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BREAKING THE TABOOS: THE INTERPLAY OF SILENCE AND VOICE
IN CANADIAN WOMEN'S WRITING

by

© Tünde H. Nemeth, B. A.

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

1 September 1987

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Abstract

This thesis analyzes, from a feminist perspective, texts by Canadian women writers that shed light on the question of women's silence. The introduction examines recent feminist theory on ways in which women are silenced in patriarchal discourse, both in speaking and in writing. It argues that women's traditional position of subordination in patriarchal culture has been posited on their silence, but that despite this women have written in ways that break their traditional silence and transform literary discourse. Two novels and several short stories are considered in light of feminist theory about women's silence.

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Abbreviations

<u>ES</u>	<u>The Elizabeth Stories</u>
<u>NT</u>	<u>Night Travellers</u>
<u>IP</u>	<u>Inland Passage</u>
<u>GC</u>	<u>By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept</u>
<u>IL</u>	<u>Intertidal Life</u>

Introduction

Women's garrulousness and capacity for gossip are legendary; they are clichés in patriarchal discourse. Women are commonly thought to talk incessantly, yet never to have anything of importance to say. Patriarchal discourse hears women's voices only as trivial noise, a vague high-pitched buzzing of insects about the head, perhaps. Women's voices are subsumed by a universal "Man" whose ears are attuned only to the sound of his own voice, and can only make sense of those sounds that are on the same frequency as his own. The high frequency sounds of women's voices are especially difficult for him to hear, and what he cannot hear or make sense of he cannot value.

Jane Marcus's observation in "Storming the Toolshed" illustrates how easily women's voices can be overlooked by men:

There were no feminist critics speaking at the first meeting of the School of Criticism and Theory at Northwestern University in the spring of 1981. . . . Protest at the omission of feminists was met by the response that there are no feminist theorists, at least none whom the men find "interesting." . . . We are excluded from their discourse (theorizing is a male activity); consequently no intellectual intercourse can take place.

(Marcus 625, emphasis in original)

Because women are excluded from patriarchal discourse, their voices become relegated to a negative space defined by what Man can neither hear, understand, nor value -- a space that is thus "not-Man's." In our culture, Man's space is the dominant, public one; women's negative space is its binary

opposite, "not-public." In our culture, where binary opposition usually means a hidden hierarchy, "not-public" is the space in which the "other-than-dominant" exists, the space that is less valued than the dominant, public space. Women's voices are relegated to a negatively valued space called "private," because it is only in the home that their voices can be heard at all, over the back fence, kitchen table or telephone, and moreover, only by each other.

While women's supposed garrulousness is a cliché in the world of patriarchal "Man," their actual silence has become a locus of analysis and struggle in the feminist movement. Feminist analysts such as Cheris Kramarae and Dale Spender have studied and documented a reality that contradicts the cliché. In books like Kramarae's Women and Men Speaking and Spender's Man-Made Language, to name but two, a single crucial point emerges insistently from their documentation, discussion and analysis: women's speech (and, by extension, writing) exists in a "muted" relationship to men's speech as well as to the dominant male-stream discourse that shapes and supports our patriarchal social system.

In numerous studies of mixed-sex linguistic interactions, women have been found consistently to speak less than men; to interrupt less and allow themselves to be interrupted more; to be more tentative in speech style, asking more questions or offering more topics, but allowing men to choose and thus control what topics will succeed in the conversation. The statistics are startling. For

example, Dale Spender cites a 1975 study which found that "98 per cent of interruptions in mixed sex conversation were made by men" (Spender 43). Francine Frank and Frank Anshen, in Language and the Sexes, cite statistics (gathered by Pamela Fishman and published by her in 1978) concerning topic failure in conversations in mixed-sex couples. "In some twelve hours of recordings of spontaneous talk," they write, "seventy-six topics were raised, forty-seven by women and twenty-nine by men" (Frank and Anshen 31). They go on to reveal that, while all but one of the male-introduced topics succeeded, twenty-eight women's topics failed; and "of the forty-five successful topics, twenty-eight were proposed by men and only seventeen. . . by women" (Frank and Anshen 31).

The vast contradiction between the stereotype of women's garrulousness and the reality of their silence is enough to give one pause. Indeed, the more suspicious among us might be tempted to conclude that men do not really want women to speak at all. Dale Spender offers a simple enough explanation for this:

the yardstick against which women's talkativeness has been measured -- and found to be too great -- is not men's speech but silence itself. Women have not been judged on the grounds of whether they talk more than men, but of whether they talk more than silent women. When silence is the desired state for women (and I suggest that it is in a patriarchal order, as do numerous other feminists) then any talk in which a woman engages can be too much. What an advantage for males in a patriarchal order!
(Spender 42)

When women begin to speak and insist on being heard, they begin to break down the male advantage to which Spender

refers; in other words, they take power into their own hands by asserting their power of speech. In this sense, then, women's speech is profoundly subversive.

By the same token, any writing by women is by definition subversive, simply because women are refusing silence, and speaking out through their writing. By taking up the pen, women also challenge the age-old tradition that only men can create, or "father," a text. In the opening pages of The Madwoman in the Attic, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar trace, from Aristotle to Bloom "the patriarchal notion that the writer 'fathers' his text just as God fathered the world" (Gilbert and Gubar 4) -- a concept they claim "is and has been all-pervasive in Western literary civilization" (Gilbert and Gubar 4). Gilbert and Gubar observe that Gerard Manley Hopkins theorized that creativity is an exclusively male activity, and they conclude, "[m]ale sexuality . . . is not just analogically but actually the essence of literary power. The poet's pen is in some sense (even more than figuratively) a penis" (Gilbert and Gubar 4). Gilbert and Gubar go on to explore the effect on literary women of "male metaphors of literary creation" based in "the patriarchal etiology that defines a solitary Father God as the only creator of all things" (Gilbert and Gubar 7). They ask,

what if male generative power is . . . the only power there is? That literary theoreticians from Aristotle to Hopkins seemed to believe this was so no doubt prevented many women from ever "attempting the pen" . . . and caused enormous anxiety in generations of those women who were "presumptuous" enough to dare such an attempt. (Gilbert and Gubar 7)

Gilbert and Gubar demonstrate, in these early pages of The Madwoman in the Attic, that our society traditionally has expected women would never be able to write because they lacked the metaphorical "penis" that would allow them to author a story.

Like women's speech, women's writing is not only subversive but marginal, regardless of whether a specific piece of writing conforms to the current dominant style or not. That is, regardless of form -- or content, for that matter -- the voices of women's narratives are never those of the dominant patriarchal discourse, because women's relationship to that discourse is different from men's.

Cheris Kramarae, in her chapter on women as a muted group, demonstrates amply women's different relationship to language and discourse (Kramarae 1-32). Kramarae explains muted group theory with regard to this relationship as follows:

The language of a particular culture does not serve all its speakers equally, for not all speakers contribute in an equal fashion to its formulation. Women (and members of other subordinate groups) are not as free or as able as men are to say what they wish, because the words and the norms for their use have been formulated by the dominant group, men. So women cannot as easily or as directly articulate their experiences as men can. Women's perceptions differ from those of men because women's subordination means they experience life differently. However, the words and norms for speaking are not generated from or fitted to women's experiences. Women are thus "muted." Their talk is often not considered of much value by men -- who are, or appear to be, deaf and blind to much of women's experiences. Words constantly ignored may eventually come to be unspoken and perhaps even unthought.
(Kramarae 1)

In their essay, "The Reader's Construction of Meaning: Cognitive Research on Gender and Comprehension," Mary Crawford and Roger Chaffin reiterate this idea: "The experiences 'lost in the translation' to the dominant idiom remain unvoiced, and perhaps unthought, even within the muted group" (Crawford and Chaffin 20). "Perhaps unthought, even within the muted group" -- surely this is the most profound silencing of all. The implications are staggering: even women's thoughts are patterned by this male-dominated discourse. Yet women have continued not only to think but to write, against all odds: despite their muted position in language and discourse.

In addition to the difficulties posed by women's muted position, by their lack of the metaphorical "penis," and by their traditional silence, women's material conditions are not conducive to the production of art. Women's traditional "reproductive" work of childbearing, child rearing and housekeeping is incompatible with writing. Further, women's social position -- including their poverty and their isolation from each other -- has traditionally prevented them from writing at all. Because of these barriers, many potential writers have been silenced before they could begin.

