can be very misleading. Despite their friendship, Philip's clerical position seems to cause Rita some reticence. She feels compelled to relate an incident which is evidence of both her immorality and her vanity, but is clearly reluctant to do so, because it involves an assignation "in a strange motel room with a strange man," clearly not a suitable topic for discussion with a Bishop. While she does tell the story, she prefaces it with: "It reminds me of something I perhaps should

not tell you" (46), suggesting that it might be an abbreviated and edited account of the event.

Ironically, the familiarity and longevity which characterize Rita and Philip's friendship can be a primary cause of misinformation in their correspondence. Throughout her letter, Rita assures Philip of her deep affection and gratitude. "I loved you at once" (101), she writes. She confirms that "[he] became [her] friend, [her] consolation" (108), and she declares that "[his] visits were a comfort" (122) during the trying years of her marriage. Letters between close friends, like Rita and Philip, tend to "display a predilection with gossip; that is the predilection for personal interpretation, and the intimacy that all dyadic exchanges share" (Kadar, Reading iv). This characteristic, coupled with the inclination on the part of letter writers to pass over details in their correspondence which are "too well understood by the epistolary 'other' to need mention" (Buss 46), can result in the omission or misrepresentation of integral information, which, in turn, can result in serious misinterpretation on the part of an intrusive reader.

The potential for ambiguity in personal correspondence is abundantly evident in Engel's novel. Rita's brief and restrained account of the accidental death of one of her fellow sisters, for example, might suggest that she is rather callous, unless one realizes that Philip is already very familiar with the particulars surrounding this tragic event:

Then a terrible thing happened. One afternoon . . . Mary Cicely ran away with a young labourer . . . by six o'clock the police were at the door to say that in their excitement they had run through a red light and been killed in an accident.

You know the rest. We buried her. (93)

Philip's knowledge of this incident allows Rita to include it in her life story without having to relive the pain. For the same reason, she can discuss Chummy without having to torture herself with the details of his affliction: "You remember Chummy. When he was well, he was a lovely, affectionate child. When he was ill, he was always a challenge" (117). Nor is Rita forced to belabour the loathsome particulars of her injudicious marriage to Asher. When the reminiscence becomes intolerable, she dismisses it with, "Well, you knew us at that time" (118), and abruptly moves on to other matters

This lack of detail or elaboration in The Glassy Sea provoked a review in the New York Times Book Review suggesting that Engel had lost "all interest in pacing and structure":

In the course of 16 pages, Marguerite¹⁶ marries, goes back to school, becomes pregnant, gives birth to a hydrocephalic child; the child dies, and Marguerite's handsome-but-no-good husband leaves her for a younger woman and traps her in bed with his best friend/sidekick, whom she always hated. Marguerite's breakdown cannot be explained by the breakup of a marriage she acknowledged to be unsatisfactory immediately after the honeymoon. We are flown through her madness as we were flown through her coming out: suddenly we find her in a house by the sea inexplicably provided by her husband. (Gordon 42)

Notwithstanding the fact that the explanations the reviewer has somehow missed are provided in the text--although perhaps not "in the course of [the] 16 pages" she cites--she seems to have overlooked (or missed) the fact that Marguerite (Rita) is writing a letter to a close, personal friend, and that, at certain points in the text, further elaboration is both inappropriate and unnecessary.

Once again, criticism of Engel's work actually confirms her achievement. Engel intentionally depicts the enigmatic position of correspondents and their circumstances, and she brilliantly structures The Glassy Sea to foreground the irresistible speculations, or gross misinterpretations, which can arise on the part of an intrusive reader. By nestling the fictional life-writing document between two explanatory narratives, the "Prologue" and the "Envoie," she illustrates that the information contained in personal letters can be deficient and ambiguous.

By itself, the letter in The Glassy Sea would leave an intrusive reader either guessing or misinformed as to the outcome of Rita's life. In her closing words she unequivocally states that she does not intend to return to the convent. "By all means open Eglantine House again, Philip. . . . But without me. I'm not the strong vessel you need: . . . I won't do" (144). In the "Prologue," which structurally precedes but chronologically succeeds the letter, the protagonist has been introduced as a recently consecrated Eglantine sister. Without the details provided in the "Envoie," an intrusive reader, familiar with the individual presented in the "Prologue," would have no understanding as to how and when the transformation took place.

