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SEEING THROUGH HER OWN "I"'S:
WOMEN'S QUEST FOR
PERSONAL, SOCIAL AND SPIRITUAL WHOLENESS
IN FOUR CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN NARRATIVES

by
Sharyl E. Bartlett

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of
Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
Institute of Canadian Studies

Carleton University
Ottawa, Ontario
June 15, 1987

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SEEING THROUGH HER OWN "I"'S:
WOMEN'S QUEST FOR PERSONAL, SOCIAL
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CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN NARRATIVES

submitted by Sharyll E. Bartlett, B. A.,

in partial fulfilment of the requirements for

the degree of Master of Arts.

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ABSTRACT

The quest for a sense of wholeness within self and the desire for unification with social and spiritual spheres has long been evident in Western civilization, especially since the Renaissance. In recent years, women writers have given this quest new meaning. This thesis examines four Canadian narratives which chart a woman's journey towards synthesis: Joan Barfoot's novel, Dancing in the Dark, Marilou Mallet's film, Journal inachevé, Aritha Van Herk's novel, Judith, and Linda Griffiths' play, Jessica. Collectively, these stories call for a redefinition of the Western conception of "wholeness", so that it includes and revalorizes the feminine principle in culture. Integral to this quest is an inquiry into oppressive patriarchal values and binary conceptions of power which seem to lead away from, rather than towards, wholeness.

An alternative vision is proposed by these narratives as they join with a larger epistemological shift currently taking place in Western culture. The telling of these women's stories plays an important role in this transformation, searching for new paradigms of wholeness which may benefit both men and women.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction:	Fortune and Man's "I"	1
Chapter One:	Edna: The "I" of the Beholder	27
Chapter Two:	Marilu: The Camera's "I"	52
Chapter Three:	Judith: Searching Beyond What Meets the "I"	81
Chapter Four:	Jessica: Looking her Self Straight in the "I"	106
Conclusion:	Keeping Our "I"'s Open	136
Bibliography:		141

INTRODUCTION

FORTUNE AND MAN'S "I"

I remember that during my first year of university I was struck by John Berger's statement in his book Ways of Seeing: "Women watch themselves being looked at".¹ This comment was meant to refer to women's complicity in the objectification of their bodies. For me, however, Berger put into words an experience of inner fragmentation which had always plagued me -- something I had never before realized was a common feminine experience. It was a sense that there were many people inside me, allowing, at times, one to stand apart from the others and watch. This kind of "schizophrenia", I understood, was bad, for it not only confused me, but detracted from that sense of wholeness that I knew individuals were "supposed" to possess. It seems I have always searched for that "wholeness" within myself. I have also tried to integrate myself into my social community. Finally, I have endeavored to develop a spiritual philosophy which connects my own personal and social existence to the universe as a whole. †

I have come to learn that I am not alone in this quest for wholeness: that my sense of fragmentation is, in fact, intricately tied to my experience as a woman within Western culture. This realization is due, in great degree, to reading other women's similar stories -- both fictional and

theoretical -- and learning from their revelations and struggles." I continue to recognize this quest in contemporary Canadian women's writing and film, and, more and more, I find these stories envision an exciting new model of wholeness: a revolutionary redefinition of the concept itself and of the world in which it functions.

I have chosen to examine four fictional (or partly • fictional) stories which privilege a female subject of enunciation and tell relatively "realistic" stories of a woman's quest for wholeness in "a man's world". Each of the four protagonists finds herself at a different stage of this transformative personal, social and spiritual process. Together, their quests can be seen as a single journey which calls for a radical revisioning of Western culture and women's position within it.

The voyage begins with Edna, Joan Barfoot's fractured embodiment of the Western feminine role model. In the novel Dancing in the Dark, Edna searches for personal wholeness after she and her patriarchal world are crushed by the very values they uphold.

Marild Mallet's film Journal Inachevé, represents the next stage of the quest. Searching for a sense of home and wholeness within her new personal and social environment of Quebec, Mallet's semi-fictional character of Marild is splintered by binary oppositions which, rather than residing outside herself, as they do with Edna, war within her.

Aritha Van Berk's novel Judith, represents a further development of this journey, following the story of a woman who first nurtures her more "masculine" traits in the search for personal and social wholeness. She finds, however, that synthesis of these realms with that of the spiritual requires the expression and revalorization of her "feminine" nature as well.

Finally, Linda Griffiths' play Jessica, depicts the protagonist's struggle and eventual balance of the powers of light and darkness in her personal, social and spiritual life. Griffiths' vision calls for a redefinition of power and its function in the universe.

What is this quest for "wholeness" common to these works and others? In her book Diving Deep and Surfacing: Women Writers on Spiritual Quest, Carol Christ describes the female literary quest as reflecting, "both women's struggles to create new ways of living in the world and a new naming of the great powers that provide orientation in the world".² She distinguishes between the social and spiritual quests, to which I have added women's personal quest for a redefined experience of womanhood in Western culture.

Christ explains that this drive towards wholeness is a desire to "unite...the dualisms...which have plagued Western consciousness...[A² movement] toward healing the splits between people and nature, body and soul, reason and emotion, culture and experience".³ Marilyn French speaks of a similar

kind of wholeness in her book, Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals. She writes of the felicity that comes from "human integration at every level -- self with other (intimacy), self with others (community), and the private self, in body and mind, emotion and thought, sensation and vision".⁴ Both writers imagine a wholeness which touches the personal, social and spiritual realms.

The quest for personal wholeness is characterized by a search for an identity which is not dictated by socialized norms of woman but allows for the free expression of the unique individual. It is a search for female subjectivity in a world which does not yet permit this. Usually prompted by a sense of inner emptiness and lack of value, it leads the protagonist towards a valorization of the feminine and an understanding of self.

Christ explains that the quest for social wholeness "concerns women's struggle to gain respect, equality and freedom in society -- in work, in politics, and in relationships with women, men and children".⁵ This journey begins with a sense of alienation from community, and leads to a redefinition of personal and political relationships. If successful, it allows integration and a certain sense of belonging in the social sphere, although the struggle to change patriarchal values is a continuing one, making these works "open-ended".

The spiritual quest for wholeness, writes Christ,

"concerns a woman's awakening to the depths of her soul and her position in the universe....It involves asking basic questions: Who am I? Why am I here? What is my place in the universe"?⁶ This journey is distinguished from the personal quest by its more universal focus, its consideration of individuals as a reflection of the whole. Christ explains that this journey often proceeds from "an experience of nothingness, through awakening, to mystical insight, and a new naming," [though] this order is not necessary".⁷ Women's quest for spiritual wholeness frequently leads to a call for the reordering of Western hierarchical models of power and the universe.

This alternative vision of wholeness stresses the interconnectedness of all things, seeing harmony with nature as a model of shared power, destiny and responsibility. It involves a conception of immanent rather than hierarchical divinity, and stresses the dynamic and balanced interplay between masculine and feminine principles.

The distinction which I have drawn between these three quests is in some ways a false one, for while the personal, social and spiritual realms differ, women's quest for synthesis usually occurs simultaneously on more than one level, thus blurring the divisions between them somewhat.

These narrative journeys also transgress many of the barriers between objective and subjective, and what is considered "real" and what is "imaginary", for they describe

experiences which are common to many women. Analysis, then, must include the cultural context to which they respond. In her essay "Post-modernism, Post-structuralism and Feminism", Linda Hutcheon points out how the concepts of "reality" and "literature" can "no longer be considered apart from their various mediating determinations: class, time, place and now, gender".⁸ In these four works, gender and the ensuing deconstruction of binary oppositions are central to women's struggle for wholeness.

There is a complex interaction which occurs between living women and the construct of woman, both within and outside of the text. Teresa de Lauretis distinguishes between these two terms "woman" and "women" in the following way:

"[W]oman"...is a fictional construct, a distillate from diverse but congruent discourses dominant in Western cultures (critical and scientific, literary or juridical discourses)....[she is] other-from-men (nature and Mother, site of sexuality and masculine desire, sign and object of men's social exchange)...."women", on the other hand [refers to] real historical beings who cannot as yet be defined outside of those discursive formations, but whose material existence is nonetheless certain.⁹

Women, both real and fictional, are, at this point in history, inextricable from the representation of woman. De Lauretis explains how women become "en-gendered" by this construct:

Through the process [of "experience"]... subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself, or is placed in social reality, and so perceives and comprehends as subjective (referring to, even originating in, oneself) those relations--

material, economic, and interpersonal -- which are in fact social and, in a larger perspective, historical...therefore subjectivity is an ongoing construction...["experience"] is the effect of this interaction...[and] is produced not by external ideas, values, or material causes, but by one's personal, subjective, engagement in the practices, discourses and institutions that lend significance (value, meaning and affect) to the events of the world.¹⁰

Women's identity, then, is elaborated both from within and from without -- through what de Lauretis terms "the semiotic interaction of 'outer world' and 'inner world'".¹¹

The female protagonists in the four stories can be seen both as re-presentations of real women's experience and as cultural responses to the construct of woman. There is an undeniable interplay which occurs between woman and women in the works. Edna, Marilú, Judith and Jessica's struggle for wholeness is inseparable from their experience as "other-than-Man" in Western patriarchal culture. As Linda Hutcheon points out:

Women do not have the same relation to issues such as identity, origin, production and the institution as men do. The cogito means something different for women who have traditionally been denied identity through Cartesian rationality.¹²

The personal fragmentation caused by this construct of Woman is most strikingly evident in Edna, whose subjectivity is essentially erased by her embodiment of the traditional feminine role. While Judith also identifies with this model, she, like Marilú, eventually begins to question it, stepping beyond to embrace a fuller definition of self. Marilú, however, is less successful in envisaging a representation of

personal wholeness, due to her incessant focus on binary oppositions. Jessica, ironically, turns to the role of prostitute in search of the seeming sexual and financial power it offers. She soon learns that the prostitute's "power" is only a façade for her repression.

While the specific nature of each character's quest for wholeness will become clear, it is important to examine why, as a group, many women have historically felt fragmented. Many modern cultural theorists have begun to question the impetus behind the very **desire** for unification within the personal, social and spiritual realms, and it is important to situate women's writing in the context of this "epistemological shift".

Anthropologists have observed that one important function common to all cultures involves establishing the inter-relationship of the individual to self, other and the universe.¹³ Since the Renaissance in particular, the Western conception of this relationship has been characterized as a search for wholeness of the individual within these spheres. This liberal humanist conception of the "individual" is very different from the meaning of "subject" as it is presently used by feminists and post-structuralists. Linda Hutcheon explains:

The term "individual" has connotations arising from Renaissance humanism's focus on 'Man' as a timeless human essence....a free and conscious agent, autonomous and coherent. It is a concept based on consciousness or reason.¹⁴

She goes on to point out that:

[T]his model of Cartesian rationality is only posing as universal and timeless;...in fact, it is historically and culturally determined...it ignores (to its discredit) the realms it excludes: the unconscious and woman -- as well as history.¹⁵

In other words, this ideal of wholeness is not really "whole" at all, especially when concerning women. Is the female quest for wholeness, then, a futile one? Is wholeness an impossibility, even for men?

Alice Jardine points out in her book Gynesis that "the Western mind's" major philosophical observations and theories about individual wholeness, and thus the nature of our world, can be observed in the "Master European Narratives" of History, Philosophy and Religion.¹⁶ She pinpoints the major areas of enquiry of the Western tradition as Man, the Subject, Truth, History and Meaning.¹⁷ If one examines these areas, a model emerges which does not stress wholeness and equality whatsoever; on the contrary, reason and hierarchical power order this world. Like Descartes's philosophy of "Cogito, ergo sum" - "I think therefore I am", Newton's deductive, linear theories of mathematics and science can be seen as examples of a similar stratified order.

Within this conception, wholeness appears within Man's reach, for he is next to God -- the all-powerful; wholeness is not, however, available to women. One cannot help but think here, of Michelangelo's painting the Creation of Man on the Sistine Chapel. Adam is depicted just before being

imbued with God's power, the touch between their hands providing Man with an opportunity for wholeness and greatness. Eve, not yet existent, will never be whole, for she is only a fragmented part of Adam, created from his rib.

In her book, A Different Heaven and Earth, Sheila C. Collins points out how this highly stratified power structure functions in the following way: God > Jesus > men > women > children > animals > plants > Earth.¹⁸ Judith Todd notes the effect this hierarchy has on women and the Earth in her essay "On Common Ground":

The spectrum of good (orderliness) and evil (chaos) fits easily into this hierarchy, with God, of course, at the good end, leaving women more closely associated with the Earth, nature and disorder, the evil end. The normative implications of this scheme for human actions are clear. Man, being closer to God and orderliness, shall have dominion over women, children and the Earth so as to impose order on their inherently chaotic (evil) natures.¹⁹

Within this order, the distinction between "masculine" and "feminine" principles is clear. Hélène Cixous and Fritjof Capra among many others, have drawn up lists of these classic archetypes.²⁰ Pertinent excerpts with a few additions include:

MASCULINE	VS.	FEMININE
Mind	vs.	Body
Culture	vs.	Nature
Techne	vs.	Physis
Intelligible	vs.	Sensible
Activity	vs.	Passivity
Father	vs.	Mother
Intellect	vs.	Sentiment
Logos	vs.	Pathos
Form	vs.	Matter
Same	vs.	Other

Aggressive	vs.	Responsive
Competitive	vs.	Co-operative
Rational	vs.	Intuitive
Linear	vs.	Synthesizing
Linear	vs.	Circular
Superiority	vs.	Inferiority
Transcendence	vs.	Immanence
Strong	vs.	Weak
Independence	vs.	Dependence

While masculine should not necessarily imply male and feminine, female, the close similarities between these principles and our cultural sex-role distinctions cannot be overlooked. According to Marilyn French, it was primarily women's capacity for childbirth which first differentiated them from men. De Lauretis notes that "women are objects whose value is founded in nature...[as] bearers of children, food gatherers, etc.²¹ This distinction between men and women became extended to masculine and feminine principles.²²

Historically, Western Man has stressed difference and division between the sexes rather than focussing on their resemblance. French writes:

[M]ale identity essentially rests on female identity, that men are what women are not, or men are not what women are, they dread moving into a state of nothingness, of being women to themselves....Male identity rests not only on not being a woman, but also on being in control...of women...if maleness is itself to be a sign of freedom from bondage to nature, for the phallus to be a "transcendental signifier".²³

Similarly, female identity has traditionally rested on being a reflection of male identity.

The protagonists in the four stories struggle with the "masculine" and "feminine" characteristics within themselves.

The exclusive application of "feminine" traits to female identity is an important factor blocking their journey to wholeness. Edna battles to suppress any "masculine" characteristics within her. Marilù does, indeed, experience both natures, but cannot perceive wholeness between them, and so they splinter her. Judith first moves from an unhappy embodiment of the "feminine" to an unbalanced embodiment of the "masculine" until she slowly learns to integrate the two. Jessica also struggles with the so-called "masculine" and "feminine" natures of power. While it is a difficult fight, she eventually is able to balance them.

When comparing masculine and feminine principles and their manifestations in gender roles, the superior status historically given masculine traits and goals becomes quickly apparent. Underlying this patriarchal hierarchy of opposites is a will to power. In his book Dialogues, Gilles Deleuze speaks of the power which is attained from dichotomization:

It is false [to say that] the binary machine only exists for reasons of convenience. It is said that "base two" is the easiest. But in reality the binary machine is an important piece of the apparatuses of power. As many dichotomies as necessary will be established in order to stick everyone to the wall, to push everyone in a hole... Binary machines of social classes, of sexes, man-woman, of ages, child-adult, of races, black-white, of sectors, public-private, of subjectifications, among, our own kind-not our kind.²⁴

Marilyn French discusses how this "binary machine" strips women, in particular, of their power:²⁵

Dichotomous thought does not arise from an honest effort to comprehend experience but from a hubristic

effort to reshape it. By excluding most of experience, and limiting discourse to a set of opposed constructs, men have been able to create the appearance of comprehension of experience and to attribute superiority and inferiority to its elements. Thus the claim that man is very different from woman, that the two are opposites, as are man and nature, white and black. Ignoring the far greater similarities than differences among humans, patriarchy divides and conquers.²⁶

- French distinguishes this kind of supremacist force from that strength which empowers. "Power-to", she writes, "refers to ability, capacity, and connotes a kind of freedom...[while] power-over...refers to domination".²⁷ These are not to be misunderstood as separate forces of good or evil; rather, they are seen as two points on a continuum. While it would be unrealistic to imagine a world where no form of "power-over" existed, wholeness requires that each type of human power be tempered by the other. Women's struggle with "power-to" and "power-over" their lives is a key theme running through the four stories.

A modification of the hierarchical conception of power is the horizontal model, which K.K. Ruthven describes in his book, Feminist Literary Studies:

The... "horizontal" model [of binary systems]... has a centre occupied by an élite, and *hoi-polloi* banished to its margins: this is the organizing trope for traditional hostilities between the metropolis and the province, or the mother country and her colonies.²⁸

As with the vertical model, women, like the poor, are pushed to, and oppressed on, the margins.

While there is no doubt that women have historically been

situated outside of what is valued in this culture, they must also function in a patriarchal world. Many feminists believe that this paradox places women in a privileged position from which to question the patriarchal power structure. It allows us flexibility, a vantage point from which we can see a fuller picture, and an opportunity to envision a world outside of a hierarchical, dualistic philosophy. How though, do women creatively work from this position of marginality without reinforcing the central position of power?

In her article "Redrawing the Circle", Barbara Godard discusses the important role literature can play by speaking from the margins while challenging the centre. Writers, she says, can "claim...the prerogative of naming" and in so doing, challenge women's situation of powerless marginality, acting in strong opposition to the ruling discourse.²⁹ In other words, women can work from this position on the perimeter to replace the masculinist conception of power-over with a more feminist power-to. Godard writes:

Women's long silence or ineffectual speech, may be an advantage here in constituting a challenge to present economic and political systems in feminists' denunciation of the appropriating boundaries....We shall find some of the "fiction which would make us real". These selves-in-becoming-in-words redraw the circle for us, shift the relations of centre and periphery, of authoritative work and marginal silence.³⁰

While Barfoot's novel focusses on women's silence within culture, Mallet and Griffiths' stories name women's marginality and in the process, their writing helps to shift

some of those boundaries. In doing so, they begin the process of questioning what Hutcheon terms "the...traditional anchors: God, the father, the state, reason, order, Man"-- those anchors which have excluded women's attainment of wholeness.³¹

The feminist desire for the deconstruction of this false humanistic model of wholeness is thus part of an ongoing cultural movement towards a new definition of unity and identity. This crisis of modernity heralds "the demise of...Man's Truth", questioning the validity of "our concepts of language, of the role of the unconscious, of various conceptions of the speaking subject, and of the symbolic, ideological, and political assumptions underlying the theorization process itself".³²

The feminist artist's deconstruction of this false ideal and the opposition to dualistic conceptions of masculine and feminine principles is frequently manifest as a challenging of the conventions of order and hierarchy within the artistic medium itself. While the three writers and film-maker each works to deconstruct time, Mallet is by far the most innovative in contesting and fragmenting the traditional production of meaning in her film. While many feminist writers choose to deconstruct phallogentric language and rebuild a more "gynocentric" speech, this is not the case with Barfoot. Van Herk and Griffiths who, for the most part, remain within the conventions of realism.³³

The interaction between private (personal) and public (social) is crucial for the spiritual transformation of woman and women. Thus, the feminist credo: "the personal is political". "The real difficulty, but also the most exciting, original project of feminist theory", writes de Lauretis, "remains precisely this -- how to theorize [or in this case, fictionalize] that experience, which is at once social and personal, and how to construct the female subject from that political and intellectual rage".³⁴

The telling of women's stories is one method which combines the spheres of the personal, social and spiritual by raising women's "consciousness of self" and thereby beginning the process of constructing the female subject.³⁵ In his book Literary Theory, Terry Eagleton notes feminism's multi-tiered approach to the personal and cultural transformation of woman:

In any politics which puts identity and relationship at stake, renewing attention to lived experience and the discourse of the body, culture does not need to argue its way to political relevance.³⁶

The concern with relationship which Eagleton notes is of central concern to women's quest and is key to their vision of wholeness.