Traditionally, the act of writing is a solitary activity, demanding at least one thing most women, especially mothers, often cannot get: time to themselves, time to think without

interruption.¹ The demands of "women's work" -- such as domestic labour, childcare and the emotional maintenance of the family unit -- leave little time or energy for anything else. Furthermore, women have been socialized to put others before themselves and, especially, to put man and family first. Audrey Thomas, in her 1984 novel, Intertidal Life, observes:

The woman artist . . . [i]f she is to move forward at all . . . has to develop a layer of selfishness -- self-is-ness -- that has been traditionally reserved for men. But then the men, who feel "despised and rejected," accuse these women of being "cold."

"If you love me why do you neglect me?" or words to that effect.

As though all the heat, all the energy of the woman had to be directed toward the man!

And the woman, guilty in her own eyes, never mind the man's, weeps and asks forgiveness and accepts the man's point of view as the correct one -- or the only one. She backs down and puts the dinner on. Or else. (IL 173-74)

Even without children, it is difficult enough for women writers -- or would-be writers -- to take the time required to practise their craft without feeling guilty about neglecting their family and responsibilities. Tillie Olsen points out that in both the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, most successful women writers did not marry at all (for example, Jane Austen, Emily Brontë, Willa Cather, Marianne Moore), or when they did, they married in their late 30s (as did George Eliot, Elizabeth Barrett Browning,

¹Crawford and Chaffin cite feminist collective writing as one way of breaking with the tradition of the solitary artist solely responsible for "his" work (Crawford and Chaffin 22-23).

The life story of Elizabeth Smart is one notable example of how the material demands of single motherhood can make it impossible for a woman to write. The 32-year gap between Smart's first novel, By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept, and her second, The Assumption of the Roques and Rascals, corresponds to the period during which she was raising her four children by herself as well as working outside the home in order to support them. In a 1983 interview with Martha Muzychka, Smart said of this time, "I was really desperate about wanting to go back (to writing). I felt it was my duty to write but I couldn't leave my children" (Muzychka, "Rediscovery" 12). In a later version of this interview, Muzychka describes Smart's work as follows:

Smart worked as an advertising copy writer, creating the little bits of information which surrounded fashion layouts. She also wrote little booklets on how pantyhose were made.

Smart recalled those years with some regret. "It took up a horrific amount of my time. By the time the day is over, you can't really come home and write about your soul."

(Muzychka, "Contradiction" 22)

This description demonstrates how women's work, both inside and outside the home, silences women writers before they even begin to write. Tillie Olsen is described on the cover of Silences as "a Depression high school dropout, [who] wrote and published when young, but the necessity of raising and supporting four children through 'everyday' jobs silenced her for 20 years." These are but two examples of a story that is as widespread as it is tragic.

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Women's lack of financial independence in traditional capitalist patriarchy made (makes) all women "poor" by capitalist standards of property ownership, regardless of actual economic status. Indeed women were themselves property: objects of exchange, not agents or consumers of the exchange; exchanged rather than exchangers. Class designations were and are a male construction: even in the aristocracy, a woman's status was (is) derived from her father or husband, not from any independent status of her own. These conditions have carried over into the twentieth-century Western understanding of women's and men's relative social positions, and form another aspect of how women's material conditions prevent them from writing, effectively silencing their voices. Virginia Woolf was, I think, the first to identify women's poverty and concomitant lack of privacy as factors in this silencing, and I believe her analysis in A Room of One's Own is still the best formulation of the problem to date: simply, a woman must have her own money (and hence status) and a room of her own if she is to be able to write. Elizabeth Smart elaborated, "You need a place, even a book cupboard will do" (Muzychka, "Contradiction" 22), as long as it is private. Many women -- perhaps most women -- did not and do not have their own money; nor do many have "even a book cupboard" all to themselves for writing.

The silencing of women before they can begin to write, or indeed to think, has devastating results. Suppression and

pre-censorship combine with poverty and subjugation to keep women isolated from each other. A vicious circle takes hold: as long as women remain isolated, we cannot stop the suppression; as long as women's writing remains suppressed, we remain isolated. Suppressed and isolated, thousands of women simply give up, as Elizabeth Smart did for over 30 years, Tillie Olsen for 20.

Nonetheless, women do write. They always have. So far have women come that their writing is being published, their voices are being heard, and the dominant discourse of patriarchal capitalist culture is changing because of women's agitation and women's struggle.

Women are finally being heard. Things are finally beginning to change -- slowly -- all around us, because of women's struggles. But when women write, they face yet another barrier: language itself. "Women have to write," says Cheris Kramarae, "with what is for them an impoverished language" (Kramarae 19), because its gender bias excludes and therefore silences women. Moreover, we receive contradictory and confusing messages about language: on the one hand, it is ideologically constructed as "universal," and therefore includes women; closer analysis reveals, on the other hand, that in practice women are often excluded, subsumed by the "male" rather than being equal partners in the construction. Dorothy Smith's article, "A Peculiar Eclipsing," opens with the premise that "[i]n the kind of society we have, a great deal gets done in words (or other

symbolic terms) and on paper. The work of administration, of management, of government, is a communicative work. Organizational and political processes are forms of action in words" (Smith 281, emphasis in original). The article analyzes a variety of fields of knowledge to demonstrate how the construction and communication of knowledge is not gender-neutral or universal at all, but heavily biased toward the male. Women, Smith says, "have been largely excluded from the work of producing the forms of thought and the images and symbols in which thought is expressed and ordered. There is a circle effect. Men attend to and treat as significant only what men say" (Smith 281). This exclusion, she argues, "means that the concerns, interests, experiences forming 'our' culture are those of men in positions of dominance whose perspectives are built on the silence of women" (Smith 282, emphasis in original).

The making of language itself is one of the cultural activities from which women are excluded. For a start, women are silenced by their invisibility in language (I refer only to English and French here, although the same patterns doubtless exist in other languages as well), most apparent on the semantic level, where in both English and French women are apparently included under the supposedly generic designation "Man." Casey Miller and Kate Swift's 1976 Words and Women argues persuasively that "Man" does not include "women" in anything like a generic sense.

Miller and Swift discuss several studies in which groups

of people were tested for responses to the generic "man" and consistently interpreted "man" to mean "biological male" far more often than "biological female." Even young children, these studies show, have an already-clear image that what the generic "man" really means is "male," not "female." The effect of such gender bias in language is devastating for women, throwing into question their full membership in humanity. Miller and Swift write:

Given the male norm, it becomes natural to think of women as an auxiliary and subordinate class, and from there it is an easy jump to see them as a minority or special interest group.

Those who have grown up with a language that tells them they are at the same time men and not men are faced with ambivalence -- not about their sex, but about their status as human beings. For the question, "Who is man?" it seems, is a political one, and the very ambiguity of the word is what makes it a useful tool for those who have a stake in maintaining the status quo.
(Miller and Swift 34-35)

For women who are writers, the effects are even more acute than for women who do not try to write: how does a woman express herself in a language that designates her as subordinate, not fully human because of being "not-Man"? The ambivalence and ambiguity around the generic "man" serve the patriarchal status quo by systematic non-validation of women's experience and women's presence in a linguistic space; that is, generic "man" silences women. Similarly, observes Patricia Smart, the mute "e" which in French designates the female is

a silent ending which can be removed without any effect on the syntax or meaning of the sentence. The feminine in grammar is a 'spare part,' an accessory, a silent embellishment to structure and meaning The same cannot be said of the masculine form, which cannot be

removed without destroying the sentence.
(Smart 10-11)

Gender bias in language exists on the structural as well as on the semantic level, because narrative desire is constructed as "male." The structure of narrative generates desire within the reader or listener, a desire to reach the end of the story and find out what happens. As demonstrated in Roland Barthes' S/Z, narrative conventions or codes operate within all traditional realist texts (be they novels, novellas, short stories or narrative poems) to encourage the reader's desire by arousing her / his curiosity. Narrative convention constructs a reader who will want closure in a text, who will desire a climax and dénouement. We are trained, as readers, to look for these stages in a narrative -- be it a play or a novel; indeed, one of the first things we learn about analyzing literature is how to "correctly" dissect a plot into its component stages.