The "Envoie," which describes the events which lead to Rita's change of heart, not only provides closure to Engel's novel, but demonstrates the elusive quality of personal letters. Intrusive readers of personal correspondence are seldom privileged to a postscript which ties up loose ends or which answers questions raised by the correspondence. Furthermore, the "Prologue" and the "Envoie" provide the reader of the novel with a glimpse into Rita's personal consciousness, providing information about her motivation and her strategy which could not be attained from reading only her letter. Rita confirms in the "Prologue" that her letter was more an effort

to come to terms with the shame and resentment, which was crippling her life, than an attempt to explain her refusal to Philip. As she explains, "so that remembering is not a pastime preoccupying the soul forever . . . I'll read the letter I wrote to Philip last summer. It will teach me, perhaps, to deal with the disastrous baggage of the past" (14). In the "Envoie" she confirms that this purpose has been realized:

Life, I decided, is a sentence between brackets: these brackets must be seen to contain what is, not what might have been. It is useless to ponder on what might have been, but entirely proper to map the future in terms of the real past. (146)

When Rita admits in the "Envoie," "while I was writing to Philip, I had, in the intervals between sentences, written a great deal more, truth and untruth, in my head, on the sky, on the evanescent clouds" (146), Engel is not implying that her protagonist has deliberately misled her correspondent. She is reminding us that Rita's letter is also her autobiography, and that autobiography is, as Sidonie Smith points out,

remembered experience--descriptive, impressionistic, dramatic, analytic-- . . . [and that] memory is ultimately a story about, and thus a discourse on, original experience . . . [a] play of seeking, choosing, discarding words and stories that suggest, approximate, but never recapture the past. (45-6)

Engel's demonstrates once again in The Glassy Sea that the personal ambitions and individual needs of the author profoundly influence the texture of life-writing narratives, but she also illustrates that in the case of a letter, the nature of the discourse depends as much on the characteristics of the recipient of the letter and the personal relationship between the correspondents as on the personal motivation and strategy of the writer.

Private and candid, letters are at one and the same time very revealing and incomparably covert, putting the reader "in the vicarious position of knowing too much and so little at the same time" (Kadar, Reading xv). Confirming that letters can be an enigma to an "intrusive" reader, Engel reminds us that they should always be read with an open mind and a respectful measure of skepticism.

Chapter VI

"nobody understands about *personae*"

(Engel, "Real People" 41)

In the Introductory chapter, I suggested that Marian Engel's work offers significant opportunities for critical pursuits in life writing. In the first place she practiced life writing throughout her life, compiling a collection of over 40 notebooks spanning some 40 years of her life. In her contribution to Marlene Kadar's collection, Essays on Life Writing, and more extensively in her forthcoming book, Christl Verduyn outlines the life-writing properties of Engel's notebooks, describing how they document "Engel's life as a woman and as a writer" (31). In the previous chapters, I discuss Engel's use of life-writing forms in her fiction, a strategy which demonstrates Engel's artistry and which contributes to current efforts to establish and define life writing as a legitimate literary genre.

There is still another facet of Engel's work which pertains to some of the more innovative and provocative pursuits in life writing, but which has been overlooked by life-writing theorists. There is compelling evidence of autobiographical allusion in Engel's fiction. In her introduction to Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice, Marlene Kadar maintains that "a . . . progressive consideration of life writing [should] . . . include as well the fictional frame in which we might find an autobiographical voice" (7), works for instance in which "autobiography and fiction are mixed" or fiction in which there is a deliberate "allusion to autobiography" (131). Other theorists who are included in Kadar's collection suggest that blurring fact and fiction, whether the writer disguises or confuses the verity of autobiographical expression or deliberately creates an illusion of

autobiography in fiction, is a strategy adopted as much by necessity as by design.

On a practical level, writers may choose to recreate personal experience in the form of fiction in order to ensure their work receives due consideration. Contemporary "autobiographical narratives, conventional or otherwise, are often omitted" from what is philosophically considered to be valid literature (Kadar, Essays On 155). A writer, therefore, may disguise autobiographical material as fiction in order to present the writing as an artistic, rather than a narcissistic, creation. Another recurring hypothesis is that the fictional form may be the most appropriate way for a writer to relate personal experiences which are either too painful or too incriminating to divulge openly, or too discomforting for a reader to accept readily. Fiction is a vehicle for speaking the unspeakable--forbidden subjects somehow being more palatable when presented under the guise of fiction rather than in a traditional autobiographical form.

Narratives that only allude to autobiography allow both author and reader to adapt the text to personal intentions and experiences. When the subject position depicted in the text is not in harmony with that of the reader, this reader can choose to acknowledge the validity of the representation as an alternate subject position to consider and perhaps to accept and understand. Alternatively, the reader can dismiss troubling parts "of a narrative . . . [as] . . . 'fiction'" (Kadar, Essays In 157). When the life experience is commensurate with that of a readership, particularly when it is painful or subversive, it provides readers with a subject position which parallels their own individual troubling experiences. More importantly, when the life narrative presents an experience of survival or triumph over adversity it offers readers hope of resolving their own personal dilemmas.