In her book In a Different Voice, psychologist Carol Gilligan notes the important role that relationship, co-operation and dependence play in the development of girls' morality. Boys, she observes, are more concerned with hierarchy, rules and independence.³⁷ This feminine interest

in relationship is a strong theme running throughout these four narratives; relationships between men and women, mother and child, and self and community are particularly important. This interest in human connection is manifest as an exploration of inner and interpersonal processes of growth and co-operation rather than as a focus on conquest, dramatic tension, climactic events, and closure, characteristics more typical of the traditional narrative structure.

A broader aspect of relationship can also be discerned in the more "holistic" feminine vision which is offered in these works. They explore the relationship between binary oppositions such as masculine and feminine as well as other dualisms such as interior/exterior, time/space and subjectivity/objectivity.

The feminist ideal of wholeness asserts that "the True...[can only be found] outside of the metaphysical categories of opposition -- or between them.³⁸ A vision which quests for wholeness amongst so-called dualisms requires the revalorization and equality of the feminine principle and a conception of it, not as an opposite, but as one part of a continuum. In her book Sexual/Textual Politics, Toril Moi explains such an idea in simple terms:

[There are] many examples of adjectives or adverbs of degree (much - more - most, little - less - least), which seem to produce their meaning in relation to the other items in the same series, not in relation to their binary opposites.³⁹

Such a vision breaks classic dualisms, focusing on the

multiple and complimentary parts of a whole.

A similar model of interrelated masculine and feminine archetypes can be observed in the framework of the I Ching. According to this ancient Chinese philosophy, however, it is the oscillating interplay between the two principles, not the power of one over the other, that maintains dynamic balance and wholeness in the world. Likewise, men and women (despite our role models to the contrary), are embodiments of both masculine and feminine characteristics. Wholeness requires the equal expression of these important parts of our nature.

French agrees:

To reintegrate humanity requires not just treating women as human beings, but valuing in one's own life and actions love and compassion and sharing and nutritiveness equally with control and structure, possession and status.⁴⁰

Referring to the more universal aspect of this integrative quest, she adds:

The goal - feminizing the world - is also the means-feminizing our worlds. The end is carrying integration as far into the world as we can....The choice lies between servitude and freedom, fragmentation and integration. The choice may be between death and life. There is no choice.⁴¹

This concept of personal, social and spiritual wholeness is quite distinct from that of most theologies, and it radically differs from the Renaissance idea of Rational Man, Truth, and Reality. This new ideal acknowledges multiplicity and contradiction as part of a dynamic, non-oppressive interplay along a sliding scale where binary oppositions act as only two extremes, equally powerful as any other point on

the continuum. In her article "The Personal is Political", Sheila Collins describes such a notion:

Such a multi-dimensional vision means the ability to grasp complexity, to live with ambiguity, and to enjoy the great variety that exists in the world. Wholeness does not imply the eradication of differences....on the contrary, wholeness of vision may lead to a multiplication of differences, as people are able to choose freely the person they want to be rather than following a pattern of one they are expected to be. Only through an affirmation and celebration of our differences can we come to an understanding of the ties that bind the total creation together.⁴²

The celebration of multiplicity and contradiction in these four narratives is consistent with French feminist Luce Irigaray's analysis of the feminine nature. "'She'", writes Irigaray, "is indefinitely other in herself".⁴³ Canadian poet Smaro Kamboureli speaks of a new form of truth, identity, subjectivity and wholeness which comes of our diffuse, multifaceted and contradictory characters:

[In theories of modernity] [c]ontradiction becomes the main thrust of discourse and of culture. This indicates a movement away from the humanistic position that foregrounds the self as ego toward a polyphonic presence of the self, where we have many versions of the "I," many stories to tell, which all contradict each other. The self is aleatory; it keeps changing. We can only perceive it through its contradictions.⁴⁴

Like Kamboureli, the characters of both Marilù and the Métis Jessica have pluralistic ethnic identities. On a social scale, this "mosaic" constitutes part of what many consider to characterize Canadian culture. Rather than strive for homogeneity, these women seek a "heterogeneous wholeness". Such a seemingly contradictory model will ensure not only the

transformation of our present culture but also a continuing dynamic and positive state of flux, change and human adaptability.

According to historian Arnold Toynbee⁴⁵ and scientist Stephen Jay Gould⁴⁶, the loss of flexibility and failure to adapt to change, leads to social decay and the extinction of the species. The survival of humanity, then, may depend upon our ability to adapt and to see heterogeneity as positive. "Change is the one constant in our lives", observes Dorothy Riddle in her essay, "Politics, Spirituality, and Models of Change".⁴⁷

This interest in multiplicity, contradiction, process and resistance to closure arises in each of the four stories. Edna wildly seeks to suppress and order her own world and its incessant contradictions. Marilú struggles with her sense of fragmentation and pluralistic personal and social existence. Judith, too, feels a lack of wholeness due to inner contradiction, but she eventually finds models of unity which honour difference. Jessica fights with, and eventually overcomes, her fear of personal, social and spiritual discord. All four journeys focus on the important role which contradiction plays in the process of change.

De Lauretis speaks of how the textual voicing of difference and the enunciation of the "feminine" can combine with the reader/viewers's active engagement in the development process to effect changes in culture. She

writes:

The work of narrative, then, is a mapping of differences, and specifically, first and foremost, of sexual differences into each text; and hence, by a sort of accumulation, into the universe of meaning, fiction and history represented by the literary-artistic tradition and all the texts of culture.⁴⁸

The non-hierarchical insertion of the feminine into the text and culture thus implies a radical change in Western concepts and structures of power. Such metamorphosis is similar to what Toril Moi describes as French feminist Julia Kristeva's utopian dream:

[A] vision of a society in which the sexual signifier would be free to move; where the fact of being born male or female no longer would determine the subject's position in relation to power, and where, therefore, the very nature of power would itself be transformed.⁴⁹

This is a notion which recognises a shared power along the continuum of binary oppositions -- a renaming which includes women and the feminine principle. While these stories of female pilgrimage form a utopian vision for the future, it is one which is rooted in the multiplicity of human nature, the real, and the political. It celebrates the power which resides within individuals, both men and women.⁵⁰

The telling of women's stories plays a crucial role in this process of individual and cultural transformation, as the narratives themselves move through the struggle with oppressive values towards the vision of a more synthesized world. As Marilyn French points out, "Our models of the universe are essentially metaphors, images that make concrete

our vision of the relationships among forces in our world".⁵¹

As a reflection of culture and reality, art can reshape our awareness of ourselves and thus act as a powerful impetus behind social change. As feminist critic and witch Starhawk rightly points out in her essay "Consciousness, Politics, and Magic":

Reality shapes consciousness.
Consciousness shapes reality.⁵²

Aritha Van Herk makes a related comment in an interview: "Ideally, a feminist novel should teach us more about ourselves...offer an alternative....that is what every good novel does. It recreates reality in another way so that we see ourselves in a new light."⁵³

These four stories of women's quest offer an opportunity to envision the transformation of our conceptions of woman, Man and the universe; they search for new models of wholeness which will enhance the lives of both women and men.

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48. De Lauretis, p. 121.

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50. According to philosopher Herbert Marcuse, utopian visions must be grounded in reality if they are to be effective. See Moi's discussion of this in Sexual/Textual Politics, pp. 122-23.

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CHAPTER ONE

EDNA: THE "I" OF THE BEHOLDER

Joan Barfoot's Dancing in the Dark is the story of Edna Cormick's chilling personal journey towards knowledge of self. Unlike the other characters we will be examining, her inner voyage cannot be considered a "quest" per se, as she does not consciously seek the greater understanding of self which she eventually gains. The reader follows this narrative journey through her journal, written in the mental institution in which she is confined after murdering her husband. Her story reveals a fragile, frightened and tense life in which she, as the "perfect housewife", represents the epitome of the traditional feminine role. In so doing, she not only supports the foundations of Western patriarchy, but also allows herself to be placed in a repressed position within its social hierarchy. When a crack appears in its apparently solid foundations, Edna's world is thrown into crisis, prompting the murder of her husband -- the very core of her ordered universe. Dancing in the Dark acts as a warning to the reader, depicting the ultimate end of a life such as Edna's, as almost totally destructive of woman, society, and ironically, destructive of patriarchy itself.

Dancing in the Dark follows Edna through two journeys. The first is a narrative-within-the-narrative, where she

recalls her past life as the perfect housewife, who constantly subverts any awareness of her passive and parasitical existence. The eventual explosion of this repressed past initiates the protagonist's present narrative journey. Throughout two years' silence in the mental institution, during which she refuses to acquiesce to male psychiatric authority, Edna writes a journal -- the story we read. The process of writing brings about her slow dawning of self-awareness and a fundamental questioning of the patriarchal structure she upheld. She is forced to come to terms with a personal and social "reality" which has become meaningless. We will first follow this journey through memory into her past, and then examine the process of consciousness she reaches through writing.

The reader is first taken back to Edna's childhood, seeing her as a "lump of a frightened child" in a home where "despair and grimness and disappointment and impatience war to become the theme of each day".¹ Her family members are "strangers"; they support no sense of individual identity, comparing her to her sister Stella and other seemingly self-assured individuals(28). Edna's resultant sense of self is a fragmented one. "All I knew was that I had several faces, all of them hidden, and multiple longings and couldn't tell which was true"(34).

Broken apart by her conflicting selves and consequent lack of wholeness, Edna searches for a sense of self along

the pre-determined path of Western "womanhood". From this road, she gains clear instruction as to the rigid identities of Woman, Man and the Universe.

Edna learns much of her "feminine" role of woman from magazines which suggest that women should embody such characteristics as passivity, weakness, insecurity, dependence and service. Conversely, the magazines portray the masculine role of man as active, strong, supportive and self-confident. A fragile universal "balance" is created between these oppositional traits, requiring that neither partner express behaviour which is contradictory to their constructed roles. Harmony must be preserved at all costs; and the maintenance of harmony is the woman's responsibility.

Having a poorly developed sense of self-value, Edna naturally turns to this clearly prescribed and ordered conception of the world for guidance. Any repression of individuality is minor compared to the overwhelming comfort and protection offered by woman's role. As a young girl, she practices her part, kissing mirrors and hugging pillows, imagining the lover who will someday replace them, thus giving her life real meaning. Her inner search for identity will, she believes, be fulfilled by a man. "If I were part of two, I understood, I would be inside and able to look out, instead of the reverse"(30). When she is a young woman, Edna's path does indeed cross that of her male counterpart; and she immediately recognizes Harry as "the face that had

been missing from the mirror and the pillow"(42). When with him, she is careful to hide her true self and follow the directives dictated by her assigned role: "Certainly he could not have seen me as I saw myself and I was careful that he shouldn't"(45).

Edna believes it is her successful personification of the feminine role which convinces Harry to marry her. "I felt I was being called to perfection...it was just like that, a vocation, something one is called to"(62). The false sense of wholeness she obtains from this experience fools her into thinking she has gained identity. In reality she has become a fragmented façade, while the "real" Edna drowns in a deep lake.

As her own spirit sinks to dark depths, this as yet lifeless shell of the "perfect wife" is pulled to the surface. Harry imbues it with life: "He took me in...and held me and breathed life into me as if he had rescued a drowning victim. He taught me attitudes and sufficient words, and I adopted them gratefully, if not wholly aware of doing so....My life, I owed to Harry"(40, 17). Her fear of lacking identity is blocked out by Harry. "Harry filled so much space that fear and desolation sank deeper and deeper under his weight until they were just small things crouching at the bottom of my soul"(50).

Edna and Harry embody the traditional Western binary roles of "masculine" and "feminine". The hierarchical model

intrinsic to this conception places the feminine in a position of little value. Edna unknowingly embraces a role which will be as oppressive as it is extreme. The description of her first love-making with Harry shows how efficiently they have inculcated these rigid "identities" into their lives.

He undressed me slowly, gently and with admiration in each step. He kissed each breast and then, startlingly, my thighs. He was -- almost pure about it; as if he were removing wrappings from a lovely statue. As if the object were to worship, not to hold....

He was much quicker with himself than with me; swift, efficient undoing of buttons, a shrug to discard the shirt... (56).

Unwittingly, she becomes trapped on the classic pedestal of the admired and beautiful feminine statue which is, in reality, powerless and frozen.

From her magazines, Edna learns the importance of the feminine object's beauty: "a good appearance was essential, the first thing people saw and how they judged" (25). She works hard to attain the Western ideal of beauty, though she never really feels she embodies it. "I was not beautiful. He was handsome, but I was not beautiful" (148).

Harry is handsome not because of his appearance, but because he is an active, powerful and strong subject. He will always be perceived as handsome. Edna, on the other hand, will never be truly beautiful for the ideal feminine object of beauty, is, in reality, unattainable. To further render this situation impossible, change and the passage of

time are inevitable; Edna greatly fears that aging will steal what little attractiveness and value she does possess(21).

As the active subject in their partnership, Harry has an identity and goals which are well established. Edna's passive role, on the other hand, does not support such self-definition. A confident business man, her husband strives for power and knows how to successfully climb the corporate ladder. He proudly tells her, "I'm good, you know. I'm really good at that"(101). As Harry's opposite, Edna has goals which are not focussed. She admits, "I'm not sure what I want"(51). In contrast to her husband, she does not want "to be" anything, except perhaps "to be safe" or "to be happy"(52).

The only goal in her journey is to have a home. "All I ever wanted was to make a good home", she says(147). She fulfills this desire with religious devotion, cleaning each item in each room until everything is literally spotless. Edna sees her days as "a service [for Harry], a mass: precise steps and motions all in order, to the end of either worship or comfort, whichever. Or both"(80).

Although she faithfully works at home, her tasks remain invisible to the outside world, where "real value" is measured in Western culture. Unbeknownst to Edna, women's often unconscious but complicit devaluation of themselves and their work is written into the traditional female role. In this way, women maintain their repressed position in the

Western hierarchy. Edna complies, believing "The trick with housework is to make one's labours invisible, so that the other person does not observe them, but would observe their absence"(99). Like the transparent glass she polishes, Edna herself becomes invisible. "But I never meant him to assume I wasn't there", she says perplexed, "I didn't mean to disappear" (96). Her silence, passivity and fear grow in equal measure to her total identification with the female role and its mechanical daily tasks. The result is that she wanders somewhere between the "dream world" of female socialization and the "real world" of patriarchy, which devalues her work, her sex and the feminine role.

The only times Edna feels any power and self-importance come each day when, for a stolen hour in the afternoon she lies on the couch, listens to a record, and imagines herself dancing:

Oh, I was important: I sang for my family and danced in front of Harry's friends...they looked and admired. I was someone. I was anyone: from Streisand to Baez....Most often I placed him [Harry] in the audience, where he sat watching proudly and with amazement, like the others....

When an album ended, I resumed my day...Just an old familiar dream that gave me, for a little time, my old familiar second life....I always knew I wouldn't like it to be real, all those people staring and certainly knew that the life I had was the one I wanted(90-91).

Her sole true pleasure is locked in the imaginary; the only "genuine" sense of self coming from her disappearance into another's image.

It is only through her protection from the outside world that Edna is able to perpetuate this dream. Her lack of children allows her this "luxury" of isolation. At the same time, her infertility represents an inability to truly fulfill her feminine role of nurturer and reproducer (the counterpart to her husband's role of producer). "For all my efforts, all my work and watching, all my listening hours-- I could not be perfect", she says(77). Consequently, she herself becomes the unborn child, protected, and sheltered from the world. She wonders, "But that we reversed our duties and he [Harry] became the womb, is that some reflection of my barrenness?"(40).

In contrast to Edna's "failure", Harry's quantifiable success in the public world renders him valuable: his life, "a steady progress: piles of accomplishments like steps behind him"(141). Harry is "a restless, pacing man...[who] wanted to be active, doing"(16). In opposition, Edna's role is one of passivity, always trying to please. Despite the activity of her daytime work she feels she must be clean, composed and prepared for a calm evening when Harry returns home each night.

As they journey through twenty years together, Edna and Harry's roles become more rigid and opposite, the balance and dependence between them growing more fragile with each year together. Edna's space becomes totally restricted to her home, while her husband's grows to be almost exclusively in

the outside, public world. Home and Harry protect her from the exterior.

I liked the view from the inside looking out....I had a home and Harry and so I was safe. I would be terrified without them. I am terrified(74, 96).

Despite Harry's protection, Edna is forced to realize the role model she emulates cannot allay her childhood fears of the outside world. In absolute powerlessness she fights to suppress her terror, becoming totally dependent on Harry for protection.

The couple's relationship is characterized by a parasitical "balance" between the powerful and the powerless. Like the other parts of their lives, their sexual interaction also reflects this hierarchical division between them. Sex and pleasure for Harry are curiously intertwined with power and his love for work. For him, both orgasm and success are solitary experiences which provide a transcendent sense of power. Work is "almost like coming", he says(43). Feminist critic Nancy Hartsock observes in her book Money, Sex and Power, that money, plus sex, equals power. This articulation places Edna's lack of fortitude and control within the larger social context of the feminine condition.

For Edna, the vessel for Harry's power, sex is not an orgasmic, solitary experience of self, rather, making love is experienced as a union with the god who protects her:

Harry inside was...sacred in a way, symbolic of the whole, and a link with some unity greater than either of us apart. I would have liked to consume him in this communion; to draw him whole inside my body, to

make us a proper unity(126).

For Edna, sex is a union; theirs is not a union of equals, however, but of the powerful and the powerless.

According to Western binary thought, strength is dependent upon domination of the weak, just as weakness is dependent on oppression by the strong. A fragile symbiosis is thus created. Harry and Edna apply this principle to their daily lives and their absolute interdependence requires a pact to assure mutual survival.

Before they marry, this couple agrees to become a dyad of what they believe to be complementary opposites: "We made a bargain: I would not make demands, and he would give"(151). Their many differences and dependence upon each other are summed up in Edna's description of their hands:

Harry lay in his hands for me....Discreet hands. Protecting and capable hands....Hands that would know me and take care....It seemed to me that what was in his mind followed into them, and they expressed his knowledge. They were the instruments of who he was. And of who we were, too....

My own hands...small [and] pale...have done so many things and one large, great thing. A mystery, the history of these hands. They have washed so many dishes and pushed a vacuum cleaner so many times....I know they must be strong, but they are also docile, dutiful. They have almost always done what they were supposed to....

[H]is hands went out and mine stayed in and together, only four hands necessary for this, two of his, two of mine, we played ring-around-a-rosy in a closed circle, just the two of us(5-6).

Such artificially divided roles require a strictly-maintained social order if both are to survive. Edna

believes her self-identity depends on her guardianship of that order.

Paradoxically, perfect order further cuts her off from herself. "Things must be kept in order", she says, "[a] single small thing out of order must throw the whole structure faintly off its balance, and these things pile up"(7). Similarly, she sees life as a linear, ordered progression, a "connect-the-dot puzzle in a child's magazine. A straight vertical line...My magazines...made it seem so clear. If one did this, that would result"(35, 96).

Edna's unspoken "marriage contract" with Harry carries with it the same ordered, linear conception of cause and effect. "It seems to me that what he was saying that day [the wedding day] was, 'In return for this, I get that.' And what I was saying was, 'In return for this, I will always have that'"(64). This ordered world is organized by "perceptible boundaries" separating her "tiny universe" from the outside(2, 48):

From the first moment, his presence, his existence, blocked the world(60).

We had no room for strangers. Besides, they were dangerous...[they] wanted me not to be safe anymore. They wanted to put me outside, when I'd been so careful and worked so hard to get inside and stay there where I'd be safe(123).

For Edna, being "safe" from the outside world requires ignoring "what country was bombing which and why, what people were suffering and dying while I was far away and safe....in my bomb shelter of a home"(84). The pursuit of self-identity

not only isolates her from herself but also from the world around her.