In Alice Doesn't: Feminism, Semiotics, Cinema, Teresa de Lauretis poses the question, "whose desire is it that speaks [in posing a question or telling a story], and whom does that desire address?" (de Lauretis 112). She answers the question herself:

The desire is Oedipus's, and though its object may be woman (or Truth or knowledge or power), its term of reference and address is man: man as social being and mythical subject, founder of the social order, and source of mimetic violence However, we need not limit our understanding of the inscription of desire in narrative to the Oedipus story proper, which is in fact paradigmatic of all narratives.
(de Lauretis 112)

De Lauretis is saying, then, that both the questioner (or

writer) and the one addressed (or reader) are constructed as male. She also equates "woman" with the "object" of the male questioner's desire.

Language itself -- the point of entry into the symbolic realm of literature -- silences and alienates women by excluding them on both semantic and structural levels. Must this mean, then, that women cannot be subjects? Must it mean they "can't paint, can't write," as Virginia Woolf repeats so often in To the Lighthouse? Obviously not -- for women do write, overcoming their status as "objects" by refusing to be silent, and instead becoming "subjects" of their own enunciation. This thesis examines novels and short stories by five Canadian women writers who have succeeded in being "subjects" rather than "objects," and who have overcome the alienation implicit in language as constructed in our culture to break the silence around their themes and to speak in their own voices about women's experience.

The voice of these writers, and many others, is the voice of taboo. Women's experience -- the experience of the muted group -- becomes "taboo" because it is repressed and ignored by the dominant group, hence by society at large. This repression results in the creation of a field of subject matter that is discussed only among women. Examples of "taboo," "women-only" topics are: "romantic betrayals, unwanted pregnancies, illnesses of various horrible kinds, marital infidelities, mental breakdowns, tragic suicides, unpleasant lingering deaths" (Atwood 21). "Women-only"

topics are constructed as "private" and therefore "taboo," or not to be talked about in public (whereas, for instance, death by violence, usually a male reserve, is "public" and even "newsworthy"!)). By succeeding in publishing their books on the open market, these women writers make public what has always been spoken about among women, in private -- but rarely immortalized in print. In doing so, they break the silence around taboo topics and therefore around women's lives, thus empowering both the writers and their readers.

Many of these taboo areas are in fact the same as the traditional "Great Themes" of literature -- sex and death -- but telling the stories from women's different position with respect to these Great Themes radically alters the themes themselves. When a woman tells a story from her perspective, that perspective is often coincident with the space coded as "taboo" by patriarchal culture. From a male perspective, for instance, Sandra Birdsell's "The Wednesday Circle" might be about a harmless sexual game a man plays with a nubile young girl; we might get sexualized and titillating descriptions of budding breasts and flowering genitalia. As Birdsell tells it, however, through the eyes of the girl, it is no longer titillating, but frightening. The girl, Betty, sees herself as curious, but not exactly consenting; she is ashamed of her own actions, but feels powerless to change her situation by breaking the silence around it. The story becomes one about child sexual abuse -- a topic our society has only recently begun to regard as a public matter, rather than a private

one.

"The Wednesday Circle" is one of five short stories analyzed in Chapter One of this thesis. Each of them breaks the silence around a taboo topic; in addition to child abuse, the stories treat as themes wife beating, a lesbian relationship, dying of cancer, and women's silence itself. The three authors represented in these five stories write comfortably and skillfully within realist discourse. Their narratives are smooth and seamless, unfolding very clearly from beginning to end, with no temporal or stylistic jumps. Although they make no radical incursions on this discourse on the level of language, this is not to say there is nothing radical about these writers, for what all three have done is to appropriate this realist mode of writing to break women's silence by expressing their realities.

Chapter Two of this thesis examines the dynamic of silence and the breaking of taboo in a much earlier work, Elizabeth Smart's By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept. This 1945 novel breaks the silence around female desire and passion, the repression of which is a supporting pillar of patriarchy. Furthermore, the novel breaks an even greater taboo by placing this female desire in the context of an adulterous relationship, and telling the story from the point of view of the "other woman."

This perspective produces a transformation similar to the one I have outlined with regard to "The Wednesday Circle." Told from the man's point of view, Elizabeth

Smart's By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept could have been another in a long series of tales that concern themselves with the painful choice between wife and mistress -- to stay with Circe forever, or to go back to Penelope and one's own hearth? To opt for pity, and go with the wife who has brought your children with her to try to lure you home from Egypt -- or to opt for passion in Cleopatra's arms? Elizabeth Smart turns the tale on its head by writing in and from the taboo space of the abandoned mistress, the adulterous woman with no place in discourse or society, the woman who has given up everything for the man.

The form of By Grand Central Station is as subversive as its content. Although it is possible to trace through the novel a thin narrative line, By Grand Central Station cannot be described as a "realist" text. Rather, the open-ended narrative structure -- as well as the allusive language -- allows female desire to emerge and to speak in its own voice, one that contradicts the rules of realism, thus breaking the silence around this desire on the level of form as well as content.

Chapter Three of this thesis explores the interplay of taboo, silence and voice in Audrey Thomas's Intertidal Life, tracing the intricate network of silence and voice among the characters as well as in the text. The novel not only exposes the taboo emotions, anger and grief, that often underlie women's silence, but adds a new dimension to the notion of taboo: that is, taboos can change, but they are

always controlled by the dominant group. The novel reveals that the taboos introduced by the counterculture of the 1960s and 1970s differed in content from those of the mainstream, but not in structure: they were still imposed on women by men, and, as in mainstream culture, they rested on women's silence.

Intertidal Life both uses and subverts the realist narrative mode. Its fragmentary form allows Thomas to examine the same incident more than once, from different viewpoints and at different times. Yet the fragments do somehow form a coherent story, though it must be assembled by the reader. The fragmentary form is also reflected in the novel's protagonist who, like her text, is never unified but remains multiple and contradictory to the end.

Women's writing, then, may or may not reflect a theoretical awareness of formal strategies for writing a way out of the patriarchal trap of language, using the very tools that built that trap in the first place. But whether it reflects this awareness or not, women's writing has become very political, for it subverts and revolutionizes our language and transforms our lives. The works examined in this thesis substantially contribute to this process of transformation.

Chapter One

Voices from the Margins: Breaking Taboo in Selected Short Stories

The five short stories examined in this chapter break women's silence by bringing into the public realm various "taboo" topics and telling about them from a woman's point of view, within a realist narrative framework. All five of the stories treat the taboo topic as theme, and three of them also have silence itself as a theme. Isabel Huggan's short story, "Secrets," demonstrates the workings of the network of secrecy and taboo within a small community of women. "The Real World," by Jane Rule, deals with the dynamic of secrecy and taboo in a family of women, as well as with the taboo topic of a lesbian relationship. Sandra Birdsell's "The Wednesday Circle" concerns the taboo theme of child abuse as well as exploring the silence of the child. Huggan's "Sorrows of the Flesh" treats the theme of wife battering, while Rule's "Slogans" is about dying of cancer, and about a lesbian relationship. Whether silence functions as theme or backdrop, all five stories operate within a dynamic of silence and voice.

"Secrets"

"Secrets" (ES 138-61) explores the "women-only" world of taboo; women's silence itself is its main focus. The "secrets" to which the title refers are those that are kept and shared among the women in the small community of Garten, Huggan's fictional Ontario town. There is a wide range of

what they consider secret or "taboo": one woman's alcoholism, another's nervous breakdowns; the fact that a certain woman was not really a widow, but had been abandoned by her husband; the fact that some members of the community "slip(ped) into the city" for electrolysis treatments (ES 139).