In one particularly intriguing essay, Janice Williamson discusses Don't: A Woman's Word, Elly Danica's "interpretive account of incestuous relations with her father" (133). Williamson explains that Danica achieves "the narrative distance [she requires] to retell her story . . . by dissolving the first-person voice into the third" (139) when relating especially horrific incidents of sexual abuse, and by presenting her account as a series of thought and memory sensations in individually numbered paragraphs rather than an explanatory, sequential narrative. While the work did not look or sound exactly like autobiography, Williamson points out that Don't: A Woman's Word is a monumental life narrative, both in its account of a life under siege and its promise for survival: "Danica's writing . . . helps propel her through healing and recovery" (138), and by communicating her "experience to others through writing [she] re-create[s] this community of understanding and release[s] many readers from silent collaboration in their own secreted guilt and shame" (135-6).

Great chunks of Marian Engel's life can be found in her stories. Like Sarah Porlock, Joanne Laurence and Audrey Moore, Engel had a propensity for keeping a written account of her personal experiences and impressions. She had twin children, a boy and a girl, as did Minn Burge and Harriet Ross.¹⁷ Her husband, like Minn's husband, Norman, was a foreign correspondent, and in a newspaper column, Engel mentions that like Minn Burge, she had a 50-year-old lover when she was only 24 (Toronto Star 13 Feb. 1982). Engel, like Audrey Moore, was a translator in England and spent time in Cyprus.

On more than one occasion Engel attempted to downplay the close affinity between her writing and her life. In 1975, in an article for Saturday Night, she complained: "The public does not know fact from fiction. . . .

Everything has to be autobiography, nobody understands about *personae*" (41). Regardless, while we know that Engel did not experience each of the predicaments which occur in her stories, there is compelling evidence that the similarities between Engel's life and her fiction are more than illusory by products of artistic creation. Engel frequently used her fiction to work through deeply troubling personal dilemmas which she was reluctant, or unable, to divulge in any other medium. The pathos and relevance of many moments in her fiction are unquestionably enhanced by the possibility that they represent very personal and very difficult struggles in her life. Readers who recognize Marian Engel in her fiction--recognize that she faced failure and tragedy at many phases of her life, and that she surmounted obstacles only to fall and rise again--are offered some hope of relief from their own tortured isolation.

It is a little known fact, for instance, that Marian Engel was not the natural, but rather the adopted, child of Mary and Frederick Passmore, or that she was a twin, separated from her sister at the age of three years.¹⁸ This information is not mentioned in any biographical accounts of Engel, nor is it revealed by Engel herself in her personal papers. For the reader armed with this knowledge, however, the pervasive treatment of twins in Engel's work takes on a new and dramatic aspect. It represents far more than the fascination that many people have with the phenomenon of twins and begins to appear to be a crusade on Engel's part to understand an essential aspect of her life which continued to elude her.

While those of us who know our origins can only imagine how excruciating this uncertainty must have been for Engel, there is another personal crisis which she covers in her work which has universal relevance. Engel achieved a remarkable sense of vitality and realism in her work by

using recurring characters, who, literally, come to life. One such character is Mary Abbot, who is a poignant spokesperson for Engel's philosophy on living and dying. Mary Abbot first appears in "Inside the Easter Egg," facing the trauma of a tubal ligation, but it is her later appearances that portray what was arguably Engel's most difficult challenge. In "The Confession Tree," a selection in The Tattooed Woman ominously subtitled "Timor Mortis Conturbat Ne," Mary learns that she has cancer. "I went into the hospital well and came home sick. . . . I went into the hospital thinking I was well and they found it" (99). "Blue Grass and Flowers," a story which appears in a collection entitled 83 Best Canadian Stories, continues her losing battle with the disease: "When Mary Abbot took in what Dr. Small was saying--that she was not going to make it through her five-year checkup, that she was going to die before she was 50, perhaps very soon, she heard the sound of knives grinding in her head" (59).