This insulation leads her to believe that since "outside rules did not apply in our two-person world, outside accidents also would not occur." It is not until she is in the mental institution, after an "accident" did indeed occur, that Edna learns there are "different set of rules" for men and women: that men in the outside world are free to pursue their desires while women, on the inside world are not(129). In her essay, "Women, Half of Europe's Population", Naomi Griffiths notes how this distinction between rules for the private and public milieux can ultimately lead to grave problems:

The idea of home as sanctuary, as repository of virtue, leads quickly enough to codes of public and private morality, to beliefs that the action taken under orders is something for which the individual has no moral responsibility, and to assumptions of two codes of morality, one for private life, one for public action.²

Mounting fears disclose the hyper-tension in Edna's fragile universe and her suspicion that chaos constantly waits to pounce on her:

I am afraid of changes and things that are not precise. I make vast efforts at perfection, because I fear what may come of flaws. Disaster waits for mistakes. I want everything to be right. There are places for all things, and proper ways of thinking about them...it is not easy to maintain precision and perfection. It is a constant labour, and it is necessary always to be on guard. The long fall, a great chasm, waits for a tiny slip(4).

She proceeds cautiously along her course, fearfully avoiding

the "great chasm" of chaos. Despite her manic attempts to maintain order, the outside "real" world seeps into the tiny cracks of her fortress. "Things -- tastes and rules-- seem...to be going backward and forward simultaneously. Very confusing", she remarks(153). The paths along the route become more jumbled as disorder and change inevitably infiltrate her protected universe.

"Chaos" eventually appears in the form of Harry's adultery. Edna's world and her constructed self then explode. "It seems strange, unfair, that having foreseen [the importance of order, that]...I should have become the target of chaos and catastrophe....I was so careful. I should have been the last, not the first"(86). "Without a place to look, the loss of balance, toppling, sliding dissolution" begins in her life(177).

It is ironic that it is Harry, the foundation and mutual benefactor of Edna's fortress, who first tunnels the hole through "the great shining wall" which she had built around them(168). Harry's "ordinary, clichéd, banal little sin" prompts a severe imbalance in Edna's life and self-image (its very "ordinariness" being a betrayal of the elevated status which he held in her mind)(156). This leads to the eventual crumbling of the foundations of the Western order Edna has worked so hard to maintain.

This crisis marks a radical about-face in Edna's journey towards self-identity. Years of repression, lack of value

and selflessness are unleashed with a fury. When she learns of Harry's adultery, Edna is faced with a choice: she can either go on living as she has always done, continuing to bury her anger, or she can express it, and open the floodgates she has so feared. Imagining the scenario had she chosen the former option, she ponders: "I could have bitten and chewed and swallowed the rage and we would have gone on. The pain would all have been inside me, instead of inside him"(167). Edna chooses to plunge her knife of rage into Harry himself. The anger released, her destructive pursuit is later unleashed, at least in her imagination, upon the entire structure which entrapped her. In the mental institution she writes:

I can think of only one thing...that might give me pleasure now....I think that if I were out of here [the mental hospital] I might drive a bulldozer to that house and smash it into splinters. That, I think, might give me joy(98).

Even the home which she so devotedly worshipped and served has betrayed her; it too must be destroyed.

The murder of Harry can be seen as Edna's murder of her patriarchal world itself. Ironically, it gives Edna her first sense of "real achievement" according to patriarchal standards; "[m]uch better than cooking the perfect meal, or shining the perfect crystal... I have accomplished something here", she notes(180). The exclusive roles and order of the couple's world begin to self-destruct. Through her enraged violence, Edna is able to shed her shell of the feminine

role, and begin the long journey back towards her long-suppressed identity. For the first time ever, she gains a sense of great strength and freedom; this comes from the murder of Harry:

I am strong....I wonder why I didn't know I could be stronger than he was? It [the knife] does not go into him so far that it is necessary actually to touch him....I have gotten out of myself at last--so this was the way; and I am joined and free. This instant is wholly mine, and I am so free and light, a helium being(179).

Despite the radical about-face this represents for Edna, her model of power versus weakness still remains intact -- she simply reverses roles with Harry.

Edna is tried and placed in a mental institution for murdering Harry. Now relieved of all her duties and purpose in life, she has endless time to reflect. The inquiry into self and society now begins to engage her, marking the departure on the second stage of her journey. The somewhat giddy inner hysteria surrounding the homicide, however, soon passes and she reverts again to her traditional role. Believing that she is responsible for maintaining order in the world, she first blames herself for its imbalance:

What did I do wrong?...What more could I have done?(96-97).

I'm sure I could have been perfect, with more effort. And then Harry might have been more perfect too. As it was, there were flaws and shortcomings, and his faults, although more glaring and gashing, were only reflections of my own(62-63).

She searches for her flaw -- the spot she missed, or the speck of dust she failed to clean which has thrown off the

entire balance(101, 80). Change will not come easily to her.

In an attempt to re-order her dissolved world, Edna begins to write a journal. For the first time she has nothing to do -- no husband in whom to subsume herself; she has the freedom to embark on a new course that is entirely her own. The suppressed thoughts of twenty years begin to surface along with her long-drowned spirit. She recalls:

I tried not to think of anything before Harry, those days before he came along and picked me up and handed me a life and all those jobs that amounted to a day....I was grateful to have this work to do..(84).

What on earth was in my mind?...Certainly I thought I had plenty on my mind(83).

In the mental institution she is overwhelmed by thoughts; she keeps them to herself, however, for they give her a new, unique and more "real" sense of identity:

I guard my thoughts. I am forty-three years old, and I have had, it appears, only twelve hours' worth of thoughts, so I have to cherish them. I do not have so many that some can be given away. Nor do I want any of them to slip my mind, which is one reason I take such care to write them down(13).

At first, Edna writes in an attempt to regain her balance and to build a new wall around herself. Describing this literary effort at healing she writes, "I bind my wounds with paper"(1). Slowly, she gains strength from her private, silent recording of her thoughts and of the hospital's activities.

Despite her silence in the mental institution, the act of writing sets Edna upon a totally new path towards an

understanding of herself. In her mind, her initial union with Harry and her female role necessitated throwing away the only poem she had ever written(39). Putting pen once again to paper is inextricably intertwined with rejecting the role which repressed her so thoroughly.

In contrast to her former life, lived entirely as a reflection of her husband, this time, Edna's search for identity is for her alone. When her psychiatrist reaches to read her notebook, she raises her pen like a sharp knife in self-defence. He retreats and she writes:

It is important not to waste words. They seize on words and try to turn them around, spare words are their weapons here....He uses too many words, throws them around too easily, plays with them. The advantage is with me and my tighter, tinier weapons(164).

Edna begins to realize there is enormous power in language, silence and the pen.

The intensity of Edna's writing allows her to almost completely ignore the patriarchal world and, like the murder of Harry, this is another subversive act. She says: "I like the sound of my pen scratching across the page. Sometimes I hear it so clearly it almost drowns out...[the psychiatrist's] voice, with his endless questions"(14). Edna's total retreat from the world is a necessary initial step in her journey towards finding an identity.

Not only does writing act as a catalyst for her self-discovery, but it precipitates her questioning of and consequent rage at the fundamental "truths" of Western order.

This interrogation begins by questioning the very truth of her life with Harry. Edna soon realizes that both her own and Harry's perfect fulfillment of their roles and the ordered, isolated character of their lives, were only a façade, not truth. Thinking back, she reflects: "I had twenty years. I can't see giving them up. The thing is to see how much was true....What was the truth, to be so terrifying?"(61, 103). And then she imagines the scenario which would have probably ensued had the truth ever really been told:

He might have said the truth, whatever that was. We might both have said the truth. But what then? Might I not have reached out and plunged my steak knife publicly into our little tragedy?(148).

The truth, Edna realizes, is that her entire life with Harry was a lie. She remembers "[a]ll the lying moments in each kitchen tile and cupboard....All the mouthfuls and forkfuls of food prepared here in this room. To fuel the lies"(178).

Both parties ^{are} engaged in the preservation of this lie -- Harry, a skilled actor; Edna, a "silent, listening actress"(99, 100). She remarks, "If someone had said, 'What a liar he is,' instead of 'What a performer,' I would not have understood"(99).

Edna eventually has the fortitude to question the crux of her former identity, her role as "the perfect housewife". She wonders, "What did he mean by perfect? That I was deaf and dumb and blind and stupid?"(145). She appears to slowly become aware of the true social attitudes towards her

feminine role.

Edna's acknowledgment of her own false identity allows her to realize the part she played in imposing an artificial role on Harry -- one which he willingly accepted. Reflecting on this man she loved with "such a grip", she realizes(168):

"He was never intended to be a god(181).

What would it have been like to really feel Harry's skin, and my own, instead of turning it into something tougher, harder -- protection?...What if I had understood those hands, the body, all the words he spoke, were someone else, another person, a life? I took the face he gave me and transformed it into something else(169).

Edna appears to question the very truth of the exclusive binary role models she and her husband embodied.

The realization of their false identities prompts Edna to also doubt the whole Truth underlying Western reality. Watching the news, she wonders, "Who was Walter Cronkite anyway? Did he have secrets, tell lies? It didn't seem so, but the faces, it seems, are just masks for other faces"(154).

Added to the revolutionary character of her journey are her suspicions that perhaps other women, also trapped in masculine constructs, may share her oppression. Thinking of religious women, who, like herself, are equally faithful to a transcendent male god, Edna speculates:

Is God like Harry? When they [the nuns] spend their lives for God, in the end do they go before Him thinking they're paid up, and does He turn away? Does He say, "That wasn't what I wanted at all, you made a mistake"?

What a thing, to go for judgement and love, for reward at last for all the work and sacrifices, and have Him reject the gift. And then turn around and accept a sinner who has never made a payment. Would there be anger in the saintly hearts? Would they reach for knives and kill God?

Maybe He says, "But you shouldn't have believed, that was a mistake. Faith made it too easy for you, it's not supposed to be so simple. You took too much for granted, you assumed all I wanted was for you to follow rules"(169).

Her comments indicate a radical questioning of one of the most important bases of Western belief: God. If other women like her begin to learn that there is "no salvation in the unsmudged glass of mirrors", they, too, may begin thinking and their thoughts may eventually shatter the false patriarchal looking glass of Truth(145).

A new "truth" begins to emerge from Edna's journal; "The paper no longer binds the wounds. Blood seeps between the pages, and oozes out the covers"(171). Surprisingly, she no longer fears this reality. This marks a radical change from the woman who once thrived on weakness and dependence. She writes:

It is reasonable that fear should be slipping away. There's nothing more to be lost, and nothing terrible, nothing left that deserves terror....And yet I miss fear....It has protected me for so long. I get lonelier and lonelier as it escapes. A more constant companion than Harry, my fear has been, and I am losing it, too(166).

After defining herself and her universe in terms of extremes throughout her whole life, it seems impossible for Edna to attain a balanced or integrated perception of the world. The above passage indicates how she still comprehends her

existence as being characterized by the absolutes of nothingness, loneliness and the total absence of fear; these extremes are simply different ones from those of her past.

At this crossroads in her journey she is confronted with another choice: to escape into an unconsciousness of the outside world, focusing on the tiny details of her prison, or face the implications of her new understanding:

I can pursue the smallest of the bedspread fibres, peering my way to blindness...or I can face the moment and the white and yellow daisy clock [which ticked away as Edna murdered Harry].

Tunnelling in or spiralling out. I call it a choice; and yet like many other things, I can see it isn't (166).

Mary Daly defines "spiralling out" within a feminist context: "Radical feminist consciousness spirals in all directions, dis-covering the past, creating/dis-closing the present future".³

Edna's murder of Harry and of her patriarchal allegiance represented a potential "spiralling out". But her subsequent imprisonment, inability to deal with the "social world" as it exists, and almost catatonic introspection, signify her eternal future of "tunnelling in".

The shattering of Edna and Harry's tiny universe does not serve to provide a more holistic world view; rather, her universe grows microscopically small like the bedspread fibres. She becomes totally and absolutely disconnected from the world. "Not lonely; remote. This was so far away that to have been lonely would not have been so distant. It would

have been a connection of some sort"(175). It is as if she is now dead.

Harry "contained" Edna and by killing him, she has killed herself(183). By totally placing "reality" and her world in question while in the mental institution she has reached understanding; but she lacks the resources to give birth to a new self. Her only remaining choice is to retreat from patriarchy and to tunnel in to "insanity". 4

A final turning-point in Edna's journey occurs when, after two years in the mental hospital, she utters her first words: "Can I go outside?"(164). The negative reply she receives is based on her psychiatrist's diagnosis that she is "not well"(165). This judgement prompts her final retreat into herself and ensures a future of solitude, precluding any further social pursuits.

The psychiatrist initially plays the same paternal role that Harry did -- seemingly benign, loving and supportive. Edna wonders if she could love him as she had her husband. She soon realizes, however, that he wields the same complete control over her life that Harry did, and this realization warns her to remain silent. Helen Levine comments on her similar experience as a patient in a psychiatric hospital. Basing her analysis on notes taken from her journal of the time she concludes:

The hospital [is]...a microcosm of male authority and female subservience (patients and staff) that is endemic to patriarchal institutions, structures, and organizations....the claim to power and authority

[is] vested in the professional by virtue of her/his specialized knowledge and training....[The theoretical underpinnings of health care have] left us a legacy of scapegoating women...[focussing on] female rather than male culpability. Psychiatric treatment itself reinforces the pattern of women being denied control and autonomy over key aspects of our lives.⁵

The domination of powerless women in patriarchal institutions noted by Levine perfectly describes Edna's predicament.

The only exit, though it is a limited one, is through silence and writing. These allow the pursuit and understanding of autonomous perceptions without their being censored by patriarchy.

Edna's act of writing transforms her from a passive object into an active, speaking subject. In her "madness" she gives up "[a] curious kind of freedom, to clean and cook", for the freedom to continue her journey of self-exploration(70). In doing so, she experiences new pleasure in her self. "What should I do, being free?", she wonders(181):

I might let the dust collect...touch my mother's shoulder, and kiss my father's cheek. I could look around and see if I could spot what frightened me. See if anything still frightens me....I would write a poem....

But I can dance now if I want....They think I'm crazy; and it doesn't matter a bit what they see....I can dance every moment of forty-three years....I shall dance the freedom of tomorrow, eyes open, watching the people watching....

Whatever will become of me, this agile, dancing, fearless Edna who killed her husband and herself in another life?...A whole pure future in which to sketch a whole new Edna, the singer and the dancer,

the free woman in the narrow corridor, alone in a small white bed(181-183).

Faced with the option of returning to the social world, she consciously chooses to retreat into her inner world of fantasy. Here, she has the freedom to pursue a new, joyous life of dance, fearlessness and self-discovery -- all of which she longed for and was never allowed in the past.

By showing Edna's various options for her future, Barfoot clearly points out that "tunnelling in" is not the only exit for women oppressed by patriarchy; she demonstrates, however, that Edna's choice, like "spiralling out", is also subversive of the repressive system.

By shedding the classic construct of woman and by murdering the construct of Man, Edna unequivocally shatters the patriarchal dream which ruled her life. Ironically, her story shows the self-destruction which results to Western values when they are taken to extreme.

Claiming jubilant freedom from this release, Edna refuses to recognise the authority and prison which vainly attempt to entrap her. Though completely isolated from the realities of the social world, for the first time, Edna has found a curious sense of "wholeness" and identity within herself.

She will dance madly in her chains.

ENDNOTES TO CHAPTER ONE

1. Joan Barfoot, Dancing in the Dark (Toronto: Macmillan, 1982), pp. 34, 31. All further references to this work appear in the text.

2. Naomi Griffiths, "Women, Half of Europe's Population," in The Faces of Europe, ed. Alan Bullock (Oxford: Phaidon Press, 1980), p. 262.

3. Barbara Godard, "Redrawing the Circle: Power, Poetics, Language," Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory, 9 (Spring 1985), p. 168.

4. Edna's decision to withdraw from the social world and to "go mad" is similar to that of Anastasie in Paule Baillargeon's 1977 film Anastasie O ma chérie.

5. Helen Levine, "The Personal is Political: Feminism and the Helping Professions," Feminism in Canada, ed. Angela Miles and Geraldine Finn (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1982), pp. 181, 189, 190, 193.

CHAPTER TWO

MARILU: THE CAMERA'S "I"

Marilú Mallet's film Journal inachevé explores the space of exile in a woman's search for personal and social wholeness. While the form of this documentary/fictional film successfully questions the patriarchal definition of wholeness as homogeneity, its narrative does not; rather, the story focuses on the battle between oppositions which fragment the protagonist and in so doing, preclude a vision of personal and social synthesis which celebrates heterogeneity. The highly subjective exploration of this space of exile, combined with the lament for home and search for personal and social wholeness, constitute the protagonist's and the film-maker's combined quests in Journal inachevé.

Journal inachevé revolves around the theme of exile. To be exiled is to be on the margins of mainstream culture, and Marilú is marginalized both as a woman and as an immigrant. Exile also implies being separated from that which is home - from that sense of wholeness and oneness with society and self which home offers. Marilú is a Chilean immigrant who has been living in Quebec for six years.¹ She is, at the time, of the film involved in a disintegrating marriage with film-maker Michael Rubbo and they have a son, Nicolas. The

striking oppositions between the social culture of her past and present, in addition to the fragmentation which comes of her failing marriage, leads her in her quest for wholeness.

Marilù experiences her homelessness as division by five major oppositional barriers. These are: exterior versus interior, individuality versus collectivity, past versus present, activity versus passivity, and masculine versus feminine. Marilù's sense of time and space is also entirely fragmented and this, too, is woven into many of the contradictions which plague her.

Journal inachevé is, in many ways, a representation of film-maker Marilù Mallet's own creative quest for the reconciliation of these divisive binary oppositions. In her article, "Feminist Language in Journal inachevé and Strass café", Brenda Longfellow speaks of the film's "narcissistic doubling, of author and image, subject and object....the 'I' of the interior monologue, the writer writing...[and] the 'I' of the director, the [subjective] consciousness behind the film".² Throughout most of the film, however, there is an artificial barrier erected between the two which prevents the film-maker's enunciation of her subjective quest and vulnerability.

Involved in a self-reflexive, exploratory process, Mallet cannot impose a linear, unified, distanced and closed perspective ^{on} her film; she therefore creates a collage of experiences, memories, thoughts, sounds, people and images.

In her book, Femmes et cinéma québécois, Louise Carrière explains how women search for a sense of totality out of such diversity:

[L]es femmes plus que les hommes cherchent...à rendre l'unicité de la vie et ce qu'elles considèrent comme une totalité. C'est pourquoi dans leurs oeuvres on retrouve étroitement mêlées les questions de travail, d'amis, de passé, de présent, de couple, de futur et d'enfants.³

Mallet describes her film as a process of self discovery: "un voyage par états d'âme...une oeuvre 'ouverte', en devenir". (170, 169)

Instead of following the protagonist's step-by-step journey, as do Barfoot, Van Herk and Griffiths, Mallet portrays Marild's quest in a more circular manner. Longfellow notes that the film is "not a linear progression of events through time, but a study of time, of the elements, the words and gestures that compose the space of exile".⁴

Journal inachevé originally began as "lettre[s] cinématographique[s]" exchanged between Mallet and a Chilean immigrant friend in Paris(9). Mallet's "letters" were essentially film scripts, describing the experience of exile in Quebec: memories of the past, difficulties of the present and hopes for the future(6). These epistolary "sketches" form the basis for Journal inachevé and will occasionally be quoted as "Marild's letters".