The notion of "secrecy" breaks the binary opposition, silence / voice, by belonging in both camps. When a secret is kept, silence is invoked; when it is shared or revealed, voice is implied. Writing about secrets also draws the reader into the dynamic of telling and not-telling. The protagonist, Elizabeth, in her ambiguous dual role as both character and narrator, also belongs in both camps, silence and voice, at once. Her ambiguous role leaves the reader constantly asking, who is the subject of this story? Is it Elizabeth-as-she-was-then, at the time of the story? Is it Elizabeth-as-she-is-now, at the time of telling / reading this story? The former is Elizabeth the character, whose position as child-observer is completely innocent, and who therefore often lapses into silence. The latter is the narrator, whose usually omniscient position supplements Elizabeth's innocent point of view with a more authoritative voice that can better challenge the reader to interpret the gaps in Elizabeth's understanding. This places the narrator on the side of "voice," although this narratorial voice is

not always explicit.¹

Elizabeth reports faithfully everything she sees and hears, whether she understands it or not. When she reports that her mother's friend June says to Mavis, "Well you know Arthur," Elizabeth observes, "I never grasped what their conversations were about . . . the two women had set up a code in which little was said but much understood" (ES 150). Huggan does not, however, leave it at that, but rather uses the narrator Elizabeth to press the point. She is allowed to muse about this code, to think out loud, so to speak, for the benefit of the reader:

. . . yes, we all knew Arthur, but what, but what? What was the information they were passing back and forth? Their voices would have a humourous edge, but there was something else under that, a brittle, discontent, unhappy sound. "You know Arthur. . . ." What did that mean? What did they know about Arthur? What did they know about Arthur and Frank and each other that could not be spoken? June's voice sounded, it seemed to me, as if she had given up on Arthur. Was that it -- had Mavis and June given up on something? (ES 150-51)

By this point in the story, the reader is privy to the code in a way that Elizabeth as character is not. The narrator's questions are merely a stylistic disguise for an omniscient voice, a disguise that allows Huggan to make her point without being didactic. These musings help the reader to understand just what it is in the gaps that June and Mavis

¹This ambiguous, or "split," subject recurs frequently in women's writing, although it is doubtless not unique to women's writing; rather, it is a particularly useful narrative device for women writers, in that it allows them to construct a character who displays silence, as well as a narrator who comments on it.

cannot speak. The reader not only agrees with Elizabeth that Mavis and June have given up on something, perhaps on their husbands, but also senses from her own experience that what they do not admit is that they have given up on making changes in their lives, on taking control of their lives -- in short, that they have given up on themselves.

In "Secrets," silence is thematized as a secret society of women from which men are excluded "as if there were a conspiracy among the women to keep things from the husbands. In fact, those men were often involved in the secrets themselves -- they simply weren't part of the intricate network of telling and not-telling" (ES 140). Each of the groups of secrets -- those the women keep from each other and those they keep from the men -- has its own code of ethics governing "telling and not-telling." The text maintains a silence around this code of ethics, never revealing, for example, what criteria are used to determine who tells what to whom. It is this gap in the text that we as readers can fill.

The first key assumption in filling the gap is the existence of a dualistic world in which women and men exist in separate spheres. It is because of this view of the world as sharply divided that there are so many things women only talk about among themselves. Those of us who share the ideology expressed in the silences of the text know what those things are, seemingly instinctively. We know, for instance, that it is "proper" for Mavis, but not for

Elizabeth, to talk to Frank about the electrolysis treatments Elizabeth has been undergoing, because of their roles: we expect a wife and husband to share intimacies that a daughter and father would not. The text alludes to this set of assumptions with the statement, "I suppose my father must have known, since it was his money that paid for the treatments, but like all matters of a female nature it was never mentioned between us" (ES 139). The mother also would never mention to the daughter that the father knew about these "matters of a female nature."

Similarly, we know from the narrator's description what kind of criteria operate in the "women-only" network of secrecy. Again, apparently instinctively but in fact from clues in the text, combined with our own experience as women in communities, we know that the code goes something like this: you tell your best friend everything, including secrets other friends tell you, and despite your promise not to tell. Your best friend must then keep three secrets: the fact that she knows and the fact that you told her, as well as the original information itself.

While men are excluded from this female circle of secrecy, girls such as Elizabeth are gradually introduced to it through their mothers, a process that is represented in the story by italicized sections that begin with the refrain, "My mother is teaching me how to dance" (ES 140, 141, 147, 153). Elizabeth already understands something about keeping secrets because of her habit of stationing herself at the top

of the stairs in order to eavesdrop on her mother's conversations. She can keep secrets if they directly involve her -- for example, she can remember never to mention things she has overheard in this way because this would reveal her hiding place. It is her girlfriends' secrets she has trouble "keeping straight," "divulging Linda's secrets to Amy or Sharon's to Joyce, not with any malicious intent but from forgetfulness" (ES 138). The metaphor of learning how to dance refers to learning to remember who is allowed to know what, an integral part of membership in this community of women.

The italicized sections also play an important role on the level of text and narrative. They function in the text to move the narrative along, and to play out the hermeneutic sequence (the sequence in the text that provides the mystery in a narrative). Their references to Tim, Mavis's old dancing partner, draw on the reader's expectations from her experience of literary technique to make her believe these references hint that Tim and Mavis are having an affair. As such, these sections contribute to the way in which the narrator unravels for the reader the secret of Mavis's religious beliefs at the same narrative time as Elizabeth discovers it.

The narrative indicates that Mavis's clandestine religious tastes are unknown to her female circle of secrecy: because Elizabeth finds this secret out on her own, not from eavesdropping on telephone conversations as she does to find

out other secrets; and because the official story -- even to Mavis's best friend, June -- is that Mavis goes to the city to see a chiropractor (ES 141). In the end, then, it appears that only Elizabeth knows her mother's secret, and she must keep this knowing itself a secret from her mother. The physical nature of Elizabeth's silence marks her true initiation into the circle of women who keep secrets and have "bad spells," like Mavis's tension headaches: "I felt as if I couldn't breathe much of the time, questions for my mother were clogging my throat" (ES 154).

At the moment of revelation there is paradox. While the narrative reveals that Mavis goes to the Anglican church secretly, it does not reveal why it must be a secret, and hence the text lapses into silence. It is possible, however, to interpret this silence, based on what it does say explicitly. From Elizabeth's description of Mavis's unusual passion and emotion when talking to Tim in the restaurant, we can discern that Mavis needs her religion for personal, spiritual reasons. Yet for her husband, Frank, religious affiliation is only important for determining his status, and therefore his family's, in the community.

Frank's dominance over his family's life, including what church his wife attends, is supported by his position as patriarchal head of the household and informed by his position in the community as a banker who must maintain the proper social contacts for business reasons. Frank is portrayed as the kind of man who firmly occupies his

privileged space in both his home and his community, and whose word is law. The family attends the United Church because Frank thinks it is good for business:

Frank found that the United was a real up-and-coming church, attracting the new people in town, the young couples with growing families, the very people he wanted to put money in his bank. . . . By going to the United Church he was covering more bases for the Imperial, he said.

(ES 146)

In addition to making explicit the reason for the choice of religious affiliation, the text also provides an example of what happens when Mavis crosses Frank by getting a job:

Mavis and June, being exactly the kind of women that Moodies catered to, found themselves hired on the day they applied. But the next day, right after breakfast, my mother got on the phone. "He says absolutely no, June. . . . I talked myself blue in the face but he wouldn't listen. He just kept on at the same old thing, no wife of mine, no matter what"

(ES 144)

From Frank's insistence on this point, we can easily infer what the text does not say explicitly: any overt move Mavis made toward religious autonomy would end in being forbidden if Frank knew about it.

The importance of keeping Mavis's secret from Frank is obvious; from her network of friends, perhaps less so, but explicable when we consider the importance of religious affiliation in Garten "not only for the women who ran the bazaars and sang in the choirs but as social definition" (ES 146). The text tells us how important religious affiliation is in the community at large as well as in the community of women. It does not say explicitly what we know to be true because of our socialization in our particular society (and

ideology): the importance of religious affiliation in a small Ontario town in that period (the fifties) means that both Mavis's and Frank's social position would change for the worse if it became known that Mavis attended a different church.

Elizabeth's silence is therefore necessary both to the maintenance of the family's position in the community and to Mavis's own sanity in so far as she depends on her women friends for her support:

Women like Mavis, married to men like Frank, with children like me . . . women like that needed each other. Without that [telephone] receiver into which to pour their troubles, there would have been little comfort or release. Their secret phone life provided them with an escape from the realities of Garton they'd not have had otherwise.