Confronting the prospect of death, Mary vows:

[This] death she was going to have was not one that someone else was giving her, it was the rest of her life, and, as far as it was in her power, she was going to enjoy it; this death was going to be her last demand on her life, and she was going to go to the new school with a map of the neighbourhood and the correct introductory formula for the new town. (68)

Finally, "Two Rosemary Road," the second to last story in The Tattooed Woman, which is a letter from a man offering thanks for condolences received on the death of his wife, is clearly a eulogy to Mary Abbot. The man does not sign the letter, and he only mentions his deceased wife by her first name, but the familiar elements are there, as Engel brings a very real end to a very living character:

Mary was indeed a wonderful person and I find myself bereft without her. We did, however, have ample . . . time to prepare ourselves. I learned to cook, the children to look after themselves and each other She, in turn, did her homework by working through the process of dying. It was not easy for her but she said that in the end it was easier to die because she had imagined the process and dealt with some of her fears. (174)

The power of these stories is unquestionably enhanced by the probability that they echo Engel's experience. The lymphatic cancer which ultimately killed Engel was diagnosed a few years after the first Mary Abbot story, but the three remaining stories were written while Marian Engel was fighting her own battle with cancer and it is possible that "Two Rosemary Road" was penned not long before she died.

Marian Engel died on February 16, 1985 at the age of 51. Whether or not Mary Abbot helped Marian Engel come to terms with her own mortality will remain forever mere speculation, and whether or not the illusion of autobiography in Engel's fiction can be considered life writing is the subject of another thesis. In the absence of an autobiography or memoirs, however, it is difficult to resist drawing on the revelations in Marian Engel's fiction to create a biography which surpasses fact to portray a vibrant and moving portrait of a remarkable woman of whom too little is known. And, that is life writing.

NOTES

¹ This hypothesis is posited by Marlene Kadar in her introduction to Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice. In my concluding chapter, I discuss Kadar's hypothesis, as well as other essays included in her collection which contribute to this line of study in life writing, in relation to Marian Engel's fiction.

² Engel's first novel was originally published in Canada under the title of No Clouds of Glory (Brady 198). It was published in the United States and in subsequent reprints in Canada as Sarah Bastard's Notebook. (See also notes 7 and 8 below.)

³ In a few issues of The Toronto Star the column was entitled "Being There." The vast majority were entitled "Being Here," however, and all bibliographical references use the latter title.

⁴ Dr. Christl Verduyn, Chair of Canadian Studies at Trent University, has completed a manuscript dealing exclusively with Marian Engel and her work entitled Lifelines: Marian Engel's Writings, (forthcoming McGill-Queen's University Press). Lifelines is the result of several years of research into the material contained in the Marian Engel Archive Collection at McMaster as well as extensive analysis of Engel's fiction, particularly the novels. Dr. Verduyn very graciously allowed me to read her manuscript, which I found to be an astute and fascinating interpretation of Engel's work and a revealing insight into the life and the mind of this remarkable Canadian woman writer.

⁵ These two theses are: "Patterns of Psychic Survival in No Clouds of Glory, The Honeyman Festival and Bear," by Joan Diane Bentley, and "The Problem of Self-Realization and Journey Motif in the Novels of Marian

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Engel," by Suzanne Marie E. Gagnon. Another thesis by Lorna Irvine, "Hostility and Reconciliation: The Mother in English Canadian Fiction," considers work by Marian Engel, Alice Munro, Margaret Atwood, Sylvia Fraser and Margaret Laurence (Wengle 69-70).

⁶ This quotation is extracted from Chris Weedon's concise explanation of subjectivity in her discussion of feminism within the framework of poststructuralist theory:

"Subjectivity" is used to refer to the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, [the individual's] sense of . . . self and ways of understanding relations to the world. . . .

. . . poststructuralism insists that forms of subjectivity are produced historically and change with shifts in the wide range of discursive fields which constitute them. . . . feminist poststructuralism . . . [insists] that the individual is always the site of conflicting subjectivity. As we acquire language, we learn to give voice--meaning--to our experience and to understand it according to particular ways of thinking, particular discourses, which pre-date our entry into language. These ways of thinking constitute our consciousness, and the positions with which we identify structure our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity (33).

⁷ Papers and notebooks pertaining to the book in The Marian Engel Archive at McMaster University consistently refer to Sarah Bastard. One notebook is even entitled, "Collection of Material for Mrs. Bastard's Notebook" (37).

⁸ In notes to Chapter 3 of *Lifelines*, Christl Verduyn quotes a letter from Engel to her agent Diarmuid Russel stating that the publishers were concerned that the word "Bastard . . . will ruin library sales."