Traditionally, women's daily experience has been recorded in diaries; the immigrants' observations have usually been mailed home in letters. These voices have thus been quietly

relegated to the margins of discourse. Mallet uses the diary/epistolary genre to bring those reflections, in from the margins, to voice the personal/private and social/public experience of exile and womanhood. Remarking on the diary's particular potency for feminine expression, she writes: "cette façon d'exprimer 'marginalelement' la marginalité semble avoir affecté l'évolution de l'expression artistique de la culture des femmes".⁵ In her book Promenade familiale, French literary critic Irma Garcia writes of the intimate, open and autobiographical expression of daily ritual, expressed in the diary and epistolary forms:

Plusieurs points communs apparaissent dans ces deux genres, leur aspect autobiographique, la création d'une intimité écrite, soit avec une personne de connaissance, soit avec soi-même et enfin leur forme ouverte, inachevée, toujours prête à s'allonger, toujours en attente d'une suite calquée sur l'écoulement des jours, sur la vie quotidienne le dernier aspect nous amènera à développer la forme inachevée suspendue de l'écriture féminine.⁶

For Marild, the enunciation of this female voice of exile, constitutes a political act: "Les séquences parlent d'intimité....[m]ais le fond est public: ici, la vie privée devient politique"(72).

Marild feels her personal exile as inner contradiction, emptiness and a lack of identity: "[i]l y a un vide", she says, "quelque chose qui me manque"(124-125). "L'exil", she explains, "c'est se sentir dans...l'incertitude, dans la confusion, sans attache....C'est avoir perdu son identité"(24). Her social exile comes from her geographic

and cultural separation from homeland and community, coupled with the overwhelming differences between the Latin American and French-Canadian cultures. Mallet describes Marilú's homelessness as "la perte de son pays, de sa langue, de sa culture, de ses amis, de la Cordillère des Andes" (24).

Marilú's quest in Journal inachevé also mirrors what the film-maker perceives as Quebec's exile. Mallet explains, "Je mettais dans le film le Québec qui se renferme sur lui, qui se sent opprimé, à la recherche de son identité".⁷ Like the protagonist, Quebec is multicultural, multilingual and heterogeneous: "In a way, I felt like this country", she says.⁸

Recurring memories of the past haunt Marilú's present, raising many of these contradictions which fragment her. Through nostalgic family photos and objects such as a hand-sewn quilt, the camera takes us back to Marilú's past, indicating that Chile was once to her a place of wholeness, safety and warmth. These images, however, are replaced by scenes of violence and murder, showing how the country became painfully fragmented by political strife, death and fear. Mallet uses the repeated clip of a Barbary organ-grinder as a bridge between these two aspects of Marilú's past: he is both a pleasant childhood memory, and an eerie shot of a man seemingly waiting for chaos to break out. The sense of being an outcast in her own home eventually led to Marilú's immigration to Canada.

Originally considering Canada "un lieu de passage", she eventually realizes she needs to have a home and that it must be made in Québec(7): "Au commencement", Marilú says, "je pensais que tout était provisoire, que je n'étais pas ici chez moi et que j'allais bientôt retourner au Chili"(102). "En même temps, je cherchais un endroit d'où je ne serais pas mise à la porte, où tout serait en place pour recommencer à nouveau"(103).

Endeavouring to build new roots out of her emptiness, she first looks to the family home, a space where many women have traditionally found wholeness; "Comme on n'a pas de pays", she tells us, "on s'occupe de la maison, on fait de la décoration, on rénove"(103). While the camera wanders through the unpeopled rooms of her house, the carefully decorated walls and cluttered floors give it a comfortable, "lived in" character. One senses that Marilú's residence is something of an inner sanctuary, reminiscent of Edna's abode, though less closed. While this provides a new structural home, Longfellow notes that it does not offer wholeness; it is a "space only precariously inhabited, never occupied"(192).

Marilú's malaise and inability to "settle in" stem from what she perceives as irreconcilable contradictions raised by her new environment. One of these conflicts occurs between interior and exterior; her impressions of space are coloured by this. On the one hand, her house represents a secure

place of intimacy which cloisters her from the cold, empty Quebec landscape of snow, leafless trees and endless roads. On the other, its four walls suffocate her because she must stay inside to keep warm: "Je m'enferme plusieurs mois chaque année", she says(103).

Winter, seems to render this country devoid of people and life. This sense of being smothered is poignantly exemplified when Michael asks Marild to help him attach translucent insulation to the windows in order to keep the heat from escaping into the Quebec winter:

Marild: Mais Michael, on va pas voir le ciel!

Michael: It will save us a lot of money....[We'll] put [it] on every window.

Marild: On va être complètement enfermés.

Michael: It is only for eight months(114).

This scene also illustrates an enormous opposition between cultural, and, Mallet suggests, socialized gender differences in value. Michael's clear preference for economic over aesthetic concerns, combined with his apparent authority in the matter, help erect the wall which separates interior from exterior, isolating Marild.

At the same time, however, this interiorization provides Marild with an opportunity to look inward for personal wholeness. "Je vis à l'intérieur", she remarks, referring to both her physical and mental existence. Journal inachevé is the outcome of this exploration into "la vie intérieure". Irma Garcia explains the overlap which occurs between a woman's interior and exterior space: "En décrivant l'espace,"

she writes, "la femme exprime sa relation avec le monde qui l'entoure".⁹

Looking inside herself, Marild finds another alienating binary opposition which is also manifest on the social level: individuality versus collectivity. Speaking of Chile she recalls, "il y avait une vie collective"(124). We see a transplantation of this group mentality at Marild's "payas", where Chilean immigrants joke and sing together. While ostensibly such communication offers wholeness and human unity, Mallet points out how it precludes the expression of women's individuality. One cannot help but notice that it is the men who sing at the payas, and that only once does a woman talk; it is Marild's sole female voice which speaks for women, and her "joke" turns out to be about a man who beats his wife, hinting at another form of rendering women speechless.

Women's silence within the dominant collective is also notable in a scene where both Michael and Marild stand against a wall of masks to recount their "curriculum vitae"(105). Michael can efficiently summarize his life, for he has performed deeds which can be socially measured and thus valued. Marild, however, begins with, "Je suis née à Santiago...", and she is cut off -- her Chilean past silenced.¹⁰

Marild's muteness in the film, it must be said, is orchestrated by Mallet. "Tu a dit presque rien...sur

toi...sur la vie personnelle", Michael remarks; "Pourquoi?"(109). Apart from commenting on women's collective silence, this scene reveals that as Mallet's alter-ego, Marild's public self-revelation poses a threat. The film-maker struggles with her fear of vulnerability throughout the film-making process of self-discovery; she is able to face this misgiving at the end of Journal inachevé.

Marild notes that in North America, women have more opportunity to fight their collective silence with individual creativity. "Ici, je me développe", she says; "Je peux être cinéaste..."(124). Her mother, who is also a Canadian immigrant, is able to make forceful if not verbal statements through her lithographs. "The politics" of her art, notes Longfellow, "becomes an act of remembering".¹¹ Her work entitled "Los Cerebros" ("The Brains"), depicts the four military men who took over Chile after the coup, showing the effects of a hierarchical structure of power which divides the world into binary oppositions, easily and confidently overruling the weaker of these dualisms and warping the minds of those in control. "[They] look...like very disturbed brains, mixed up", notes Michael(120). "That's how they are, actually", his mother-in-law replies(120).

Marild's mother is apparently able to balance her own individuality and collectivity, her personal and social existence(120). Marild remarks with some envy: "[un] artiste peut s'enraciner où il vit et ne peut habiter que le lieu de

son travail"(103). While herself an artist, Marilò's incessant focus on binary oppositions precludes wholeness. Comments in her letters reveal that even in Chile her life was not characterized by a balance of these concerns. "Il y a cinq ans....[mes] préoccupations étaient toujours sociales et orientées vers les autres"(23). Her present opposing exploration of individuality worries her: "j'ai changé...[je deviens] plus égoïste"(124). Recurring memories of the past haunt Marilò's present, raising new contradictions. The lively collective life of Chile, for example, provides a striking contrast to the quiet order of Québec. "Au commencement", she tells us, "j'étais étonnée par le calme. Par le silence des gens....J'aurais voulu un peu de chaleur, des bousculades, même de la poussière...[dans] cet endroit bien organisé, bien propre"(102). While she is nostalgic for activity and disorder, the violent extremes of noise and chaos in Chile also make this — Québec calm somewhat attractive.

The irreconcilability of Marilò's past and present further precludes personal and social wholeness. She remarks on the material changes in her life: "j'ai plus de choses [maintenant]...[plus] de richesses matérielles"(124). In her letters, she describes her resultant sense of guilt: "[son] sentiment de culpabilité de doute, d'accepter le bonheur de ce pays riche....de se sentir heureuse dans ce pays où la vie lui semble plus facile"(78, 81).

She remembers the distasteful qualities of the poor Chilean culture of her past, writing in her letters: "[l]es valeurs morales d'une société pauvre sont difficiles à vivre: le 'machisme', la façon indirecte d'entrer en relation, la dépendance économique, le manque d'opportunités, l'avenir incertain, la méchanceté, [et] la violence"(59). While nostalgically clinging to certain aspects of Chile which are dear to her, she admits preferring many of the social values found in Quebec.

Marilú's inner fragmentation also results from the incongruity of the active, political commitment of her past and her comparatively passive present roles of housewife, mother and artist. Michael explains:

I don't think you're so exotic. Not as exotic as you were...when I met you. You were like those Chilean refugees, in the Canadian Embassy and had people shooting at you, and now you're just a housewife with a child(104).

"Mais c'est pas vrai", she answers weakly(104).

Marilú's present life is much more "passive" than her tumultuous youth: her activities now revolve, to a great extent, around home and childcare. Physical and mental emptiness characterize this new role. "Je sens que je perds mon temps, que toute mon imagination s'en va dans les détails de la vie quotidienne(40)....J'ai l'impression de vivre dans un dortoir. J'ai effacé mon individualité".¹² Her mother-in-law's painting of Marilú's wedding was, in fact, a prediction of this loss of identity as a home-maker. Marilú

describes the portrait: "Moi, j'ai un visage étrange. Je n'ai rien d'autre qu'un trou, comme un crâne"(113).

While Marild detests her role of housewife, she is plagued by another contradiction: that this work has always been labelled as "passive" and thus, "considéré comme secondaire". Mallet is concerned with a revaluation of the quotidian, that which, though private and "invisible à l'oeil masculin", defines many womens' experience.¹³ Her film fulfills what Annette Kuhn terms the feminist cinematic aesthetic: "To make visible the invisible".¹⁴ The diary form structures Journal inachevé's intimate portrayal of "la vie quotidienne" for both are "manière[s], non-analytique[s], de montrer l'essentiel"(72, 9, 10). Each depicts that which is essential for women.

"Activity" characterizes Marild's life of the past. Footage of political strife in Chile shows a politically engaged Marild, arms held up against a wall, while off-screen militia presumably hold guns to her. Before 1973, Mallet worked in Chile with the leftist Allende government to help "construire un pays meilleur"(69). The 1973 Coup d'état, however, destroyed her political dreams: "elle en avait tiré un sentiment d'échec...de quelqu'un qui a perdu une guerre", and she came to Canada(24). Marild's letters reveal the sense of guilt and fragmentation which arise from her present sense of inactivity: "Je me sens très coupable....je pense que je n'ai pas fait assez....J'ai été

comme trop passive"(123). "Je sens que je ne participe pas à la société ici", she admits(124).

Trying to unite her politically active past with her "passive" present, she becomes engaged in the struggles of Quebec immigrants, also in social exile. She makes a film about the exploitation of immigrant women factory workers, also trying to help Salvador, an illegal refugee, about to be deported back to Chile. In one sequence, they discuss his problem while he sweeps the floors of a shopping mall (the second of his two jobs). After the conversation comes to a close, Marild and Nicolas window shop. The disparity between her privileged entrenchment as wealthy professional and Salvador's poverty-stricken desperation is rendered doubly striking considering the fact that Mallet's first Canadian job was as an architect, designing mall boutiques much like this one(51).

Marild's political attempts to unite passivity and activity are apparently unsuccessful; she lies in bed confessing her guilt and sense of fragmentation to Michael (he on top of the covers with a drink, and she protected on the interior, inside the sheets). "Je me rends compte que chaque jour je suis en train de devenir un peu indifférente", she tells him. "Je pense à moi...je me dépolitise"(124).

While these binary opposites of passivity and activity, interior and exterior and past and present divide Marild, the film's exploration of her resultant sense of exile and quest

for "home" leads to a questioning of those dualisms. This debate underlies Marild and Michael's marital relationship.

Michael's role in the film is one of espousing, through his words and actions, patriarchal and puritan values. According to Mallet, such attitudes lead to negative ends: "[une] notion d'efficacité qui provoque le stress et tue l'amour"(78).

These beliefs, while confirmed and mirrored in the world around her, conflict with her own feelings. While she mildly queries Michael's attitudes throughout the film, one senses this is partially due to her jealousy of the strength, confidence and apparent wholeness which he seems to gain from his convictions. He is, as critic Fulvio Caccia points out, "un modèle si tentant à imiter".¹⁵ In her letters, Marild explains that "[e]lle voudrait que Michael partage...[son sentiment de] culpabilité, mais il ne peut pas et ne veut pas"(81).

Marild's interrogation of masculinist Western values centres around the divisions they cause between the social and personal milieux and the lack of wholeness which results. She notes, for example, the effect that work can have on intimate relationships and the body:

Marild: Tu travailles trop, Mike....You shouldn't exploit so much your body.

Michael: But that's how I've always been....The only way I get things done...is to work very hard.

Marild: Mais tu es devenu presque inhumain. On se voit jamais.(114)

Michael: What do you mean, we travel in the car every day....(128) Work is life.

Marild: Tu es trop puritain Mike....

Michael: I don't think it's puritan at all, it's important(114-115).

This opposition of "masculine" and "feminine" principles becomes even more clear as Marild asks Michael: "Pourquoi tu es tellement rationnel, tellement pragmatique"(119)? He answers, "Because I want to be....Because I believe in rationalism. Life without rationality is chaos...confusion...and disorder"(119). Michael's words here, are reminiscent of Edna's -- the obsession with order and the fear that without clear divisions between the rational and the body, work and love, chaos will result.

Unable to vicariously gain wholeness through her husband, Marild asks him: "Pourquoi tu es tellement sûr de toi-même? J'ai toujours pensé que des gens sûrs comme toi avaient colonisé tout le monde....'Without doubts'"(129). His answer, "I have doubts but you have to function", reflects his refusal to question these norms(129).

This fear of colonization and its associated powers also applies to Canada's "société d'abondance" and its apparent Americanization (5). Marild seems aware of the radio jingles which boast, "Cracker Jack, America's favorite snack", while they pass unnoticed by Canadians, ironically inferring that this country, too, is exiled within its own borders. Marild's malaise in Québec is contrasted to Nicolas' ease and speedy cultural integration as he watches American television, is read Babar, goes to America, and insists on

eating with plastic cutlery: "il aime toutes les choses en plastique, Nicolas"(110). What seems natural to Nicolas is artificial for Marilú: "C'est tout artificiel!", she exclaims, as the camera explores his room, "[de] la lumière artificielle...des émotions, artificielles...des jouets artificiels"(119). Her Chilean past acts as the standard against which her new world is measured.

While these differences between Marilú and her son disturb her, she deliberately planned them so that he would not feel the same cultural and linguistic exile. With his mother he speaks French, while with his father, English. Nicolas speaks no Spanish. The same linguistic splintering symbolizes Marilú's broken marriage: she speaks to her husband in French while he responds in English. Her reflection on Nicolas' changing personality according to the language he speaks is, in fact, a confession of her own attitudes towards the languages which symbolize her cultural and marital exile: "En français, il a l'air d'un tout petit enfant doux et chaleureux....En anglais, il a l'air plus rationnel et violent"(48).

The success of building Nicolas' cultural roots in Quebec is questionable, however. Asked where he was born, he answers, "I don't know", and at nursery school he demands, "Appelle-moi Nicolas Thériault", inferring a desire to become Québécois(118, 111). Wondering about her son's roots, Marilu ponders, "Quelquefois je me demande à quoi s'enracinera

Nicolas"(103). Michael's view is that Nicolas is, at least, "better integrated than you or I"(139); "This is his country at the moment"(139).

Marilù's obsession with Nicolas' lack of roots, her desire that he not be "[u]n étranger à l'étranger" and her fear that he will become "égoïste" and indifférent", as she feels she has become, are, in fact, symbolic of her own deep sense of exile (59, 124). Her own son represents an incarnation of all that estranges her. When Michael announces: "And now we are probably going to get...[a] divorce"(138), Marilù wonders, "Mais comment est-ce-qu'on va le partager [Nicolas] si on a des idées tellement différentes?"(138). "Life", her husband answers, "is full of people who get together for the wrong reasons and who have different cultures and they can't relate to each other, and they create children"(138-139). As the product of a failed joining of two cultures, Nicolas is a bitter-sweet model of integration. As a symbol of wholeness, the hope he offers is dubious.

Perhaps the seeming impossibility of personal and social unity as well as the difficult establishment of a home in this space of exile are partially due to Marilù's monolithic perception of culture and "home", where differences must be eradicated. "Etre enracinée", she explains, "[c'est] avoir une culture et une manière de vivre....[c'est de] se sentir chez soi"(103, emphasis added).

Because the difference between Latin American and Québécois cultures is so pronounced, reconciliation of the two seems impossible. Marilú assumes that she must renounce her culture and take on a new one. Her letters elaborate on this idea: "Il me faut tout oublier", she writes; "[J]e me suis dis que je suis maintenant Québécoise qui doit assumer sa nouvelle société"(56). The failure of her attempted homogeneity is made clear by the contradiction which plagues her; on the one hand she claims, "je me suis intégrée...je travaille en français....", and on the other, "Je veux m'enraciner, je veux m'attacher au pays", indicating her nagging sense of homelessness(131). Michael points out her inconsistency, exclaiming, "Then let's not have any of this bullshit about 'exile'"(132).

The consistent, divisive pressure of exile and binary oppositions rises to a crescendo in Marilú and finally explodes during the cathartic moment of the film, causing a radical reversal in her perception. This moment, which Longfellow characterizes as a state of "heightened schizophrenia", is a spontaneous scenario which occurs in the couple's kitchen.¹⁶ It is provoked by Michael, possibly to bring some of these contradictions to the fore. This turning point has three crucial effects for the combined journeys of Marilú and Mallet. First, it breaks down the barrier set up between the author and her "fictional" character. Second, Mallet is forced to admit that she imposes many of the binary

divisions of exile on herself; that her inability to find wholeness of the personal and social realms is due, in great degree, to her exteriorization of the problem -- to her blaming of it on everything outside of herself. And third, it forces her to realize and claim her film as a model of wholeness respectful of contradiction.

Marilù and Michael's argument in the kitchen initially focuses on differences between their film-making techniques, the notion of "Truth", and the definition of "the real":

Michael: I don't understand really what you are trying to do with this film.

Marilù: Mais toi, tu penses que ta façon de faire les films c'est la façon de faire les films. Moi, je fais un film comme je veux.

Michael: No, I think there...[are] many ways to do films, but you have to catch the real thing that happens....And if you're not going to do that, I think....you have to have a story, a plot, conflict, characters....(132-133).

Michael's acceptance, comfort and sense of being "at home" within the prescribed norms of film technique are contrasted with Marilù's sense of exile outside of these parameters and her insistence on changing them.¹⁷ Her film cannot fit into any of these rigid cinematic categories because it is a study of ^owoman's plurality. Michael's prodding forces Marilù to stand up and proclaim the validity of the heterogeneity her film exhibits:

Marilù: [C]'est ma vérité, c'est ma façon de faire un film....c'est ma culture, je veux m'exprimer comme je veux. Je ne veux pas me faire imposer ton regard et puis ton style(133).

On a passé des années à...m'imposer une façon de vivre(135). Pourquoi il faut définir la vérité...[pourquoi faut-il définir] un film: "c'est

du documentaire ou c'est de la fiction",
pourquoi(136)?

This declaration prompts Marild to question the monolithic conception of wholeness she has held onto. Calling for a concept of heterogeneity which deconstructs the barrier dividing documentary and fiction, Mallet strives for "un nouveau langage cinématographique"(11). This deconstruction of cinematic conventions, challenges Marild to erase other barriers which fragment her life. Michael is quick to point out the most threatening of these divisions: that which Mallet has set up between her own subjective reality and its more objective representation in the film:

You don't want to talk about...what is happening to us...[in] the movie...that is a product of exile, the product of two cultures who can't live together....You marry the wrong person....That's exile. That's the truth....That's what should be in the film....but you don't want to put that in(136-137).