(ES 143)

Elizabeth has become an endpoint on her mother's "intricate network of telling and not-telling" by discovering Mavis's secret; her knowledge is her own secret, one that she cannot share with Mavis. Her initiation into the network is completed when she decides not to confront Mavis with the fact that she knows about the latter's visits to the church. Elizabeth as a character must be silent; as a narrator, she can reveal everything.

"The Real World"

Like "Secrets," "The Real World" (IP 45-60) revolves around an intricate web of silence and secret, this time involving two linked sets of mother-daughter relationships. "The Real World" opens with a tension between voice and

silence with respect to a woman's love for another woman. Tess wants to tell her maternal grandmother ("Gram") -- who lives with Tess and her mother, Margaret -- about her lover, Annie, so that the latter can move in with the family. Tess's mother, Margaret, intervenes between Tess and her grandmother, insisting that if she and Annie want to live together, she should move out, rather than tell her grandmother she is a lesbian.

The positions Tess and Margaret take about the necessity for secrecy reflect their respective attitudes and values. Tess regards her lesbianism as a matter of love and of a whole way of living. Keeping it a secret, she says, is turning her into "a hypocrite and a liar," and forcing her to "deny the most important thing in [her] life" (IP 45). By saying so to her mother, Tess breaks an important silence by naming that silence (as hypocrisy and lies) and naming her oppression (as a denial of the most important thing in her life). Margaret, on the other hand, sees Tess's lesbianism as a private, sexual issue, which Gram need not ever know about. In other words, she acknowledges it as "taboo," saying it is only the most important thing in Tess's "private life" (IP 45, emphasis in original). Tess counters that she cannot have a private life until Gram knows about her love relationship with Annie.

From Tess's opening statement ("There's no reason, just because she's eighty, that she shouldn't live in the real world," IP 45), she takes the position that the fact of women

loving women is part of reality; therefore, she argues, Gram should not be sheltered from that reality, and Tess herself should not be forced to maintain a silence around her choice. Margaret's position, by contrast, is that her mother's "world is just as real as yours, and, if you love her, you should want her to live comfortably in it" (IP 45). In saying this, however, Margaret is also talking about herself. She is also more comfortable with Tess's silence.

To some extent, Margaret uses her mother as an excuse to mask her own discomfort with Tess's sexual orientation, and with Tess's request to bring Annie to live with them. The text does not say so explicitly, but the connection is there to be made, in the gaps of the text. It does say Margaret has learned tolerance, over the years, with help from her now-dead husband, who was far more accepting than she is. Now, she allows him to "admonish her from his by now-accustomed grave. Surely," thinks Margaret to herself, "if Annie had been Andrew and they wanted to begin their married life in this house, Margaret would not have objected" (IP 46).

At the same time as she uses her mother as a shield against confronting Tess with her own discomfort, Margaret herself also keeps silent about many things where her mother is concerned. For instance, she "even allowed her mother to think she'd stayed away from church all her married life out of respect for Lou's athelism and now had happily returned to the fold" (IP 47), when in fact the reason Margaret now goes

to church is that it is simpler to do so than it would be to drop her mother off and pick her up later, just to "make a point of not going" (IP 48). Margaret silences herself in the interest of allowing her mother "some right to be who she was as well, though Margaret admitted to herself that her mother's views were often both alien and offensive to Margaret" (IP 47).

Margaret's position is one that is traditional for women, especially for mothers: mediation and peacekeeping through silence, either their own or that of family members in conflict with each other. Margaret mediates between Tess and Gram, on the one hand preventing Tess from revealing her sexual orientation to her grandmother and, on the other, making herself available to Gram so that the latter can criticize Tess and ask questions about her without actually talking to Tess herself. The text reveals the power of this kind of silence as a tool for keeping peace in the family; it also reveals its disadvantages, such as Tess's unhappiness with the situation, or Margaret's own discomfort with her mother's views.

As Margaret will not allow Tess to "come out" to her grandmother, so Gram will not allow Margaret to tell anyone Tess's true occupation, that of auto mechanic. The text in this case tells us exactly why: Gram is "snobbish and sheltered" (IP 47).

Tess closes the circle of secrecy in her family by insisting to her mother that Tess's cooking and laundry

lessons be kept a secret from Gram. We are not told directly why, but again, the connection is there to be made. From Gram's frequent refrain about Tess's unmarried, childless state, and Tess's good-humoured, light-hearted responses that belie her strong feelings, we can infer that Tess, like Margaret, maintains certain silences with regard to her grandmother, in the interest of not entering into open conflict with the latter.

The text breaks an important silence by deconstructing the stereotype of the "butch / fem" dichotomy. First, the story sets Tess up as the "butch," the woman with so-called "masculine tastes and behavior" (IP 46): from an early age, she does not want to learn to cook and sew, but "she does want to learn about tools and fixing the car" (IP 46); she can fix the washing machine and the furnace; she wears jeans to go out with her lover. The stereotype leads us to believe that such women unfailingly dress and behave "like men," and are never interested in or capable of even the simplest domestic chores. But the text also tells us Tess wears a skirt to dinner, and that she asks Margaret for lessons in doing laundry and in cooking -- then, furthermore, tells us Tess becomes good at it. The mix of roles portrayed in one of the partners is enough to break down both ends of the butch / fem dichotomy.

At the same time, the text breaks a silence by indicating that so-called "masculine" tastes and behaviours do not necessarily mean a girl will turn out to be a lesbian.

Margaret asks,

"Why does that [Tess's interest in tools] have to mean she'll be a lesbian?"

"It doesn't," Lou said. "It only means we have to be open to that possibility."

(IP 47)

Lou and Margaret (despite the latter's misgivings) are unusually open to accepting Tess's sexual orientation. They are aligned in the text with the ideas of acceptance and respect, which reside at one pole of a spectrum of power or dominance; at the other pole are Annie's parents, who are aligned with a traditional point of view with regard to homosexuality.

Unlike Tess's grandmother, who may share their perspective, Annie's parents are in a position of dominance relative to Annie. Whereas in Tess's family, the power relationship is subtly balanced among Margaret, Gram and Tess herself, the power in Annie's family definitely rests with the parents, most likely the father. The text does not explicitly describe the patterns of dominance in each household, but rather alludes to them; it is silent and not-silent at once. The text describes the problem-solving technique, negotiation, used in Tess's household, without actually naming it. There is an even greater silence surrounding the power dynamic in Annie's household, Tess's descriptions being the only way we see anything of it at all: it is Tess who tells us that Annie's parents forbid them to see each other (IP 54); Tess who tells us Annie's father has thrown her out of the house because she is pregnant (IP 57).

This leaves the reader to speculate on what actually is said and what actually happens between Annie and her parents.

The text's silence about Annie's family leaves the reader wondering as well about her mother's role: it is Annie's father who is said to have thrown her out -- what about her mother? Did she agree with her husband, we wonder? Did she in fact have any choice or any voice in the decision? This gap in the text leaves it up to the reader to fill in her own analysis of the ideology of dominance that may be involved.

Through suggesting that Annie's parents have threatened to charge Tess with corrupting a minor, the text alludes to but does not elaborate on an ideology that holds that homosexuality is immoral. It also alludes to a profound contradiction in this ideology, which does not view as immoral, for example, the father's action of arranging for his daughter to go out with one of his male friends, then turning her out, with no means of support, when she becomes pregnant by him. The text assumes a reader who can "read" these allusions or gaps: a reader whose cultural background affords an understanding of why a lesbian relationship is taboo, and of the many ways in which lesbians are oppressed, as indeed all women are (by, for example, coercive heterosexism, inadequate contraception and non-existent support systems for pregnant women). A reader with this basic understanding can read the silences around the power relationship in Annie's household.

By contrast with Annie's situation, the results are quite different when Tess does tell her grandmother the truth, openly and in her own terms, about why Annie has stopped visiting them: "I wanted more than she could handle," Tess says. "I loved her" (IP 55). Because she describes her relationship with Annie in terms of love and not sex, Gram can not only accept it, but can even sympathize with Tess's loss. Margaret is surprised, but concludes that "[p]erhaps as long as no one put any name to it but love, her mother had the heart to understand" (IP 56).