⁹ This quotation in Felicity Nussbaum's text is from Issac D'Israeli's 1796 treatise, "Some Observations on Diaries, Self-Biography, and Self-Characters." The entire thought is as follows:

He who studies his own mind, and has the industry to note down the fluctuations of his opinions, the fallacies of his passions, and the vacillations of his resolutions, will form a journal to himself peculiarly interesting and probably, not undeserving the meditations of others. Nothing which presents a faithful relation of humanity, is inconsiderable to a human being. (97-98)

¹⁰ Earlier in her essay "Anthropological Lives: The Reflexive Tradition in a Social Science," Sally Cole argues convincingly that the following types of documents are legitimate forms of ethnography:

In anthropology life writing includes (a) the different ways that anthropologists conventionally have written about the life of the Other, whether it be an individual 'life history' or an ethnographic monographic that describes the life of an entire society or 'culture'; (b) the memoirs, letters, diaries, novels, prefaces, and so on written by anthropologists that describe their personal experiences in the field as they went about finding about the lives of others; and (c) contemporary ethnography wherein anthropologists self-consciously attempt to acknowledge their presence and integrate their personal

experience or political consciousness in the writing of ethnography itself. (115)

¹¹ The name of the island is never specified in the text, but in an interview with Graeme Gibson in 1973 Engel states that her current novel in progress “is set in Cyprus where we used to live” (97). Marian and husband Howard Engel, a foreign correspondent for the CBC, lived in Cyprus between 1962 and 1964.

¹² In this quotation from White Mythologies, Robert Young is discussing Emmanuel Levinas’s work Totality and Infinity (1961) which “questions the accepted relations between morality and politics” (13). Young points to Levinas’s ideas as belonging to the “phenomenological tradition . . . of twentieth century European philosophy . . . [which is fundamentally concerned with] the way in which knowledge--and therefore theory, or history--is constituted through the comprehension and incorporation of the other” (12). Young explains that Levinas “posits [this] relation of sociality” as “a means of bridging the gap between knowledge and morality” (14).

¹³ According to the theological tradition, Mary signifies the contemplative life while Martha represents the active life, as denoted in the following excerpts from A Biographical Dictionary of The Saints:

Martha, V., the sister of Lazarus and Mary of Bethany, the hostess of our Lord (Luke X, 38ss.; John Xii, 2ss.) a type of the active life (665).

Mary of Bethany and Martha, sisters of Lazarus. Mary sat at the feet of Jesus (Luke X, 38ss.), a type of the contemplative life (677).

¹⁴ As I discuss towards the end of this chapter, Engel uses the “Prologue” and the “Envoie” in her novel to tie up loose ends, and to demonstrate that letters often omit information that is crucial to

understanding aspects of the personae and the lives of the correspondents. I cite this passage from the "Envoie" at this early point in this chapter because, I believe, it most effectively explains Rita's rationale for refusing Philip's request and her motivation for responding with her epistolary autobiography.

15 This quotation is from Marlene Kadar's paper "Behind Every Great Man: Frida Kahlo's Letters to Ella Wolfe." The subjects of her paper are the 1930s left-wing political partisans, Ella and Bertram Wolfe and Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera. Kadar points out that while Ella Wolfe and Frida Kahlo, the female components of this group, "played crucial roles in various political and literary projects" (146), their contribution has been overlooked by the patriarchal establishment:

[The] scholarship of women in the past decade has indicated that the work of women and the role they have played in intellectual history have been overlooked. Our overlooking them, moreover, results in misinterpretation of a period, or in other negligent misreadings. That the ideas and feelings of women have often been expressed in the forms of life-writing . . . gives scholars who subscribe to the canon every excuse to turn the act of overlooking into the prime signal of academic rigor, the more blessed act of proper judgment. Thus the circle continues, and women's roles and women's writing become misrepresented, underrepresented or marginalized, and whole genres get forgotten in the rush to appropriate the correct canon. (144)

In her study of Frida and Ella's correspondence, Kadar demonstrates that a significant "amount of cultural history [can] be learned from women's correspondence" (153).

¹⁶ "Marguerite" is the formal, christened name of the protagonist of The Glassy Sea, but she is never addressed by that name. With the exception of the period when she was a nun and named Sister Mary Pelagia and when she was married to Asher Bowen who "christened [her] Peggy" (112), she is known as Rita. She even states "I never got used to Marguerite" (112). Mary Gordon's use of "Marguerite" in this critique seems to exemplify her lack of attention to detail in this book.

¹⁷ Minn Burge and Harriet Ross are the protagonists of Engel's novels, Honeyman Festival and Lunatic Villas, respectively.

¹⁸ I gleaned the possibility that Engel may have been adopted while doing research for this paper but I could find no biographical data to support my suspicions. The truth about Engel's birth was later confirmed by Dr. Christl Verduyn, who also informed me that Marian Engel was a twin, separated from her sister at the age of 3 years. Dr. Verduyn had come to this conclusion during her extensive research of the Marian Engel archive collection. Marian Engel's daughter, Charlotte, later confirmed this information for Dr. Verduyn.

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