"No I don't", Marild answers(137). Why does she not want to explore the exile of her own marriage in the film?, Michael demands; "Because it's too true", he answers rhetorically(137). "Yes", she acquiesces(137).

Marild's conception of exile is more ambiguous than Michael's unified, focused conception. Hers is a multiplicitous exploration which works from the margins; she encircles the centre, but does not become engaged in it. By focusing on the exterior, her interpretation of exile is one of social oppression of the margins by the centre. She does not explore the interior causes of exile and realize that her

homelessness is also personally imposed and consequently that she has the "power to" change it.

If the purpose of the film is, in part, to provide a step in the process of unifying binary oppositions which divide personal and social life, this barrier between interior-subjective and exterior-objective must be resolved. While the movie has been intimate in tone -- what Mallet calls "un éloignement de l'objectivité" -- we have only become intimate with the character of Marilú. Mallet writes of this barrier erected between subjectivity and objectivity: "L'idée que j'avais, c'était de reconstruire dans un film, certaines sensations que je sentais à l'époque(75)....Au début...je ne pensais pas du tout m'impliquer en images moi-même....je construisais mon personnage comme dans un film de fiction"(76, 77). These binary divisions between subjective and objective, real and imaginary, are, however, broken during the kitchen scene. This "catharsis du personnage principal" exposes what Mallet recognizes as "le 'vrai drame' caché"(77). Longfellow describes this moment as "a gap...opened up...by her expression of emotional vulnerability, a gap that illuminates a real beyond the imaginary of the film".¹⁸ This real also touches the spectator; as Ina Warren notes in her review: "Journal inachevé is not an easy film to watch -- it cuts a little too close to the self-doubts of real life".¹⁹

The imaginary Marilú suddenly becomes the real Mallet and

the impasse is broken. Longfellow notes that in the kitchen scene, "the director appears to lose control over her object, the representation of her image"(197). As Michael questions her, she begins to cry, saying: "I hate those things [the truth about their marriage]. "I'm not capable to be in the film, in a film that I have to show myself"(137).

Marild's surrender to tears coincides with a yielding to the English language -- one of the opposites against which she has pitted herself. Rather than symbolize her submission to what she has set up as a greater, oppressive power and its "Truth", the words she speaks, despite her tears, are strong, self-assertive ones which insist upon her difference. Asked by Michael why she is making a film about herself if she doesn't want to become personally implicated she replies, "Because I want to do it my way, I want to show the things in the way I want"(137).

The use of English to explain her desires implies that Marild/Mallet realize the importance of communication between opposite points of view. "Why do you ask my opinion"?, Michael demands(133). "[P]arce que finalement tu es mon mari...tu es cinéaste, parce qu'on a toujours échangé", Marild replies(134). This communicative stance infers that she is finally able to admit that both seemingly dualistic realities can carry value and that each offers insight into the other. Her vulnerability represents the first crumbling of the wall of binary oppositions she has erected between her

own and Michael's differences as well as those within herself.

Within the film's diegesis, however, there is no wholeness which comes of opposites. Marilù and Michael decide to divorce, suggesting a resignation to irreconcilable differences. The dualisms which Marilù struggles with throughout the film, also remain unresolved. Mallet's own quest for personal and social wholeness, however, demonstrates a more optimistic end than Marilù's, one which is an opening, a new beginning. One assumes that Mallet's quest continued after the shooting of Journal inachevé and that she later came to terms with some of the binary oppositions which fragmented Marilù. The very decision to include this break down sequence in the film, despite her insistence that she is incapable of self-revelation, indicates that Mallet has let go some of the fears and barriers which divide interior from exterior, public from private. She admits that such self-revelation is "pénible", but inevitable: "un artiste 's'expose' toujours, non"?²⁰ "Journal inachevé", she writes, "à sans doute été l'expérience la plus dure que j'ai vécue sur le plan créatif et professionnel, mais la plus riche du point de vue humain".²¹ She insists that Journal inachevé is not "un film tragique", but that it documents "l'enthousiasme de recommencer à zéro"(79).

The successful perception of wholeness within

heterogeneity is evidenced in Mallet's film technique. By deconstructing traditional cinematic practices and blurring the divisions between the dualisms of documentary and fiction, subjectivity and objectivity, the real and the imaginary, she demonstrates how each aspect is an incomplete part of the whole and how differences can inform one another in a creative manner.

Many of these deconstructive film techniques are typical of feminist and counter-cinema techniques. Mallet explains the crossover between fiction and documentary which occurs in Journal inachevé:

Je voulais construire une fiction avec du documentaire -- du documentaire au sens où les personnages sont des personnes réelles, de la fiction par la construction et le traitement(75)...des mises en situation à partir de situations vraies(12)....Dans ce film, fiction et réalité se mêlent intimement: dans ce sens que la fiction n'est pas tellement éloignée de la réalité, elle se nourrit du quotidien"(12).

"Truth", for Mallet, comes out of the relationship between the real and the imaginary. She forces the spectator also to question these traditional divisions by putting the authority of her apparent autobiography into question, using fictional techniques such as the stilted linguistic communication between herself and Michael.

By privileging a subjective, female enunciating voice in a partially documentary film, Mallet throws into question the façade of Truth usually accorded this genre. The poetic tone of the voice-over is very different from that of the National

Film Board's traditional commanding narrator, for example. Her insistence on expressing a feminine, subjective view of reality asserts that the status of Truth cannot be accorded a single discourse; rather, that many perspectives must be recognized as important parts of the whole.

The combination of fiction and documentary also implies a movement away from the objective facade of film towards a more subjective union of the real and the imaginary. Mallet writes: "La subjectivité est par soi-même un travail d'interprétation des faits, ça veut dire d'invention. Le matériel filmé réel est devant nous, mais il faut le transformer en quelque chose d'autre qui fait le subjectif est une oeuvre de fiction"(76).⁴

She explains how the film's subjectivity is meant to be felt by the spectator, implying a desire for active observation -- another feminist/counter-cinematic practice. "La différence est dans l'approche; dans mon film...il s'agit moins de montrer et de dire (ou de faire dire) que de faire sentir".²² While Marilù's exile can be perceived, the film's fragmented cinematic address precludes suture and its associated problems of closure, resolution and passive spectatorship.

This interest in combining fiction and documentary, the real and the imaginary, and subjective and objective challenges dominant cinematic conventions and patriarchal definitions of wholeness. By exploring the multiplicitous

character of women's lives, the patriarchal model of focused, homogeneous existence is thrown into question. She notes:

Le discours masculin accorde peu d'importance à la vie quotidienne et à son manque de cohérence, tandis que le regard des femmes déstabilise ce discours en sélectionnant un geste révélateur qui contredit le geste le plus apparent.²³

Mallet stresses the importance of heterogeneity, both for her film and for society. "Pourquoi continuer à vouloir que la société soit homogène?", she asks.²⁴ "[M]on film, Journal inachevé, est une recherche dans ce sens: ouvrir une tradition de la différence".²⁵ Mallet's statement infers that she has found personal and social wholeness which can co-exist with differences.

Contradiction, she realizes, can provide creative inspiration rather than be purely negative: "Vous savez que les artistes sont masochistes", says Mallet in an interview; "en même temps qu'ils se plaignent d'être exilés ils se nourrissent de cette situation d'exil. Sans cette contradiction on ne pourrait pas créer".²⁶

Like many feminist films, Journal inachevé resists the fixed and ordered parameters of closure. The film is an "unfinished diary", one part of Mallet's continuing journey towards wholeness. The work is an exploratory voicing of women's subjectivity, where the narrative renders the personal political, and where the pain and vulnerability associated with publicizing private experience renders the

political personal. Mallet's struggle and journey towards wholeness represents a moment in her evolutionary quest--one which resonates with the lives of many women.

ENDNOTES TO CHAPTER TWO

1. Marilù Mallet, "Journal intime filmé," M.A. Diss. University of Montreal, 1985, p. 69. All further references to this work appear in the text.
2. Brenda Longfellow, "Feminist Language in Journal inachevé and Strass Café," in Words and Moving Images: Essays on Verbal and Visual Expression in Film and Television, ed. William C. Wees and Michael Dorland (Montreal: Canadian Film Studies L, 1984), p. 87.
3. Louise Carrière, Femmes et cinéma québécois (Montreal: Boréal Express, 1983), p. 271.
4. Longfellow, p. 88.
5. Carrière, p. 262.
6. Irma Garcia, Promenade femmillière (Paris: Editions des femmes, 1981), p. 152.
7. Jean Royer, "Marilù Mallet: 'Pourquoi, en 1983, continuer à vouloir que la société québécoise soit homogène?'," Le Devoir, 12 Feb. 1983, p. 32.
8. Ina Warren, "Chilean Native's Introspective Film Praised," Peterborough Examiner, 24 Feb. 1983.
9. Garcia, p. 292.
10. Marilù Mallet, dir., Journal inachevé, Les films de l'Atalante; Société Radio Canada, Cinéma Libre, 1982. Dialogue omitted from transcript. Found on reel 1, scene 51.
11. Longfellow, p. 88.
12. Mallet, Journal inachevé. Dialogue omitted from transcript. Found on reel 1, scene 37.
13. Carrière, p. 262.
14. Annette Kuhn, Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 69.
15. Fulvio Caccia, "Malle, Mallet, Wenders et le Super 8," Virus, Feb. 1983, p. 177.

16. Longfellow, p. 89.

17. The distinction between the character of Michael and film-maker Rubbo also becomes clear in this scene. While the fictive Michael's acceptance of traditional cinematic norms stands as a model which Mallet attempts to deconstruct, his work, in reality, is also characterized by heterogeneity as he constantly intervenes in the film's diegesis.

18. Longfellow, p. 89.

19. Ina Warren, n.p.

20. Marild Mallet, "Notes sur Journal inachevé," in Femmes et cinéma québécois, p. 265.

21. Mallet, "Notes sur Journal inachevé, p. 266.

22. Michel Euvrard, "Marild Mallet s'entretient avec Michel Euvrard," in "Journal intime filmé," p. 170.

23. Mallet, "Notes sur Journal inachevé, p. 263.

24. Royer, p. 32.

25. Royer, p. 32.

26. Royer, p. 17.

CHAPTER THREE

JUDITH: SEARCHING BEYOND WHAT MEETS THE "I"

"Aritha Van Herk's novel Judith follows the journey of a twenty-three-year-old woman whose personal, social and spiritual quests lead her to a pig farm in Alberta! It is there that Judith Pierce is able to grapple with and finally reject the "feminine" role expectations of her past. Unlike Edna, who chooses to remain in isolated retreat, Judith's solitude and union with nature represent a temporary stage of her journey, allowing her to redefine herself and to begin the trek towards personal wholeness in adulthood. Consequently able to re-enter the social world, she integrates her now more balanced self back into it, shifting some of the elements of its hierarchy in the process. The sense of wholeness experienced in the personal and social realms develops simultaneously with her spiritual quest; and the three journeys interrelate to form a more global whole.

The novel traces Judith's journey to selfhood while on her pig farm, but through a series of flashbacks woven into the text, we learn about her country childhood and about her young womanhood as a city secretary. Because these experiences are indistinguishable parts of the protagonist, Van Herk does not establish temporal borders between them, using only the names "Judy" and "Judith" to differentiate

youth from adult.

The success of Judith's quest forward depends on her reminiscent journey into the past. Van Herk's narrative charts Judith's present story on the pig farm, as she searches for personal, social and spiritual wholeness. Within the narrative, however, Judith recalls her childhood in the country and young womanhood in the city. We learn of the malaise surrounding these experiences, the steps which lead to her eventual rejection of them, and the reasons behind her final return to the country -- her last desperate hope of finding wholeness. An initial examination of Judith's journey through the past will inform our subsequent analysis of her quest in the present.

Desire for the joy she felt as a child in the country is the force which lures Judith back to the pig farm. She knows only that at one time, she indeed felt whole:

In the lithe energy of her childhood, she remembered dancing, hopping, skipping, mother and father on either side, a hand in each of theirs and her small body like a charged wire, feeling the strength in herself flowing from them. She was the vibration between their steadier feet, their joining.¹

Matrixed there, she was the center of the world.
(37).

In many ways, Judith's childhood sense of bonding between her parents is a "joining" of the masculine and the feminine they symbolize. She quests for this unity of self as an adult.

As role models, Judith's parents are fairly traditional--
- "her mother's world: the stove, the sewing machine, the

washer", her father's: the barn, the town and the outdoors(53). A not unkind woman, Mrs. Pierce is not, however, overly warm as she efficiently carries out what she considers the daily duties of marital partnership.

Conversely, Judith's relationship with her father is extremely close; he plays a very influential role in her perception of self and world. He expects her to perform the physically demanding work a farm boy would do. She responds, "crying with rage at his demands, his blindness to her inability to lift and carry, to swing like a muscular boy. But [she] never told him...[she] always tried, as stolid and stubborn as he was"(67). In the Pierce family, physical and emotional fortitude are regarded as desirable traits for both men and women. Despite the clarity of this message, it is contradicted by the nature of Judith's father's love for her. The passionate strength of his adoration gives his daughter a sense of self-value, yet at the same time, its highly protective nature develops her enjoyment of submission:

[T]hey stood together almost lovers in the pale light of the morning...he carried her on his shoulders. You are my little girl, my only little girl, this is all for you...you won't go away from daddy and the farm, I will always take care of you....and she felt his shoulders under the heat of her legs, thick and strong and warm, and before he put her down he hugged her against him, her body tight and close to his chest, her bones almost crushed in his arms(110, 152, 151).

The desire to be overpowered by love is a recurring theme throughout Judith's story.

The close union between Judith and her father poses three

crucial problems for the her transition from childhood to adulthood. First, her father is elevated to an "all-knowing", god-like status in her mind(116). Her desire for an equivalent man leads Judith on a constant but impossible search for "her father or her non-existent, never-existed lover"(174). Second, their inseparable attachment assures that she will always remain a child -- her father's haunting judgments are a barrier to her uninhibited expression of self. "[He] was the last-minute resource that she held just under the surface; it was her father that stood in black relief against the winter, against her desire(118). Third, Judith's impossible quest to fuse strength and weakness according to her father's expectations is doomed from the outset. She is caught in that curious Western women's paradox: masculine power is praised yet weakness in the feminine sex is loved.

Trapped by these irreconcilable contradictions, it is no surprise that Judith decides the country life of her youth cannot offer her a satisfactory solution. Here, she finds insecure men like Norman who "botch" her with their "stupid fingers"(98). Despite her greater strength she feigns feminine weakness in order to be loved, watching the consequent transformation of the male ego "what he convinced himself was his triumph overrunning his apprehension....his lips were tilted in a smile of possession....she even let him believe it"(99). In the country, "all the women are

housewives and all the men are country louts....Every day is the same. I hate it, I hate it", Judith shouts. "I want to do things, can't you understand?"(84). Her quest for the adult synthesis of these contradictions leads her to an urban milieu.

In the city, Judith finds only greater disparity between men and women, strength and weakness, and the masculine and feminine principles. Both the city's gender-based roles and its hierarchical structure coax her to sabotage the strength she seeks. At the same time, her sexual arousal from submission entraps her. A classic union of the roles of the strong, capable woman who enjoys little status and the passive, female object of male desire is found in the secretary having an affair with her employer. Judith's journey inevitably leads her to a similar dilemma and she becomes engaged in a sexual liaison with her employer.

Judith belittles her job as "just a secretary"(19). Judging herself as she believes her father would, she feels like a mindless machine of painted "feminine" appendages:

[S]he lit another [cigarette] and saw herself, a picture through her father's eyes: cigarette, blue eye-shadow, fingernails long and glossy with scarlet polish. She cringed, huddled lower on her typist's stool...But you don't have to see to type. Just keep the fingers moving...automatically.... A good secretary can...keep going(80).

Judith feels abhorrence for her co-workers: the lazy "pear-shaped women who grew from chairs behind desks"(45). Her admission that "she knew herself [to] be one of them" is, in

truth, a confession of self-hatred(54). Such weakness is, she asserts, "undeserving" of her father's love.

As a secretary, Judith wields little power compared to her male superior. The hierarchical relationship of men to women, so prevalent in the business milieu, is not only corrosive of female self-worth, but also erodes female solidarity. Judith remarks with wonderment: "there was never more than one woman in the bathroom at a time, never any talk....There must be some rule she didn't know, one at a time, no socializing in the bathroom, no fraternizing with colleagues"(103-104).²

Judith's servile role of secretary extends beyond her employer's casual, "would you mind finishing these up before you go tonight Judith?"(20). This man, (who remains unnamed in Judith's present narrative in an attempt to finally disempower him), also becomes her lover. The hierarchy of power established between them in their employer/employee relationship also extends into the bedroom. This transfer of power patterns from the public to the private realm backs up the feminist credo "the personal is political".

In the face of overwhelming male control in the city, Judith finds herself not only weakened, but perceived as a material object:

[H]is eyes on her naked back, the same insatiable hunger, so masculine, that instant desire, she wanted to clutch his arm, insist that she was different from the lines of the car [they looked at]...."You're not giving me this car," she said flatly...."Well my dear." He leaned toward her, turned her face to his

and touched her lips. "You're wrong because, you see, you have no choice"....

So smoothly, so effortlessly, he had amalgamated them, her and the car, the car and the woman(39-40).

Rather than describing Judith's manipulation of men, as critic George Dretzsky has claimed, this scene depicts her manipulation by men.³ Subtle male control over co-operating women is complexly interwoven into culture. Suttee, infibulation, clitorodectomy, and severe dieting (sometimes to the point of anorexia nervosa) are practices which women often "willingly" inflict upon themselves.⁴

Western women's use of makeup is a less violent, more insidious form of this kind of patriarchal control:

[P]lucking her sleek eyebrows, rolling her straight hair into curls, thrusting golden posts through holes in her ears. [She] Did all that and then resented his acceptance of it as his due, his casual, "You look lovely tonight, Judith"...his careful honing of her salient features into his special mold(166).

At the same time as she practices these rituals, Judith senses the sublimation of her identity in them.⁵

This simultaneously willing and protested act of "body-marking" mirrors Judith's contradictory relationship with power; while detesting her weakness, she associates love with "voluptuous attack"(97):

His hand touched her neck under her hair, gently moved her toward him...Suddenly afraid, she fought against him in fierce but ineffectual silence. And then he was savage, bent her back and back in his persistence until she crumpled and fell, jarring against his desk. His hands like his words, so blunt and direct. The rough surface of the carpet chafed

under her naked legs and then she could no longer hold her resistance but joined him in the chill heat created by the afternoon(65).

Frustration and anger follow arousal since, in her amorous relationships, she always subsumes her own power in insecurity; as a result, she finds men gain self-confidence from their superiority over her. "When are you damned men going to stop being ~~so~~ egotistical?", she shouts at her lover. "I don't suppose the idea has entered your head that if I hadn't wanted to be seduced, I wouldn't have let you"(73). Judith's brief anger, however, soon ebbs to uncertainty and the balance of power remains intact. This dubious façade of female strength is the only possible response considering her dichotomous relationship with power. The result of uncertainty and the suppression of power is, as with Edna, repressed anger: "Maybe that was where her resentment began, his fierce control in the face of her confusion"(129).

In her theoretical writing, Van Herk questions the justness of a world view which orchestrates such a hierarchical relationship between women and power. She asks:

Must all experiences fit into the rhythms of dominant and subordinate clauses patterned after the ordered and hierarchical world? As a woman, I know that mine does not...[This represents] a masculine world view that masquerades as a world view for women and men.⁶

Judith shares this questioning of the patriarchal order. Seeing the decay this impossible struggle wreaks on her body, it is, ironically, hatred of her present state of weakness,

combined with the desire to please her father, which lead her out of the urban prison of patriarchal order. "Looking at her midriff, [she saw] the slight bulge appearing at her waist. Turning into a blob....Already the lethargy was settling on her bones, heavy and unwieldy"(112, 113). She holds one last hope that the physical and emotional strength, wholeness and value she experienced as a child in the country might be regained -- that she might find "the implacable truth she was looking for"(116).