Tess's use of the word "love" to describe her relationship with Annie breaks another silence. She names her own experience in a powerful, convincing way, as she has already done to Margaret, when she tells her: "I really love Annie, mother." "I know." "So I have to let her go" (IP 54). In this exchange, the text is again "silent" and "vocal" at the same time, for while Tess names her love for Annie, the text is silent about the implications of Tess's conclusion that her love means she must let Annie go, rather than causing her pain by trying to persuade her to stay against her will.

Tess's statement indicates an attitude very different from the dominant social attitude toward love and the loved one, in which the norm is to try to "hold on" to the loved one at whatever cost, regardless of how the loved one feels. Ordinarily, this attitude is expressed in societal acceptance of jealousy and rivalry. Tess's love is of a less-

romanticized variety, one in which her lover's well-being is more important than anything else, and in which the silent action of retreating from the relationship speaks volumes about this love.

When Annie comes to the door late at night, seeking support and shelter from her parents who have "brutally used" her, Margaret thinks, "in the name of protecting her" (IP 58), Tess is silent about how she feels, but her gestures and the expression on her face tell Margaret all she needs to know. Tess folds Annie in her arms, "her face concerned, her eyes washed with wonder" (IP 56). Margaret therefore suppresses her own questions: "Margaret wanted to ask Tess if she were sure, if this was what she wanted after all these months, but to ask was to pretend she couldn't read Tess's face" (IP 57). What Tess does say to Margaret is simple and clear; she offers no explanation, just makes a decision and states it calmly: Annie will stay the night, with Tess, and they will all talk in the morning. Tess's clear, calm tone here and elsewhere is as important as the words she uses.

Tess's tone with Gram, we are told, "always managed to make her grandmother indulgent rather than cross" (IP 48). The text is silent about what Tess says to convince Gram that Annie should live with them; there is a gap in the text about what words she actually uses. This is made possible by the device of giving Margaret the narratorial point of view, then having Tess and Gram talk privately. There are clues in the text, however, as to what Tess may have said and how. One

clue is Gram's response to Tess's profession of love; another is this matter of tone. To fill the gap in the text, we can surmise that Tess talks about giving Annie love and support, in the tone that makes her grandmother indulgent.

Through negotiation that includes both spoken and silent communication, both openness and secrecy, the four women at the end of the story create for themselves a space where their individual "real worlds" can intersect. This intersection constitutes a real world in which they can all live peaceably together. The text also communicates to the reader, through both silence and voice, the parameters and dynamics of the relationship of secrecy, silence and speech that make up the real world of the story.

"The Wednesday Circle"

The dynamic of secrecy / silence / voice, of telling and not-telling, is also central in Sandra Birdsell's "The Wednesday Circle" (NT 45-57). In this story, the 14-year-old protagonist, Betty, struggles with her conflicting feelings about being sexually abused by Mr. Joy, the farmer from whom she buys eggs for her family. She both wants to tell someone about it and does not want to, because she is ashamed of her own part in it.

"Telling" is initially associated in the story with protection. At the Bible camp she attends one summer, Betty has already confessed all her sins except the one about Mr. Joy, and has felt better for it. She believes that the women in her mother, Mika's, prayer circle will be as kind to her

as the people at the Bible camp were. The women, Betty believes, "can reach out to protect" her even here [at the Joys' farm], by just being what they are" (NT 46), and all she need do is tell them her secret in order for them to do so: "The Wednesday Circle women are strong and mighty. She knows them all, they're her mother's friends. She'll just go to them and say, Mr. Joy feels me up, and that will be the end of it" (NT 50).

When Betty confronts Mr. Joy in the machine shed, she still believes that telling will protect her:

"I'm going to tell," she says. "You can't make me do anything anymore because I'm going to tell on you.".... She can feel the presence of the Wednesday Circle. The promise of their womanly strength is like a lamp unto her feet. They will surround her and protect her. (NT 52)

The first indication in the text that all is not well is Mr. Joy's answering threat: "'You say anything,' he says. 'You say one thing and I'll have some pretty stories to tell about you. You betcha'" (NT 52). This threat is one reason why Betty does not actually tell the Wednesday Circle.

Both Mr. Joy and Betty have kept secret for some years the fact that he has been sexually abusing her. The text reveals, from the victim's point of view, how this has progressed over the years: how a casual touch on the shoulder or an apparently accidental brush in passing has gradually turned into touching her breasts and putting his hand down her pants. The text explicitly says that Betty feels ashamed and at least partly to blame, because she did not resist as much as she now thinks she should have, and because she has

accepted payment from Mr. Joy for her silence. The longer the abuse continues and the longer she is silent about it, the more she feels it is her fault.

There is a gap in the text around the bizarre ideology of blaming the victim. Patriarchal discourse constructs sexual abuse of children (and adult women) as the victim's own fault, because it constructs and names the abuse as sex, not violence. As in cases of sexual assault against adult women, the ideology presumes the victim guilty of complicity and hence of immorality unless she has fought her attacker enough to have been physically injured. Also unacknowledged in the text is the dynamic of male dominance over women -- the power Mr. Joy has over Betty because he is male and she is female, therefore subordinate to him in the social hierarchy, with little choice but to do as he says. The text is also silent about the ideology in which children are constructed as less trustworthy than adults, especially if the child in question is female, like Betty, and the adult, male. The text uses the circle of women to illustrate this ideology at work. It uses the story of the Russian girl to indicate the probable result if Betty were to tell her story. The white-haired woman tells this story, which is similar to Betty's, though much worse:

During the revolution in Russia, there was once a young girl who was caught by nine soldiers and was their prisoner for two weeks. She was only thirteen. These men had their way with her many times, each one taking their turn, every single night. In the end, she shot herself.

(NT 56)

Her audience's response to this question is harsh and judgemental. Mika implies that she scarcely even believes the story: "'I've never heard of such a case,' Mika says. She sounds as though she resents hearing of it now" (NT 56). We can surmise that she would also resent hearing Betty's story now. Mrs. Brawn condemns the victim of the story by mouthing platitudes, saying that God "never gives us more than we can bear. When temptation arises, He gives us the strength to resist" (NT 56). With this response, Mrs. Brawn voices the religious underpinning of the ideology that blames the victim, as does Mika when she says that God does not condemn us, but "[w]e condemn ourselves. We make that choice" (NT 56).

Similarly, when Mika reveals a truth of her own -- that if she were not convinced suicide was an unforgivable sin, she would have taken her own life long ago -- there is "shocked silence and a rapid exchange of glances around the circle, at Betty, to see if she's heard. 'You shouldn't say such things,' Mrs. Brawn says quietly. 'For shame. You have no reason to say that'" (NT 56). Here, too, "shame" is given as a reason for silence. Mrs. Brawn does not say that Mika should not think such a thing, but that she should not say it. If we have such thoughts, this implies, they should be secret. This expresses the dynamic of taboo: the thought or activity exists, but is repressed and therefore weaves a cocoon of silence around itself.

Betty's realization that she cannot tell her secret,

confess her sin and tell the women about Mr. Joy makes her feel ashamed again, as well as betrayed by the women, whom she thought she could trust but in whom she now finds she cannot confide. Like Elizabeth in "Secrets," Betty feels her silence physically: "The stone is back in her stomach" (NT 57).

As in "Secrets" and in "The Real World," this discussion of silence and of the character Betty's inability to speak about the taboo subject make it possible to say that the story is "about" the character's silence, and about the silence surrounding the taboo subject of child abuse. Betty's silence mirrors the silence in the real world around child abuse: as in the real world it is difficult and often impossible for children to talk about abuse, so it is impossible for the victim to do so within the coherence of this story. The text, however, breaks Betty's silence. As a character, Betty must be silent, but as narrator, she can tell her story to the reader. The text thus breaks the silence not only around abuse, but also around what it is like from the point of view of the victim, whose story is usually not believed, and whose silence is taken to be complicity. This is perhaps the most important silence that is broken in this short story.