This marks the beginning of Judith's narrative journey into the country. "Nothing, she wanted nothing left" of her city life(41). Embarking on a new, unknown and fearful path, she is lost and unaware of why she stands at these crossroads. Despite her bewilderment, she feels there is no choice but to return to the country in a last attempt to find wholeness(89).

'It's as if something else made me do it [move back to the country]. I didn't really want to, but I had to'(89).

Humorless she was, with that piled-up heap of expectations and that determination to recreate her lost chance even while she hated it(114).

This disillusionment with the city occurs simultaneously with the death of her elderly parents in a car accident. Before their death, Judith had refused to move back to the family farm, and they had thus been forced to sell it. By her refusal, she had hoped to gain adult independence and a sense of self. This did not occur and while she is reconsidering,

her parents are killed. She is left feeling she has failed her father and, to a lesser extent, her mother. The impetus behind her move back to the country, then, is not only a search for self but an attempt at redeeming her father's love. It is not until the end of the novel that she understands that:

It all pivoted back to her father, guilt and desire....And she did it alone [moving back to the country]. For him and without him....It mattered little whether he was alive or dead, she had to show him that she would hold herself for him, her father" (169).

The desire which drives Judith's own journey is inextricably bound up in her relationship with her father.

While some critics have interpreted Judith's "desire" for her father as indicative of an Electra complex, they perhaps have misunderstood Van Herk's use of the term.⁷ For the author, desire is not only sexual but also defined as a powerful driving force which leads one through the cyclical and aleatory journey of life. She writes:

Desire moves us forward, incites change, asks for more. It is desire that refuses to believe that the world is finished and complete, desire that stretches romanticism, defies history, transforms detail, perplexes tradition, and welcomes freedom. The true measure of human beings is not what they know, but what they strive to attain despite its inaccessibility. And yet, it is not the result that is important, for when one goal is reached, there will be another. What is important is the striving, prompted by desire (38).

Judith's quest is characterized by such striving, witnessed in several steps throughout the novel.

Judith first begins to explore the personal and spiritual

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aspects of her new life on the pig farm. The initial development of these realms involves not only a rejection of the city, but also of society in general. She notes with surprise one day, "God. I've been here for three weeks without seeing a soul"(10). When finally able to face other people and go into town, she realizes that she has gained long-forgotten strength from her solitude:

And there, in the middle of that farmer's town, she felt a sudden surge of self-reliance, a small spurt of self-respect that gave her an instant and brilliant hope. So that she could afford to ignore them, the people around her; she had herself and that was enough(43).

Her introversion involves even remaining silent and aloof to her pigs. "They moved in a silence with her; she never spoke to them, reserving her words to herself"(31).

By pulling inside herself, Judith becomes even more aware of her body. For many women, the body acts as a grounding, constant core of reality and human experience. Her body mirrors the inner transformation which occurs during her quest. Van Herk describes the changes in Judith's hair, feet and, particularly, her hands. She contrasts the "city femininity" of "hands soft and white, nails long and painted...helpless, weak and injured" with country hands which struggle to carry out their new, physically demanding jobs(103):

Those narrow white hands with jagged nails and battered knuckles straining at the handles of feed pails, grasping the shovel and pitchfork, antagonistic. So defenseless and weak while attacking so much(34).

The important role which hands play in reflecting identity is also found in the description of Harry and Edna's hands in Dancing in the Dark .

Judith's decision to farm represents a rejection of the despised femininity which has so disempowered her. She works to develop within herself what she considers to be a more "masculine" strength, in an attempt to subvert her own "femininity". "Small, slight [and] ineffectual" at first, there soon remains no trace of her previous "feminine" grace(11):

Walking down the aisle the length of the barn, she felt herself disjointed and awkward. Clumsily she heaved against the wind to shove open the back door....She thrust a stone against the door to hold it open(1, emphasis added).

During this stage of her journey, Judith attempts a reversal of the stereotyped gender traits within herself. Her initial challenge of the patriarchal hierarchy is an ~~incomplete~~ one, for she simply inserts a woman into the masculine role of farmer.⁸

This physical awkwardness is paralleled by the sense that she is a foreigner in her home. As with Edna and Marilu, Judith's sense of self is closely tied to her house: "the yellow painted kitchen was still and hollow...[apart from her bedroom] The rest of the house was separate and with no knowledge of her"(5, 6).

Contrasting with the coldness of Judith's house is the welcoming warmth of the barn. Like the grounding nature of

the body, the "animal constancy" of her pigs offers her "the security of sameness"(159, 114). Her daily ritual of work becomes a "systematic and deliberate liturgy, an ordering of her time and body. She was as contingent on them as they were on her"(121). This awareness of the interdependence of ~~humanity~~ and nature is a startling change for Judith; rather than perceiving the universe in terms of a competition between strong and weak, as she once did, she now sees the dynamic and systemic interplay of a whole.

This communion with nature contrasts with the masculinist tendency to separate Man from nature -- to lord over "her". While avoiding the trap of biological determinism and claiming that men have somehow less natural functions than do women, critics such as Annis Pratt have nonetheless noted that a preponderant theme in women's fiction is nature as a source of personal and spiritual renewal.⁹ This is certainly the case in Judith.

It is ironic that despite Judith's rejection of the feminine in herself, she is drawn to the female nature of her pigs. This characterizes the next development in her journey. "She was whole here [in the barn], a part of their tumescent sanctuary of female warmth"(48). She names her pigs after powerful women and goddesses: "Marie Antoinette Josephine Daisy Emily Circe Venus..." and later, Mina and Judith(148).

Judith's resonance with her sows becomes a soothing

ritual, drawing her out of introspection and encouraging communication. When she breaks her long silence, the pigs notice with surprise:

[She] had words, a voice(73)!

After all, she had never spoken in the barn before, except for that one word last night. And now suddenly here she was talking and laughing -- almost dancing in the aisle(69).

Experiencing a "oneness" with her pigs, she not only personifies and projects herself onto them, but their animal sensuality becomes a part of her:

And she delighted now in the scent of her own purity(146).

[An] odour of skin and sweat and hair and body...an animal's emanation, clear and bitter(145).

She shrugged into jeans and sweater as if they were a skin or a pelt, an extension of her alive and breathing skin, unsullied. And she extended it to her pigs, her hands stroking their rough hides, her words like music in their huge, pointed ears(146).

Communication with her sows promotes the simultaneous healing and opening up of Judith's body and soul:

Layer by layer she shed the accumulation of those years, the thickness between herself and her surface growing smaller and smaller each day until she could feel through her skin the push of bones, their angular fragility. And she lost her stiffness, the jerky awareness that had carved her movements for so long, fluid and shapely she slid around the pigs, moved between them like a sorceress(146-147).

Van Herk comments on the important role which the sows play in the novel:

With the animals I tried to push the Circe myth to its furthest limit: instead of having them as being enchanted by an enchantress, they become the

powerful, . they become the mysterious and mystical. They become the catalyst for the woman's development.¹⁰

Gaining spiritual power from this metamorphosis, Judith experiences a new kind of "femininity" -- one which, like that of a sorceress, is strong and self-confident. This is radically different from the male-defined conception of womanhood she has tried to emulate up until now.

Having attained some potency from her personal and spiritual quests, she becomes aware of the need for human contact. This marks the beginning of her social quest. The pigs are aware of a change in her:

In her hurry they sensed an eagerness for something they did not have and could not give to her. Instinctively they knew that she would go to other humans tonight...there was a subtle excitement in her quick movements that transmitted itself to them and pleased them(49).

On the first part of her social quest, Judith meets Mina, a role model who combines characteristics of the feminine principle with strength. This woman does not, however, embody the traditional femininity which restricted Judith's mother in her home: "[Mina] moved as if she were the only woman in the house yet free from it"(52)...She is "quiet and unassumingly direct"; Judith is amazed at her "openness" and apparent "invulnerability"(54, 90).

Mina embraces the multiplicity within herself as part of the dynamic, changing nature of life. "I always contradict myself", she says; "it's my way of figuring things out"(93). She validates Judith's sense of interdependence with nature

by expressing a similarly holistic view of the world, in which each tiny entity affects the whole. She says, "Well, reading books has convinced me that even the smallest thing I do is important"(91). When Judith embraces Mina, "the two of them caught together in the incantation of their joining", a whole new spiritual path opens. Mina offers a powerful model for revalued femininity and a sense of integration with the world(94).

This spiritual "joining" with Mina, coupled with the Judith's growing sensuality and need for relationship, opens her to her sublimated sexual desire. "I feel itchy today" she says to Marie Antoinette, "Hell, I need a man"(111). Embarking on a new, more threatening path, she begins a relationship with Mina's son Jim -- not without the realization that "he could upset her balance"(57). The success of this union will demand the balancing of her femininity with Jim's masculinity -- "the mixture of them, the woman and the man....their human oppositeness"(124, 162).

The strength of her newfound "femininity" is tested with Jim. Her first response to her "hot fluid ache" of desire for him, brings her penchant for powerless sex back to haunt her: "She could feel her bones under the light weight of his fingers, pliant and eager for him to crush them in a hard grasp"(151). He does not, however, respond with the aggressive advance to which she is accustomed. In fact he is afraid of her; perhaps because, as he tells her, "You're so

sure about what you don't want"(150). "Wild and gentle", the same co-existence of masculine and feminine principles found in Judith are also observable in Jim.

While in the bar with him, Judith faces another test of the revalued "feminine" within her, having to respond to a number of drunk farmers who ridicule her pig farming. When one of the drunks calls her a "little lady", Judith responds with rage. "Who the fuck ever told you I was a lady?", she screams, throwing a glass of beer in his face(133). Her public refusal to be placed back into the role of the weak woman is met with laughter and support on the part of both Jim and Mina. This strengthens the conviction that her quest is a valid one.

Laughter plays a powerful role in healing Judith's years of repressed anger. It is perhaps the ability to laugh which leads her towards a more positive end than does Edna's rage. Faced with the last of many potential confrontations with the town's postmaster, she "felt something snap, some high-tension wire spring into release"(179). She is finally able to laugh in the face of his apparent disapproval of her new identity.

Full acceptance of self now requires facing the fragmented woman and memories of her past. Judith eventually brings herself to open the long-sealed boxes of city possessions, thus welcoming her old self into her new home:

Lifting those fragments out of the newspaper packing, she was surprised to find them so light, so lifeless

in her hands, and she wondered why she had waited so long, why she had viewed the boxes with apprehension when they had so little significance, contained only dusty objects that aroused neither pain nor regret. And so she could put them away in this, her new house, carelessly, untroubled by their past(121-122).

The next struggle she must face again relates to strength and independence. Now that her parents are deceased, Mina and Jim replace their supportive roles:

The two of them now, Mina and Jim, mother and son, one on either side of her, touching and guiding her as if she were blind. And she felt blind then, rejecting and at the same time holding their reassurance against her lonely isolation(144).

Using this metaphor of blindness, this passage describes Judith's dependence. It also echoes the sense of wholeness and love she experienced as a child between her parents. The challenge now, is to achieve adult independence in union; Mina cannot replace Judith's lost mother, nor can Jim replace her father (despite the fact that he shares his name, "James"). Successfully meeting this challenge will mark Judith's true movement from childhood into womanhood.

The castration of her piglets brings on the final and cathartic crisis on this journey. In this scene, Judith's "swift" and "cruel" power as she removes her pig's testicles is contrasted with Jim's "despair" and "icy cast of fear" while he assists her(166, 165, 167). This "savage witch of pragmatism" "atones" for her willing participation in "the careful honing of her salient features: into that 'special mold' of woman" to which she submitted herself in the city(166).

The expulsion from the old mold of "femininity" and her newfound sense of power must find their balance with Jim's own strengths and weaknesses if their relationship is to survive. She must accept his full humanity as well as her own. This challenge is inextricably bound up with Judith's adulation of her father. She realizes, finally, that in hiding what he perceived to be the more personally threatening aspects of pig farming (such as the necessary castration of his own species), her father concealed the truth of himself from her. By preventing her from seeing his vulnerability, he obstructed her "discovery of his common humanity...his own sexuality"(167):

That was how she could immortalize him, could worship and long and ache to have him take her, father and daughter in their complicity, their mutual preservation of the lie, casting themselves forever on the mercy of their ideal.

And so it was that she could love him, father/god perfect always, unfailing, showing her only birth and death and never the sordid in-between, the soiled and rumpled edges of what the others were so eager, so pleased, to show her. Within that discrepancy she came to hate him and then to idolize him, and then again full circle to her childishness, trying to please him(167).

Having now seen "the core" of farming and the reality and imperfection of her father, her self, her love and her life, Judith must choose either to accept these or run away as she has always done in the past when at a point of crisis. When an emotionally and physically exhausted Jim and Judith finish the pig operation, they leave each other on a strained note. Shrugging off this disagreement, she decides that the tension

between them "was no longer her worry, her problem; she was free"(170). Her façade of independence and self-confidence soon fades, however, and she feels again "the weight of opprobrium, of anxiety....her savage distaste with herself"(170, 171). Self-doubt races through her head: "How can I keep on with this?....It's all wrong....Why do you stay, you don't have to, you are free....I'll get a job again", she imagines(171).

As before, it is the constancy of Judith's body which offers her strength at this point of crisis. After a cleansing shower she quite unconsciously begins to dress:

on an impulse [she] dabbed some perfume behind her knees. Then kicking aside her barn clothes, she walked naked through the dim and silent house to her bedroom, again the sense that this was more her room than any....she stood looking, looking for that other Judith(172).

Finally at home in her surroundings, Judith mindlessly dons her long untouched velvet skirt and silk blouse from the city. Her now muscular, strong body opens itself to the sensuous clothing:

She slipped her body into them, the skirt falling dark and heavy onto her hips and the electric blouse cleaving to her naked breasts. The material felt like touch against her skin, the tips of a man's fingers running over her(172).

Her strength and feminine sensuality meld in a kinetic and self-accepting harmony. This sense of wholeness within self must now be challenged in the social world. Jim returns, and with a renewed sense of calm, Judith listens to the

confession of his fears and his humanity. Despite herself, she cries -- her first open attestation of her own vulnerability. Jim responds with words which echo Judith's father's: "Judy, shhh, listen little girl, don't be so afraid all the time, you're safe now, my little Judy, shhh"(175). Rather than accept his fatherly protection and thereby replace herself in the "old Judith's" mold, she stands up and, asserting her adulthood, proclaims: "I'm not little. I'm twenty-three years old"(175).

Judith's acceptance of her own womanhood gives her the courage to open up to, and finally make love with, Jim. "And oh yes, it was very good. There was something about denying her childishness that made it better than it had ever been....she lay quiet at last under the thud thud thud of his still and beating body, her hands beside her open and relaxed"(175). Making love, Judith experiences the assertive satisfaction of her desire, no longer placing herself in the position of an object to be violently "taken".

The last chapter of Van Herk's novel throws this seeming conclusion of Judith's journey back into question. As they watch a stud boar mate with the strong and manipulative Marie Antoinette, Judith and Mina celebrate the sow's rejection of the boar after fulfilling his "limited [sexual] usefulness"(177). This response is reminiscent of an earlier statement made by Mina: "You can't do with them and you can't do without them"(55). This seeming contradiction of the

partnership which Van Herk has set up between Judith and Jim, challenges the reader to, like Mina, accept contradiction as part of the developmental process of life.

Perhaps by reversing the roles and placing the female in the position of using the male as only a sexual object, Van Herk forces us into questioning the validity of such hierarchical oppression. In her critical writing she states, "The human condition should not require that one human being fulfill her or himself at the expense of another."¹¹ She asserts we should "de-sire" this tradition, that is, challenge the hierarchical and divisive binary oppositions so inherent in Western thought.¹²

This novel is open-ended and foretells the continuation of Judith's personal, social and spiritual quests. In the epilogue, she receives a long-awaited letter from her ex-lover in the city. The flood of memories and continued uncertainty of the "rightness" of her country life brings first anger, then tears. "For a long time she stood sobbing, then gradually grew quiet"(181). She then turns to her pigs, saying, "'Pigs'...[and] she opened herself for them, stretched herself wide and unending, her arms out, her head tall, her legs long. 'Pigs,' she said, 'you win'"(181).

Judith's final gesture of strength and openness attest to the long, arduous and empowering journey she has made. Her body bears testimony to her positive transformation into a strong woman: "Poised there, her body was hard and muscular

but soft too, a grace and ease that she had only just begun to realize"(176). At the end of the novel, she can stand alone, unsupported by parents, lover or friends. With this strength of inner wholeness, Judith opens herself to her community, ensuring her engagement with the continued challenge it offers. "You're not plannin' on leavin', are you?" the postmaster asks her. "No, I guess not", she answers(180).

Judith's quest can act as a transformative model for women who face similar struggles. Van Herk writes of the power which Canadian fiction can offer by providing such alternative models:

These offer an alternative: a movement [away] from fiction that deals with the probabilities of our world to its inherent possibilities, a movement toward a fictional imagination that pushes language and ideal beyond perception into vision and speculation. Instead of simply copying the world around us, it is time for writers of fiction to create, time to abandon the rehearsed context for more challenging frontiers(38).

Judith, I believe, fulfills Van Herk's challenge by giving the reader the permission, the example and the "courage to explore the fullest range of human possibility"(38).

ENDNOTES TO CHAPTER THREE

1. Aritha Van Herk, Judith (1978, rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), p. 10. All further references to this work appear in the text.

2. Such a scenario is taken to a frightening extreme in Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale, where women's solitary trips to the washroom are policed, so as to prevent any possible conspiracy or solidarity amongst them.

3. George Dretzsky, "The New Woman's Novel," The Fiddlehead, No. 120 (Winter 1979), p. 143.

4. The painful physical, emotional and sexual results from the practices of infibulation and clitoridectomy are explored in Louky Bersianik's Le pique-nique sur l'Acropole.

5. This same struggle of feminine identity formation is explored in Mireille Dansereau's film La vie rêvée.

6. Aritha Van Herk, "Desire in Fiction: De-Siring Realism," Dandelion, 8, 2 (1981), pp. 35-36.

7. Dretzsky, p. 143.

8. Feminist critics such as Elaine Showalter have commented on the similar assimilation of early feminists into dominant, androcentric models of thought. This "imitation focus" characterized an initial step in what later became a more thorough questioning and revisioning of these models. A comparable development can be observed in Judith. See Elaine Showalter, "Is there a Female Aesthetic?," In Women, Advocate and Scholar: Proceedings of the Conference at Mont Claire State College, 1974, cited in Jeri Dawn-Wine, "Gynocentric Values and Feminist Psychology," in Feminism in Canada, ed. Angela Miles and Geraldine Finn (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1982), p. 74.

9. Annis Pratt, Archetypal Patterns in Women's Fiction (Bloomington: Indiana Press, 1981), p. 17.

10. Van Herk, "Aritha Van Herk: Her Time and Place," interview by Sharon Batt, Branching Out, 5 (1978), p. 27.

11. Van Herk, "De-siring Realism," p. 36.

12. Van Herk, "De-siring Realism," p. 36.

CHAPTER FOUR

JESSICA: LOOKING HER SELF IN THE CAMERA'S "I"

Linda Griffiths' play Jessica engages the audience in a Métis woman's desperate search for personal, social and spiritual wholeness. Unity of these three realms depends not only on Jessica's ability to establish equilibrium among them, but also on her success in balancing the forces of "light" and "darkness" within these spheres. Power is at the centre of her struggle, and ultimately the question becomes whether she can control power or it will control her. The achievement of wholeness depends upon facing her fear of power itself.

Jessica grapples with these opposing powers of light and darkness in herself, her social community and her spiritual beliefs. The play follows her quest, beginning at a point of crisis where she is "caught somewhere between the light and darkness of her own spirit".¹ In Act I, her spirit guides decide to help her by "becoming" dream people. They recreate and relive with her a "real and not real" "shadow dream" through which she re-experiences the powers of light and darkness in her past(36, 11). In Act II, these dreams become more real and the lessons she has learned must be applied to her present social existence.

As with Edna, Marilù, and Judith, Jessica's personal quest involves finding a self-actualized identity which allows for a balanced interplay of the multiple traits within her. Her social quest requires that she synthesize this strong sense of self and her own desires into political and interpersonal relationships with the world which surrounds her. Her spiritual quest entails integrating the philosophies and beliefs which underlie Western society with those of the Native elders; the spiritual direction which comes of this will determine the nature of her social and personal experience and actions.

What distinguishes Jessica's story from those of the other protagonists we have examined thus far is that the playwright makes clear how the personal, social and spiritual balance of the individual inseparably affects the equilibrium of the social world in which she lives and the spiritual unity of her universe. Their destiny is interconnected and each possesses equal power. "Power resides at all levels", writes Griffiths(1).

Jessica must struggle with the light and darkness which interact at each of the personal, social and spiritual levels of her life. "Darkness" acts as a metaphor for the more negative tendencies of human nature and existence. Darkness is characterized as that energy which moves us to fear, hatred and destruction. "Light", on the other hand, provides the vigour which inspires freedom, love and joy. Both forces

are equally strong, and represent two interconnected poles on a continuum.

Griffiths is careful to use the terms "light" and "darkness" rather than "good" and "evil" in order to stress that these differing powers are simply gradations of a whole -- that they are two points on a continuum. This distinction is an important one, for it challenges the traditional conception of separate and absolute good versus evil. Griffiths envisions power as a dynamic and ever-changing interplay between light and darkness; she acknowledges and celebrates each different part as integral to the whole.

Power is at the crux of this interplay of light and darkness and like them, is also characterized as being on a continuum. At one end we find what Marilyn French in her book Beyond Power calls "power-to". This force, like Griffith's metaphor of light, offers a creative, liberating strength; the other end of this continuum is identified by a wielding of "power-over" -- a domineering and repressive control similar to that of darkness.² Jessica's survival and sense of wholeness in each realm depends on facing her fear of darkness and its power over her. She must also find the strength to embrace light and her own "power-to".

Jessica's spiritual world is a curious mix of three belief systems. Hierarchical, binary thought, typical of Judeo-Christian Western philosophy, is juxtaposed with the pantheistic Native Indian theology which recognises the

spiritual forces of nature. These two interpretations of the world are contrasted with the more holistic vision of pre-Christian goddess worship, which celebrates the dynamic interplay of masculine and feminine principles within and between individuals and their universe. Jessica is challenged to synthesize these three dissimilar visions, and Griffiths makes clear that while these beliefs and their powers seem antithetical, they must all be recognised as equal and component parts of a whole. Vitaline, Jessica's spiritual teacher, speaks of the necessity and possibility of this union. She acknowledges, "The city is with us, the white world is with us, there is a new energy that speaks to us"(9). The strong synthesis of these beliefs will come only of change which honours difference: "If you respect those ways you can change them, she says"(9).

The social world in which Jessica lives is equally diverse. Her mixed Métis blood is a metaphor for her multicultural Canadian identity and society. She tells us, "I'm a modern person, I'm a halfbreed. I live in a white world full of filing cabinets and common sense"(8). In contrast to this universe of bureaucracy and government organizations, her culture is also informed by the teachings of the Native Indian spirits and the ancestral grandmothers and grandfathers.

Jessica's personal nature is a microcosm of her multiplicitous social and spiritual worlds. Like Mallet, she

feels "doubled up" and torn apart by the seemingly contradictory facets of herself; she is a fragmented being living in an environment which cannot conceive of wholeness in disparity(29). While during Indian ceremonies she may "sit in a room full of sweet grass and animal skins", she carries with her a ghetto blaster, a Walkman, high heels, jeans, a book by Karl Marx and a copy of People magazine(8). These, she points out, are all parts of her. In her diversity, however, Jessica has the "electricity" and potential to successfully integrate the Native spiritual wisdom into the modern, white Western world of "politicians, business men, [and] men with power"(17, 28). Just as she needs her spirit guides in her quest for wholeness, they admit that they, too, need her power, for she's "got a foot in both camps"; it is only she who can "walk into Safeway" and confidently order "two pounds of hamburger and...some tobacco for the spirits"(11, 42-43). This is the challenge she faces in the play.

Like Jessica and her world, her spirit guides are multifaceted. Despite their base in the spiritual realm, they each have the power to become dream people of the social world.³ Collectively, they represent the range between the forces of "light" and "darkness". Coyote/Vitaline is a practical and wise spiritual teacher who thinks "in circles"; while somewhat "set in the old ways" she has "even worked at the Calgary Stampede", assuring her grounding in the modern

world(2, 40). Bear/Sam is "warm and sensual"; he struggles with the overwhelming and opposing powers of love and war within himself(2). Crow is Jessica's "childhood spirit and special guardian"(2). With a childish kind of naiveté this trickster figure gambles both with Jessica and with the forces of light and darkness(2). The "dark" and "vicious" Wolverine/Bob, though on the surface a philanthropist, is "full of revenge" as he fights for material and manipulative power(2). Finally, Unicorn/Liz is an "[a]ncient symbol of the goddess"(2). "[S]oft and strong and wild", she "celebrates female sexuality and freedom"; but in doing so, she also experiences much of life's ugliness(14, 2).

The genders attributed to these mythological spirits have a significant bearing on their relationship to power.⁴ As a Moon-animal symbolizing courage, strength, wisdom, and sometimes acting as Man's enemy, Unicorn possesses female sexual fortitude.⁵ Vitaline's feminine power is a consensual one; she is symbolized as the quick, adaptable Coyote. The sometimes violent masculine passion of Sam, is embodied by Bear, the most powerful animal spirit of the Indian underworld. In Midewiwin mythology which partially informs Métis beliefs, this spirit can become the "Bear Walker", who is obsessed by power, using it to evil ends.⁶ Bob's supremacist patriarchal domination is symbolized by an oppressive, money conscious tyranny. As the childlike, happy-go-lucky Métis trickster figure, Crow stands between

these variants of power, gambling with, but not controlling them.

The spectrum between light and darkness, and between masculine and feminine, is integral to each of these characters and to their interrelationship (the least "balanced" of these characters being Wolverine/Bob). Their human manifestations, however, exist within a modern, Western context -- one which tries to minimize inner disparity in order to reduce the vulnerability and threat which comes with equilibrium, equality and unity between what are considered "opposing" powers. The Judeo-Christian roots of modernity focus on just such an adversarial battle raging between the opposites of good and evil. The early adoption of linear, binary thought, Unicorn explains, led to the fear and overpowering of the more integrative visions of pre-Christian and goddess beliefs which she represents. She recalls: "all of a sudden there was good and evil and they were in different places...they called [the powers of the goddess]... witchcraft"(6).

The introduction of this dogma of binary oppositions disempowered the feminine deity of magic and sexuality long ago, transforming her into "The hag, the virgin...the mother" and the whore(7). Unicorn remarks that before this time, lying with the priestesses "didn't used to be dirty, ugly, horrible and rotten. It was sacred and beautiful"(18). She explains how the goddess' temples were burned in "straight

lines", symbolic of linear thought(6). The divisive philosophy of good versus evil introduced a hierarchical power relationship which had devastating effects on women and the feminine principle, but also radically altered the balance of the Earth.

The temples of the Native Canadian religion, found in "streams and trees and rain and flowers", were also "burned" by white colonizers(20). But Jessica's Native spirit guides admit that, like the white colonizers, they suppressed the feminine power in their midst as well. Who said you could talk?", Crow asks Unicorn(9). "I said I could talk", she replies, assuring that her voice and wisdom will no longer be silenced(9). Initially, the Native guides resist Unicorn's membership in the spiritual circle, asserting that "she's inside out, just like Jessica". But eventually remembering the long-forgotten white buffalo Cow Woman -- "a part of us that was left behind long ago", they finally decide to accept this living symbol of the goddess in their midst(7, 10). The inclusion of Unicorn's vigorous power and holistic vision offers Jessica a possible key to wholeness in the three realms of her life.

Unicorn insists that it has been her absence which has thus far hampered Jessica's ability to balance the personal, social and spiritual realms. When the Native Indian guides suggest that Jessica will have even greater problems trying to integrate one more spirit into her life, Unicorn replies,

"I'm not the problem, I'm what's been missing"(11). She offers an empowering model which revalues the feminine as part of a shared partnership, vital to survival. Her reintegration into the modern social world will be a challenge for Jessica; for Unicorn, like women and the feminine principle, has lost all power and been reduced to the status of a pretty stuffed toy at The Bay -- dressed in "a big pink bow...[and] sitting on a Candy cane rainbow"(7). Despite this outward defeat, she still remains a "vital living force" which has "been around, [having] used a lot of [d]isguises....whispering and spinning threads" throughout history(2, 22). Her energy still gives people "just a feeling" of her ancient feminine vigour as "something soft and strong and wild"(14).

This is the personal, social and spiritual landscape through which Jessica must journey. The diversity and imbalance she experiences among the three spheres brings her to personal crisis. The play begins at a crucial moment when she cries:

I'm not standing in a fertile place, I'm standing in a place that's dry and empty like a dessert [sic]....My throat closes off and chokes me, it's as if there's a stone in there and unless I let it loose, I'm going to die....I feel like an old withered pile of bones, I feel sucked dry. I've used and misused the gifts you've given me, and I've just come to an end. I can't go back and I can't go forward. Hear me, I'm asking you to help me(10, 11, 10).

Frozen at a dead end, unable to move backwards or forwards, Jessica opens her heart to the spirits. They decide to "take

her back" and to try to teach her about the power which resides in the light and darkness of her own soul(11). They return with her through a shadow dream to relive the happy and sad times of her life, making "certain changes that will help her to see through the muddle of years"(1).

Jessica's flash-back journey through the past begins with her grief-stricken childhood and her rape by a Mountie at the age of twelve. Crow's simultaneous preoccupation at the horse races causes him to shirk his role of protector, and this failing initiates the protagonist's fundamental questioning of the spiritual power he represents. Jessica's sense of betrayal prompts her to repress her Native beliefs as well as the wisdom, light and "power-to" within herself. After being sexually assaulted she screams to the spirits:

Why couldn't you help me?....Because you have no power. I don't hear you, I don't see you, I'm blind. These aren't green witch eyes, they're brown, do you hear me?...I can make you die if I just close my eyes(14).

Her experience of darkness, rejection of faith and loss of inner strength also throw off all balance in her social world. As we follow her dream journey back through young womanhood, we learn how this disequilibrium is manifest in her failed marriage, her poverty-stricken single motherhood, her financial decision to turn to prostitution and her subsequent heroin addiction. The dark side of power begins to take over her life and she becomes overwhelmed by her triple patriarchal oppression as Métis, a woman and a

prostitute.

The loss of self-value which accompanies this oppression causes Jessica to immerse herself in the role of prostitute, hoping that in doing so, she will find new identity. Her partner Liz explains the parameters of the role of whore; these restrictions paradoxically, prevent Jessica from achieving wholeness: "To men", she says, "high class is quiet, so look great and only talk about them....They want beauty...with clear eyes and no problems"(17). Or, as Wolverine puts it, while "shredded to bits" these women must remain "still smiling"(17).

Jessica becomes trapped at the bottom of a hierarchical pyramid of "power-over" her life. Lusting after the elusive omnipotence of money -- the seeming key to survival and advancement -- she is required to subvert her own identity and self-respect, reciting as she is paid to do: "[I] know nothing, am nothing...[am a] [d]irty filthy redskin squaw"(25). This misogynist "naming" of herself is an admission of her sense of ultimate weakness. Her identity becomes lost in the socially constructed and powerless roles of "tough bitch and stupid chick...hooker and junkie and halfbreed from the bush", as Crow tells her(29). This almost total loss of value, wholeness and identity under the dominating power of darkness leads Jessica to a point of personal crisis on her dream journey. She suddenly realizes, "I'm starting to get ugly, aren't I?"(27). Having lost touch

with any sense of light in her life she asks Crow (despite her mistrust of his very existence): "Is it true I don't have a soul?". "A little one", he replies, "about the size of a pimple, one good squeeze and it's gone"(29).

Now that Jessica has experienced a world where darkness is more powerful than light, her guides are careful to balance this vision by showing her the power also inherent in light --the "power-to" which resides within her. The inclusion of Unicorn in their circle allows them to introduce Jessica to a different belief system from the one which betrayed her in childhood. "She'll feel something she's never felt before", predicts Unicorn, "a little bit of the goddess, of the lady herself"(18). This "lost religion" of feminine power and spirituality adds crucial balance which is presently lacking(20). Bear and Crow enlist Liz and Jessica in a so-called "whore prayer" to the priestesses. As this prayer rises to a crescendo, Jessica experiences another kind of strength -- one which comes of unity rather than domination. Together, the two women imagine a shared energy between the goddess and her lover:

Jessica: He's a hunter, he's wild like her....He's the biggest, greatest man.

Liz/Jessica: And she's the biggest, greatest woman....

Jessica: He's her son and her lover and her king.

Liz: She's the earth and the moon and the grandmother. She's the goddess that farts and eats, who gets mad, then loves [,] who knows all the rhythms and all the changess, [sic] who changes and changes.

Jessica: Who is free(23).

Liz and Jessica envision a non-hierarchical and joyful vision of dynamic sexuality, freedom and power, which is not only grounded in the "real" rather than the transcendent realm, but is celebrated and balanced between masculine and feminine energies. Just before reaching the climax of their chant, however, Jessica falters, too frightened of the growing power within her to continue. She does not yet possess the courage to face these fears. Liz will not easily accept her retreat, and challenges her by accusing: "You know what you're scared of? Magic....You've got no real guts"(28). This scene is strikingly reminiscent of Judith's experience while embracing Mina, when the complicity and strength between the women suddenly becomes too terrifying. Van Herk writes: "And when they broke apart their faces were no longer laughing, but still and frightened, as if they had seen too much of something".⁷

Jessica recoils from the vision of partnership and wholeness offered by the goddess and allows herself to become finally overpowered and imbalanced by the darkness of her circumstance. She believes that the pain which is inside of her "should show", and that the only strength which she still possesses is a dark one, with which to slash her wrists(29). As with the women in the other works we have examined, one notes here a close liaison between the female body and soul. She feels as if there is within her, a "bloody hole with guts coming out", and that such inner destruction should "make

some blood at least"(29).

After her suicide attempt, Jessica finds herself in a mental institution, where she has a vision that offers a small ray of guidance through this dark passage of her journey. She dreams of a woman who wanders aimlessly, lost and exhausted, through the dry, empty plains of existence. One of the men she meets wishes to rape her, but the head of a white buffalo calf which she wears offers her the strength with which to turn this "untaught" man to dust(32). She possesses spiritual fortitude which can overcome the darkness he wields. Standing "on the brink of what all the suffering had been for", she is frightened, but a starling flies over to guide her way(32). Like this itinerant women, also "trapped in a human body", Jessica stands on the verge of total darkness(31). Her spirit guides are with her and, seeing the dangerous precipice before which she stands, they decide to send in Sam with "some loving that isn't part of the bargain"(32).

Sam injects in Jessica some of the long-forgotten light and joyful power of living. He loves her for her inner beauty and for being "crazy as a hoot owl", rather than for her sexual favours(38). This scene, in which Jessica perceives life as "real and not real", heralds the transition to the second part of the play. Unlike Edna, who remains in the mental institution, Jessica moves beyond madness, and struggles to re-integrate power into her personal, social and

spiritual existence(36).

Sam and Jessica's relationship has a healing effect, putting her, as Crow points out, back on "the homestretch" towards wholeness(40). Sam teaches that much of her craziness is due to oppression and that this seeming "destiny" can be changed:

Sam: I bet I can tell why you're in here....

Jessica: Because I'm crazy.

Sam: No, because you're oppressed....The loony bin and penitentiaries are full of our people....You got a place to go?

Jessica: No.

Sam: Any money?

Jessica: No.

Sam: Somebody to look after you?

Jessica: No.

Sam: Son of a bitch, you must be oppressed(33, 34-35).

Speaking of the Native plight he adds:

We've been murdered, starved, raped and pillaged. When that didn't work they infected us with diseases, fed us booze and made us dependent on handouts. They stole our land, broke up families, outlawed our language and religion, and worst of all, they spent a lot of money making terrible movies about us. We're outlaws and if we can admit that we can fight back....People all over are starting to figure out what human rights are(33-34).

As a Native Canadian, Sam, like Jessica, has been a victim of the oppressive power of darkness. Rather than react to this in a passive manner, as she does, he actively fights his marginality. Like Jessica's vision of the desert woman, which gave her spiritual hope of empowerment, Sam offers a vision of fortitude in the social realm.

"Changing the seeming destiny of being "over-powered" requires finding strength within and responding to

oppression. How should one take control of power? Actively or passively? What should be its nature? Shared or supremacist? Jessica's decision will ultimately affect the nature of her fortitude. While in the mental institution, she resignedly believes, "all you can do is try to survive"(33). Sam counters, "you can stand up....let us fight"(33, 34). This passive versus active response is typical of socialized gender behaviour and is ultimately rooted in a supremacist, hierarchical model of power. Sam's adversarial approach is more representative of standard practices in the social realm. In the spiritual realm, Vitaline and the other guides believe that strength and guidance can be found through prayer: "We're born knowing how to pray....Praying is listening", they say(20, 21).

Vitaline and Sam dispute what is, according to the binary model, a more "feminine" power of praying versus the "masculine" power of fighting. While the attribution of gender association to these traits remains stereotypical, the message is clear: the active fight for one's "power-to" must also be balanced by passive reflection to ensure that strength remains shared and that it does not become hierarchically or horizontally oppressive:

Sam: You can't make praying [the] answer to everything....There's got to be action.

Vitaline: That's your job, you're a man.

Sam: Then I'm doing my job.

Vitaline: But you can't do your job unless the women are doing their job.

Sam: There's nothing wrong with women.

Vitaline: They're too busy acting like they're

powerful without looking at the mother, the grandmother, the female power....

Sam: I'm talking about revolution.

Vitaline: I'm talking about revolution. The spirits aren't against fighting, they're against losing(58).

Vitaline points out the pitfalls of possessing one kind of power without the other when Sam tells her, "I feel power. It comes when the sun shines in the morning and I feel good"(59). "And how do you feel when it's dark?", she asks provocatively(59).

Vitaline insists that both powers can and must co-exist. When Jessica comes to her for guidance, she introduces a different model of fortitude -- that of "the mother...[and] the old woman" who came "[b]efore the French and the English...the Irish, [and] even before the Cree and Blackfoot"(42). Hers is a power and strength which comes of vulnerability and interdependence. Jessica becomes "hooked" by this shared and magnetic power:

Jessica: You feel the hook, it's got you right in the pit of your stomach, and the spirits are on the other end. They pull you and you pull them and sometimes they let everything go slack so you can wonder for a while. You know you could tear away but you don't want to because you're only sure of one thing, that there's something on the other end.

Sam: How much do you believe?

Jessica: Most of it. All of it. I don't know.

Sam: No doubts?

Jessica: Of course...but they [the spirits] love me, I know they do(54).

She feels a strength which emanates from within but is equal and complementary to that from without. In order to truly attain wholeness, she must learn to control this vigorous spiritual partnership -- to balance its light and darkness

and integrate it into the personal and social realms.

Jessica's ability to balance her power -- to fight and to pray in a non-oppressive manner -- will now be tested. Wolverine complains that because of her positive relationship with Sam, Jessica is "losing her scent, [and that] she's got no anger left"(40).