"Sorrows of the Flesh"

As "The Wednesday Circle" is about child abuse, so is Isabel Huggan's "Sorrows of the Flesh" (ES 109-37) about wife battering. In contrast to "The Wednesday Circle," in which

the reader position is one of identification with the victim, this text places the reader in identification with an outside observer, Elizabeth, whose sympathies lie with the batterer, Jerry Wheeling (her science and homeroom teacher, and basketball coach), rather than with his battered wife, Mayruth. From this outside position, Elizabeth can only report what she sees, which does not include the inner thoughts and feelings of either partner -- her narratorial position in this story is not omniscient. Through keeping both batterer and battered in a position of silence, this text also mirrors the real world, in which talking about wife beating has long been taboo even among women, let alone society at large.

The text also represents what has in recent years been revealed as a classic battering situation -- that is, no one outside the family home knows that battering is taking place; Jerry Wheeling seems perfectly "normal," in that he shows no outward signs of temper and in fact appears to be a very devoted husband, even talking lovingly about his wife to his students. Although he becomes aloof to his students after the birth of his physically disabled daughter, this is considered unremarkable at the time. Mayruth seems shy and withdrawn, but this too is unremarkable.

Elizabeth, even in her role as narrator, suspects nothing: she is portrayed as understanding only enough of Mayruth's situation to ask herself,

was she asking me to be her friend? After all, there were barely six years between us, and she was

desperately lonely and shy I couldn't stop myself thinking about Mayruth's small sad face, her breathy, hesitant voice asking me something under the words. I could feel her plucking at me and eventually I knew I would give in.
(ES 130)

Elizabeth only understands that Mayruth is asking her "something," but she does not know what this is. She does not suspect battering when Mayruth tells her a common lie about where her bruises come from, although the reader does:

. . . I saw that the whole side of her face was a massive, yellowish bruise. "I didn't turn on the upstairs light and I tripped on a pile of laundry I'd left on the top step," [Mayruth] said. "What an idiot, eh? Well, I've learned my lesson, that's for sure. I'm just glad I didn't break my arm." And she showed me her elbow and upper arm, black and mauve like a summer-storm sky.
(ES 131)

Even when the girls go to Mayruth's house to invite her to the dance, then come back with another typical lie -- that "she had been putting her suitcases away at the top of a closet and they all fell down on her, and she wouldn't think of coming out when she looks such a mess" (ES 135) --

Elizabeth, both as character and narrator, does not make the connection to the earlier incident, although the reader does. Elizabeth expresses only relief, and does not remark upon Mr. Wheeling's sudden departure from the dance except in terms of her own feelings of betrayal.

The revelation that Mr. Wheeling has been beating his wife comes as no surprise to the reader, because the text has been releasing numerous clues from the start. In part, it is nothing more than familiarity with literary convention: Mr. Wheeling's personality change after Mayruth comes home with

the baby, and especially after the baby's death, must, we know from our experience of literary texts, signify something. The baby's death, as well as the details about Mayruth's shyness and loneliness, then about her bruises, indicate quite clearly that there is something wrong. In addition, the text provides such clues as describing the pink of the baby's room as "violent" (ES 128) and describing Mayruth as "a scared little rabbit" (ES 135).

The reference to the rabbit confirms the reader's suspicions, because of the juxtaposition of the story of the Wheelings with a story about Elizabeth's pet rabbit, which opens "Sorrows of the Flesh." When Elizabeth finally gets a rabbit, after having always wanted a pet, she quickly begins to hate it for the same reasons that she had initially loved it:

The very thing that made it lovable to begin with, its idiotic passivity and furry heartbeat, grew to offend me so much I wanted to wring its neck I had nightmare after nightmare about squeezing the soft fur around its neck until the head lolled to one side, finished with rabbit thoughts forever.
(ES 112-13)

Elizabeth at least has enough sense to sell the rabbit before she harms it. The text thus captures a psychology of battering as well as demonstrating the appropriate action to take: recognize your own limitations and get out of the situation before it is too late.

Parallels are drawn between the rabbit and Mayruth: Mayruth is unfailingly sweet, adoring and vulnerable. Her vulnerability evokes in Elizabeth the same reaction of

revulsion as had the rabbit's passivity. Elizabeth is thus the link between two of the threads in this story: the tale of the rabbit and a case study of wife-beating. Because it is Elizabeth's story, ostensibly about her high school basketball career and her crush on Mr. Wheeling, the battering theme is decentred. Yet, through the paradigm of the rabbit, the reader understands by the end of the story that the battering is, after all, central. The text appears to suggest that Jerry Wheeling may be associated with the same emotions Elizabeth has toward the rabbit, partly through their identification because of their height and their abilities on the basketball court, partly because their situations are painted in similar terms, and partly because of their mutual friendship and understanding.

The text breaks the silence around battering by representing a case history of a battering situation. Yet there is more. Huggan rounds off this story by making an important link between the batterer and the society that permits him to batter. Elizabeth is once more the agent of this link, as Huggan draws the narrative back into Elizabeth's home, which has been the site of a struggle between her parents about her father's job. Their struggle has been resolved with great tension but no violence, her mother, Mavis, finally giving in to her father, Frank, and agreeing to stay in Garten forever, something she has never wanted to do. Yet the alternative, a transfer to North Bay, is an even greater evil in her mind. She finally, therefore,

agrees to stay in Garten, letting Frank leave the bank where he has worked for many years to go into business for himself, which he has wanted and she has resisted for many years as well. She does so because "she really had no choice, and she was not particularly giving or gracious about it" (ES 123). Frank gets his way through verbal persuasion, not violence, although sometimes he is only pretending to persuade, when in fact he is merely asserting his dominance, as with Elizabeth and the discussion about keeping pets: "'But Daddy . . . ' I would be allowed to break in, but only as a matter of form, to give the appearance of rational dialogue between father, and daughter" (ES 110).

The Kessler household is presented in contrast to that of the Wheelings, but it is not wholly different: it is merely another point on a continuum of male domination and social attitudes that allows battering to take place. This is evidenced by the attitudes expressed by Mavis and Frank -- typical, well-respected citizens of Garten -- after Jerry Wheeling's arrest. Frank says, "what could you expect, violence had always been part of the American character, and we should all just consider ourselves lucky he took it out on his wife" (ES 136). This astonishing attitude is simply dropped into the text without comment, where it is echoed by Mavis's heartsickness at the time Elizabeth spent with him -- "I shudder to think what might have happened" (ES 136), she says, but she makes no comment about what actually did happen to Mayruth, nor does the text give any indication that she

has thought about it at all, much less connected it to her own situation.

The text also maintains nearly total silence around the death of the baby, Nancy. There is only the faintest hint that she might have been killed by her father, a hint that is summarily dismissed in the story by Dr. Waddell, who "stood by his original statement of natural causes and the matter was let alone" (ES 136). As the matter is let alone in the coherence of the story, so the text itself lets it drop. The very mention of the renewal of interest in "exactly how poor Nancy had died" (ES 136) is enough, however, to raise this question in the reader's mind, along with questions about Dr. Waddell: about his position of authority and dominance, and what he stands to gain by standing by his original statement -- continued credibility, perhaps, or simply complicity and solidarity with the community of dominance, in which, as we have seen, wife-beating is not taken particularly seriously even by the pillars of that community, such as Mavis and Frank.

"Slogans"

The silence surrounding the baby's death in "Sorrows of the Flesh" is a point on the spectrum of western society's silence around death. Jane Rule's "Slogans" (IP 181-91) confronts directly this silence around death and, particularly, death by cancer, a "taboo" disease, through telling the story of a visit paid by Jessica, a cancer victim, to her old school chum, Nancy, and Nancy's lover,

Ann. From the title and the first paragraph of the story, it is easy to discern that what the story is "saying" about this silence is that one way many people cope with their own mortality is by simple ritual, by learning to say slogans, or empty words, that obviate the need to really talk about it:

Jessica did not say, "I am dying." She said, "I live from day to day," that cliché of terminal therapy. Some people never did learn to say the word, cancer, but nearly everyone could master a slogan.
(IP 181, emphasis in original)

The text's wry observation that if Nancy, through whose eyes most of Jessica's story is told, "needed a slogan, it was learning how to live forever" (IP 182), places Nancy's character in apparent opposition to Jessica's; the latter is mortal, the former immortal. Yet, as the text makes clear, this opposition is false, since everyone dies sometime. The blurring of the lines between them is symbolized by Nancy's closing recognition that the Zen death poem is only another slogan, one that neither she nor Jessica needs for comfort or enlightenment. Nancy in fact tries to protect Jessica from the power of the words in the slogans on the cookie tin -- her fear that Jessica will turn out to be a "Wednesday's child," thus "full of woe" (IP 186), indicates the fragility of the silence around dying.