Throughout the play, Wolverine is told by the other spirits that the "time is coming" when he can lead Jessica into "the shadows" of her "dark side", for anger and darkness, too, are important parts of human nature which must be experienced. After making sure she has first felt the vigour of light with Sam, they allow Wolverine his opportunity. He transforms himself into Bob -- a white male, self-professed philanthropic lawyer. This man represents the epitome of the extreme social powers of darkness: the pursuit of money, political clout and knowledge. Bob's facility with "the power game" is consistent with his belief that "You can't help everybody", "cream always rises to the top", and "People are ruled by their own destiny"(45, 46, 46). He believes that authority should rest in the hands of those who have the strength to demand and maintain it. "Power", he says, "is a commodity....I'm a power broker...[for] control and knowledge"(47).

In the past, Jessica's "destiny" has been one of oppression and being "over-powered". Now she is aware of a strength which resides within herself. Her challenge becomes

that of facing her fear of Bob's overwhelming social darkness while preserving the shared notion of spiritual power she has learned.

While maintaining some of her newfound strength, Jessica buckles under the seductive energies of darkness. Ever since she was a child, she has coveted this darker side of power most often held by whites. As a youngster, she wants "blond curly hair and white skin" like a girl at school(13). As a young woman, she erroneously dreams that the "payoff" for her prostitution will be wealth, knowledge and status as "high class"; she believes, "I'm going to...come back with a different face"(16). These desires come from a position of weakness. Now with some strength of her own, she bargains with Bob's "stocks" in power: she will teach him about the magic she has learned in return for his tricks as to how to wield corporate power -- things that being white, he was "probably born knowing"(46). Bob's desire to understand and thereby manipulate the spiritual energy which Jessica wields moves him to strike a deal with her. The power they both seek is not one of partnership but of adversity and control.

Jessica's spiritual strength now takes on a darker, more imbalanced character. After "zapping" him into a kind of manipulative hypnosis she tells Bob, "You're not supposed to use it [the powers of magic] for yourself, but I could just concentrate, get money, change people's minds...."(47). Jessica has lost the connection between the spiritual and

social realms; her magic remains, as Unicorn explains, a "part of her that isn't real....She thinks she doesn't have to play by the rules"(47). "It gets her into lots of trouble", adds Vitaline(47).

This imbalance of spiritual fortitude spreads to other areas of Jessica's social life: she begins "using her moods to get things"(49). Sam complains: "You keep switching on me....the kids don't know who you are anymore" (49, 52). Darkness creeps into Jessica and Sam's intimate relationship and the balance between them is broken. Seduced by the supremacist concept of power she becomes caught in its paradox: power built on inequality is forever vulnerable to and fearful of that which it has oppressed. Jessica begins to feel this threat, fearing that Sam, like other men she has known, wants to steal her energy and force. Angered and hurt by her withdrawal ~~the~~ remarks, "The more room I give you, the more you back away like a scared cat"(49-50). Sam wants partnership but Jessica explains her fear and reticence:

Jessica: I never let a man get close before because I was afraid they'd take something from me.

Sam: You've got everything I have to give, there's got to be some taking back in the bargain.

Jessica: It's like there's a place I've got inside that men always seem to want...sometimes they don't even want me, they just want to find out what's in that place, and I won't let them, I won't let you, I won't let anybody. It's my secret until I find out what it is....

Sam: Take what away?

Jessica: My power. (50).

This imbalance projects the couple to opposing poles, and uncovers deep and hateful gender stereotypes and power

relations buried underneath their seeming partnership. Sam accuses her of being a "whore" for power(51). His reaction to the threat and fear of inequality is active anger and physical violence, Jessica's is a more passive verbal abuse; she responds calling him a "chicken-shit, yellow coward" and "not even half a man" because he doesn't beat her(51). Thus provoked, Sam begins hitting her. The following passage makes extremely clear how an imbalance of power which privileges darkness leads only to oppression, war and self-destruction. Sam eloquently explains how as a man, he has been socialized to be strong and respond to anger with violence. As a Native Indian who is himself oppressed, his only opportunity for supremacy and release comes in his power over women, whose lesser physical strength makes them targets for physical abuse:

I can't afford to be gentle, all I know is that when I see red, I fight. It's too dangerous any other way. You can't ask me why....Somehow that's what I'm supposed to do but it gets all screwed up. There's a place for it, I know there is, but I don't [k]now where. You look at me, all bruised up, and you think you're the one that's hurt, but it's me that's dying. I want to beat you because I can't beat them, you're just one step down from me, that's all....You've gotta support me, you've gotta believe in me, even when I'm an asshole....somewhere in this world I've got to be right. They did take our balls away, and they hold them dangling in front of us while we rage around and try to get them back. All we've got is rage....You've got your mysteries, all I've got is that sometime I was a warrior. So I'll get drunk and sing and pound the drum, dance in the gutter...that's all that's left of war(51-52).

This passage is a baldly honest depiction of the hierarchical structure of our culture and its degrading and ultimately

destructive effects on both men and women, master and slave, persecuted under layers upon layers of power.

The wielding of "power-over" destroys wholeness and the "power-to". Jessica suddenly recognizes the deadly fragmentation which her obsession for imbalanced power has wrought within her. Seeing a vision of her self standing before her she screams, "She's awful, it's a face with no soul"(58). She is now forced to admit that which she most fears: that ultimate darkness thrives within her.

This vision catapults Jessica back to the spiritual realm. There, Wolverine further exploits her fears and deeply human insecurities in order to strengthen his dark power which is dependent upon them. "You are nothing, see nothing, understand nothing", he taunts(59). Twisting her confusion into apprehension and hatred he tells her she has "so many enemies, all to get back....make them pay any way you can"(59). In so doing, he fosters an adversarial philosophy of difference -- the foundation of a hierarchical, oppressive system of power.

Jessica is again faced with the same question of how to respond to darkness: by submitting to oppression and destiny, by fighting and attempting to dominate the other, or by facing her fears -- trusting, praying and striving for a balance of power?

Wolverine, naturally, condones a model of balanced power. "[There are] no partners", he says; "Only one who gives and

one who takes"(60). As a woman submitting to this adversarial philosophy, Jessica immediately becomes trapped at the bottom of the hierarchy: "Let you be on top", she says to Wolverine, "he'll be jealous"(60).

Sam's model of power relations, though slightly different from Wolverine's, remains essentially rooted in fear of and control over the other. He believes that force is imposed upon scapegoats and that tyranny must be fought:

You want to divide us up, build a wall, and that's how they get us every time....We have to be on the same goddam side. It's men women on the bottom against the beast who's going to push the button. And if we don't fight that, there isn't going to be any praying to any spirits, dark side, light side, any side(61).

Sam insists to Vitaline that Jessica's crisis requires active fighting, not passive praying. Vitaline repeats that both praying and action are necessary in order to maintain a balance between light and darkness, for the beast Sam speaks of was born long ago, of just such a binary and adversarial philosophy as his. Vitaline, Wolverine and Unicorn tell the ancient story of how a disequilibrium of light and darkness radically altered the balance between the masculine and feminine principles of the Earth:

Vitaline: Thousands of years ago, there was a balance between the sun and the moon, then a crack opened up between them...And from that crack came that beast.

Wolverine: And the beast said to the sun, aren't you tired of all those shadows and mysteries?....Wouldn't it be nice if there was only one kind of light?

Unicorn: And the beast said to the moon: think of him, he needs you so much, you have so much, give in to him, after all, he isn't very bright. A

little sacrifice, there's so much glory in sacrifice.

Vitaline: He took and she gave and gave until there was nothing left but migraine headaches and sacrifice. The balance was broken. The whole earth has to do with that balance, the tides and the winds and the growth of everything. Nothing can be right again without it, nothing(61).

Like the Earth, Jessica must establish symmetry between the "masculine" powers of Wolverine and the "feminine" powers of Unicorn. True partnership between Sam and Jessica requires that they accept each other's difference and that each possesses individual strength. Watching Jessica as she struggles with darkness in the spiritual realm, Sam resists: "I'm leaving and taking her with me", he insists(60). Vitaline replies, "She can't leave now....Just try to let her be....There's a whole side you have to accept. Look at her, she has to let the Wolverine inside, something wild that could save you both"(60). "You're teaching her to hate me", Sam shouts. "You want a woman to love you, or a slave?" asks Vitaline...."You have to be willing to risk everything" (59).

She insists that Jessica must pursue her final path to wholeness alone. Jessica resists: "I am a partner for a man....I don't want to be alone"(60, 61). "Let him go" Vitaline tells her. Sam finally agrees to this challenge for equal partnership: "I'll wait as long as I can", he says(62). I am a warrior. I have courage and honour and love"(62). Both partners' willingness to stand independently is crucial to their personal, social and spiritual wholeness.

Jessica's journey brings her to the final test of her

ability to accept and balance these forces within her. Standing alone and unsupported by her social or spiritual mentors, she is kissed "full on the lips", by Wolverine and his dark spirit wholly enters into her(62). He, too, then leaves her to journey and fight alone. Throughout the play, Vitaline insists that Jessica "feel and understand...[her] power", to "go to ...[her] dark side" in order to learn to balance it with the light(5, 6). Now finally able to do so, she is encouraged by Vitaline: "This is what you were afraid of and now you're in the middle. It's just you, a part of you. You're strong enough to take that Wolverine, he's the last one, Jesse, the last one"(63). Jessica must accept and overcome her fear of the darkness and light within her; she must realize that she, like all individuals, is a microcosm of the greater whole and as such, is partially responsible for it.

Jessica returns once again to the social realm to finally test whether she can control her power or whether it will control her. Bob tells her of her successful mastery of the corporate power she so coveted: "The cheque came in [for her halfway house and the Red Power Association]. "I want it" she answers, buckling under its force(63). "Power is a commodity. Cream always rises to the top. Money is power. Idealists get bitter", she recites(63). "Now you're just like me", he says with disgust. "It's all your fault", she answers, still unable to accept responsibility for her weakness and dark corruption within(64).

Petrified by her overwhelming fear of this darkness within herself, Jessica begins to strangle its personification in Bob. In doing so, she suddenly sees his weakness, the fear and frailty of his adversarial power, so easily snuffed out by a shift in command. She asserts that his great need for domination hides a fear of his own body, his sexuality and the powers of prayer and light. Jessica screams as she throttles Bob:

[Y]ou fear your own legs and your own arms,, but most of all, you're afraid of what's between your legs. Without money or power, you walk with your eyes down, head lowered, paces behind the others, trusting nothing. Not even your own breath, no you have no right to breathe, your songless throat closes with no chance for a prayer, they're [sic] been torn out of you[r] chest, you've stolen the breath from yourself. (64).

Ironically, her accusation demands that she overcome her own fear of inner darkness in order to relinquish its "power-over" her and embrace her "power-to".

Jessica's journey now takes her to the brink of life and death -- she is forced to either simultaneously establish balance amongst the light and darkness of these three realms, or become lost and die. In search of final strength she prays to her spirits for guidance, drawing on the vigour of passivity and reflection. Instantly, she is returned to the same moment where her journey began, crying:

I'm not standing in a fertile place, I'm standing in a place that's dry and empty, like a dessert [sic]... It's as if there's a stone in there and unless I let it loose, I'm going to die(64-65).

Vitali~~ne~~ comes to Jessica to ask where she finds her spirit

guides. Standing alone, she feels each one in equal partnership with her -- Unicorn offering the final balance to her outstretched arms. Finally able to accept them all and their properties as parts of her self, separate yet connected, she is strengthened.

As Jessica looks into the smoke before her, a woman appears. Vitaline asks her what she sees. "I don't want to look at her", Jessica answers, frightened(65). "Who is she? Name her", insists Vitaline(65). "She doesn't have a name", she replies. Vitaline desperately begs the grandmothers and the grandfathers for strength, "Call her now or you'll never see her again. ; Name her", she shouts(65). And from somewhere deep within, the protagonist finds the force to scream aloud, "Jessica!", and from her, a power song of "release, joy...celebration" and light begins to slowly emerge and crescendo(66). Jessica's naming of herself proclaims the oneness and power she has found within her multiplicitous and diverse personal, social and spiritual realms. "It's been a long time since one of them has taken power for themselves"; observes Bear(3). Carol Christ observes how such a descent into darkness introduces a new concept of strength: "Women need stories that will tell them that their ability to face the darkness in their lives is an indication of strength, not weakness".⁸

Jessica's naming of self also marks a feminine renaming of power, characterized by universal balance and interplay

between light and darkness. Such stability and symmetry are not an ending; rather, they herald a new beginning.

Jessica's struggle for and achievement of wholeness offer a hopeful metaphor for the Earth in the nuclear age. Like her, our spiritual cosmology is informed by such contradictory practices as Western capitalism, communism, diversified world religions, and inequality between the First and Third Worlds. The power relations imbedded in these philosophies are often hierarchical, and the overwhelming personal, social and environmental tragedies of violence, sexism, totalitarianism and pollution, are but a few of the results of such oppression. The binary philosophy of good versus evil forms the grid of this hierarchical pyramid of power emanating from the few masters at the top, down to the multitude of oppressed at the bottom. This model has become so entrenched in history that it appears to some to constitute human nature and "destiny". According to this binary model, the only response to oppression can be adversarial. Fighting, however, leads only to the oppression of another, different group. Supremacist power is ultimately destructive to both master and slave.

Griffiths suggests another model, which could be described as an inverted pyramid of power rising out of each individual and connecting her/him to the interdependent aspects of the whole: society, human relations, environment, and spiritual faith.⁹ She stresses an ideal of strong

partnership spread equally amongst the multiplicitous facets of our world. Power resides within all, and the creation of balance must come from respect, trust and compromise.

Integral to this vision, is the belief that the balance of light and darkness within self affects the whole. This granting of power to the individual counteracts the contemporary sense that nuclear destruction, for example, is our destiny and that the so-called "superpowers" control everything. Refusing to fear and submit to a supremacist "power-over" renders humans not only responsible for themselves but also for the Earth and each other.

Jessica's story offers a vision of wholeness. She shows us that great power resides within individuals and that we can say "no" to a seeming destiny of self-destruction. Her victory acts as a reply to Vitaline's lamenting prayer for the Earth:

Thunder beings, Spirits of fire, earth, air and sea.
Where are our prayers when the earth is covered and
hidden. When we no longer see you.... They tell me
the earth our mother is a bomb that will burn my
lungs and flesh.... That she has no more children to
bear. Give me the strength to dig deep, to say no,
there is power that will save us(9).

Acknowledging the personal destiny she shares with her social and spiritual worlds, Jessica offers a new model of power: one which is strengthened through interdependence. Her quest inspires our shared human struggle in this time of crisis and cultural transition.

ENDNOTES TO CHAPTER FOUR

1. Linda Griffiths, "Jessica," ([Toronto]: [Playwright's Union of Canada], [1986]), n. pag. [paginated from pp.1-66], p. 9. All further references to this work will appear in the text.

2. Marilyn French, Beyond Power: On Women, Men and Morals (New York: Summit Books, 1981), p. 505.

3. This is consistent with the Indian belief that humans and ceremonial animal spirits can exchange places. Telephone interview with Dr. A. McFadden Clark, Museum of Civilization, Ottawa, Ontario, 9 June, 1987.

4. The mythological significance of Métis spirits is drawn from a number of Native tribal traditions, particularly those of the Cree, Ojibway, Ottawa and Great Lakes Indians. Telephone interview with Dr. Ted Brasser, Métis Indian Specialist, Museum of Civilization, Ottawa, Ontario, 9 June, 1987.

5. Ad de Vries, Dictionary of Symbols and Imagery (Amsterdam, London: North-Holland Publishing Co., 1984), pp. 481-83.

6. This belief was common among the Ojibway, Ottawa and Western Great Lakes tribes. Personal interview with Ruth Phillips, Professor of Native Indian Art, Carleton University, 18 May, 1987. Telephone interview with Dr. Ted Brasser.

7. Aritha Van Herk, Judith (1978, rpt. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1986), p. 94.

8. Carol Christ, Diving Deep and Surfacing, 2nd ed. (1980; rpt. Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), p. 17.

9. Fritjof Capra uses a similar model in his discussion of systems theory in The Turning Point (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982) p.280.

CONCLUSION

KEEPING OUR "I"'s OPEN

The combined quests of Edna, Marilú, Judith and Jessica tell the stories of many women's lives. The female subjects of these four bildungsroman call for a redefinition not only of the experience of being female, but also a revisioning of the patriarchal world in which women live. These stories chart the journey from woman's fragmented place in history towards a wholeness which involves the realms of the personal, social and spiritual. This new definition of unity differs radically from the humanistic conception of the Cartesian "I"; it is an ideal which allows for the multiplicitous expression of difference, celebrating both the masculine and the feminine nature within individuals and the universe. The creation of such a world requires questioning, deconstructing and recreating the philosophies which have informed our culture.

These four protagonists chart the journey of cultural transformation beginning with women's experience as a silent, passive object in a patriarchal world. They then explore what it might mean to become a subject, investigating the feminine voice of desire and strength. Inherent in their goal of wholeness is the revalorization of women's lives and that which is considered to be the

"feminine". Redefining woman is inseparable from redefining Man, and this knowledge is central to the four stories.

Collectively, these women call for a re-ordering of masculinist values. This feminist approach focuses particularly on hierarchical power, how it affects women's experience and how it determines the supremacist philosophies which order our world. These stories envisage instead a shared power of equals which benefits all.

Breaking down models of binary opposition is an essential step in this metamorphic female quest. Oppressive dualisms centreing around differences between the masculine and feminine principles are particularly evident throughout the four stories. The desire for integration, equality and an understanding of these distinctions as simply two poles on a continuum unites the narratives in their feminist goal. Relationships between self and cultural image, self and other, self and environment and self and spiritual universe play extremely important roles of integration in these works. Past, present and future meld into a conception of time as a process, often manifest as a return to the beginning in order to gain new understanding. They depict the female quest as an exciting, challenging and an ongoing transformative process.

Similar patterns of woman's quest for personal, social and spiritual wholeness are evident in the works of many Canadian writers and film-makers. The work of Louky

Bersianik, Bronwen Wallace, Marcelle Brisson and Margaret Laurence come immediately to mind. Film-makers such as Yolaine Rouleau, Patricia Grubin, Joyce Wieland and Paule Baillargeon also depict this shared quest for wholeness.

Films which have emerged from the National Film Board's Women's Studio "D" are particularly inspiring, passionate, and politically engaged enunciations of women's call for a more holistic revisioning of the world.¹ Important issues related to this cultural transformation are explored in these films. The now famous films, Not a Love Story and If You Love this Planet, show the roots of pornography and the war machine in patriarchal concepts of power. Other films document how this domination is extended to attitudes about underdevelopment in the Third World, focusing particularly on the most oppressed group in these countries -- the women and children. Behind the Veil: Nuns documents women's spiritual history in the Catholic Church and explores the present personal and social manifestations of this past. These concerns are representative of a current wider cultural investigation into the effects of supremacist power and patriarchal values. The popularity of these films demonstrates their timeliness.² The N.F.B.'s Studio "D" films, like feminist philosophy, encourage us to imagine a different world. They teach that individuals have the power to transform, and a responsibility to take action.

Woman's quest for wholeness complements similar current

movements and concerns evident in the Western world today. The nuclear issue and call for a more co-operative attitude towards politics is one area of inquiry. The destruction of the Earth's environment is another, inseparable from the oppression of the feminine in our culture. New models of the universe and power are also emerging from recent subatomic and astronomical theory, suggesting a more systemic view which stresses the interdependence of the whole. Studies on how the optimal functioning of the right and left sides of the brain involves an interplay between the two hemispheres simply underlines this holistic, feminist model.

Women's personal, social and spiritual quest for new models of power, wholeness and interdependence amongst so-called dualisms heralds a movement towards a future paradigm shift offering women, men and the universe significant possibilities for transformation and growth.

ENDNOTES TO CONCLUSION

1. The Women's Studio "D" films, in general, remain within traditional modes of documentary practice. Their deconstruction of patriarchal norms occurs primarily through the subjects which they address.

2. For statistical figures comparing the popularity of the Women's Studio "D" films with an N.F.B.-wide selection, see Chris Sherbarth's article "Why not 'D': An Historical Look at the N.F.B.'s Woman's Studio," Cinema Canada, 139 (March 1987), p. 12.

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