The casual, light conversation in the car on the way home from the airport seems almost too casual, in spite of what we have been told about the women's relationship, that "they had nothing in common, really" (IP 184), except the guilt they share because of the one truly serious

conversation they had as students, long ago, when Nancy "came out" as a lesbian to Jessica, only to be rebuffed. This impression that the conversation is almost too light is borne out by the unspoken yet unmistakable understanding between the two, when Nancy really looks at Jessica for the first time, sees "the sudden death's head strain in Jessica's face" and asks simply, "Rest?" (IP 188). Jessica's equally simple "yes" reveals that despite the casual nature of their relationship, there is indeed a deeper bond, beyond words. The two are complicit in a silence that surrounds the reality and imminence of Jessica's death, a reality that is perhaps too big for words.

The silence is contagious. Jessica's silence seems to rub off on Nancy and Ann as they "prepare dinner together without exchanging the ordinary bits of their separate days" (IP 188), as though these "ordinary bits," on this particular day, are just too ordinary or too small in the face of the overwhelming reality of Jessica's death. When Jessica does break her silence, it is precisely with ordinary, manageable talk that she does so, revealing that she hates "to waste time resting," and hates "all those articles about the 'cancer personality,' trying to make you feel guilty as well as sick" (IP 189).

Hidden in Jessica's light, unprovocative talk, however, is a profound understanding and acceptance of the condition of dying: "My daughter thinks it's God's wrath for my wicked ways. I said to her, 'Ducky, the only reason I have to die

is that we all do. You find me a survivor and I'll repent'" (IP 189). The idea is repeated and generalized by Nancy, who demonstrates that the living -- the apparently immortal -- must take the same view; she says simply, "We have to accept the random. We know all the leaves are going to fall, but we have no way of knowing when any particular one . . ." (IP 191).

Interwoven with the theme of death and the silence around it is the motif of living as a lesbian. The text's understated treatment of this taboo subject renders it unshocking and ordinary -- a matter of preference, not sin. In keeping with its matter-of-fact tone when treating the theme of death and dying, the text breaks the silence with small details which show that a lesbian lifestyle can be unremarkable: like non-lesbian women, it tells us, lesbians may make simple, "motherly gestures," such as baking cookies (IP 185), even if they are not themselves mothers; lesbians, too, have parents who visit them and who accept their lifestyle enough to sleep under their roof. The text does not question these details, but rather takes for granted that they are so.

At the same time, the text presents conflicting attitudes drawn from society at large, as represented by the classmates at the reunion Jessica attended before her visit with Ann and Nancy. Jessica says that "being a lesbian by now, even in those conservative circles is, well, admirably scandalous" (IP 187), commenting, however, that "there are

still sheltered lives among us" when Nancy jokes that making cookies is "what lesbians do when they're alone together" (IP 190). Jessica's current attitude of enlightened tolerance is contrasted with her initial reaction, many years earlier, to Nancy's announcement that she was a lesbian: "Oh, God What is it about me that people are always telling me such awful things? Why do I have to bear it?" (IP 183). This reaction is used in the text to precipitate both Jessica's guilt about "her lack of sympathy" (IP 184), and Nancy's own guilt about taking "unfair advantage of Jessica, presum[ing] far too much on her good will" (IP 183); it is this "shadow of guilt" that has kept them in touch with each other over the years, and has become "nothing more than a seasoning for their yearly good will" as they have "aged into a more permissive climate" (IP 184).

In this way, the text sets off its representation of lesbian life as normal, ordinary and unremarkable against prevailing social attitudes which both have and have not changed in the 25 years since Nancy first confessed to Jessica. It therefore not only breaks a silence surrounding lesbian-"ism" but also holds up a mirror to the attitudes most of us have grown up with. The text thus acts upon the reader in the real world, forcing her to re-evaluate her own attitudes and values about both taboo topics: sexual preference and death.

In all of the short stories discussed in this chapter, the realist mode of narrative allows for great clarity in the

breaking of silences on the levels of content and theme; and the subtlety of narrative voice encourages an active participation and even complicity on the part of the reader. These texts and others in the three collections of short stories thus represent a forward movement in what is coded as "speakable" or "writable" in our society. By writing about taboo topics, the authors break the silence around them, and move women's experience from the private into the public realm.

Chapter Two

When the "Object" Speaks: The Voice of a Woman's Desire

While the short stories considered in Chapter One break taboos even within "realist" narrative, a much earlier Canadian work -- Elizabeth Smart's 1945 novel, By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept -- breaks formally as well as thematically with traditional literary discourse, giving voice to a woman's sexual desire, the ultimate "taboo" in a culture based on the objectification of women. Smart's narrator / protagonist chooses to be faithful to a bodily and spiritual love that links her to nature and the cosmos, rather than obeying the laws of her society, which term her love "adulterous" and "illicit." So all-encompassing that it includes not only her lover but his wife, this love seeks fusion with nature and all humanity but, ironically -- because this love transgresses human laws -- it leads instead to the protagonist's solitude and silence.

While the protagonist as character is almost entirely silent, as reflected in the narrative by the very sparse dialogue in which, furthermore, she says little, as narrator, she can give voice to the love that "possesses" her, tracing a path into the almost uncharted area of fusion with body and

nature that is the locus of repressed female desire and love.¹ The voice that speaks here is a voice of transgression and of taboo. This chapter examines the movement of this voice and of the silence around it, among the characters and in the narrative.

This chapter explores the complicit rivalry between the two female characters, then goes on to examine the power relationship between the protagonist and her male lover. Next, the chapter traces changes in the imagery with which the novel reflects the progression of the protagonist's love, from intense fusion with all humanity and nature, to alienation from everything. Finally, the chapter argues that, because the protagonist has no discourse in her society, her confrontation with society's laws and norms ends in her silence, a silence that is only broken by the narrative itself.

A desire which transcends rivalry: The love triangle

In her foreword to the 1966 edition of By Grand Central Station, Brigid Brophy notes that "the story goes scarcely

¹This "uncharted area" of female desire corresponds to some extent to what Julia Kristeva terms the "semiotic," the portion of the signifying process that is anterior to the "symbolic" but which informs it, and has been traditionally repressed in narrative, in favour of the symbolic (Kristeva 6-7; Moi 161-62). It may also correspond to the "wild zone," a term Elaine Showalter has taken from British anthropologist Edwin Ardener, and which refers to that portion of the experience of the muted group which is not available to members of the dominant group (Showalter, "Wilderness" 30-31). Finally, I would suggest that this novel is an early example of écriture féminine, the "writing the body" that characterizes recent French and Quebec feminist writing (such as that of Hélène Cixous, Luce Irigaray, Madeleine Gagnon, France Théoret, Nicole Brossard, and many others).

beyond the bare three lines of a love triangle" (GC 9). Yet even this scant framework is enough to contain an extraordinary tale, for what emerges from the silence around adultery as experienced by the "other woman" is a love so vast as to include even her lover's wife, her supposed rival, whom she had "never expected nor imagined" (GC 19), so full was she of anticipation for the meeting with her beloved. When confronted with the reality of the wife's existence, and with the latter's innocence and trust, the protagonist is suddenly reluctant to betray her:

But then it is her eyes that come forward out of the vulgar disembarkers to reassure me that the bus has not disgorged disaster: her madonna eyes, soft as the newly-born, trusting as the untempted. And, for a moment, at that gaze, I am happy to forego my future, and postpone indefinitely the miracle hanging fire. Her eyes shower me with their innocence and surprise.
(GC 19)

The wife's eyes and later her smile convey the innocence and trust that the protagonist finds appalling in its vulnerability: "she smiles happily across the room with a confidence that appals" (GC 20). This vulnerable confidence is also appealing, and the protagonist quickly realizes that she loves the wife, her rival ("... I love her," the protagonist says [GC 20]), but in our society this love necessarily conflicts with the love and desire she has for

the husband.²

The protagonist attempts to resolve this conflict and avoid giving the wife pain by denying her own passion: ". . . I entirely renounce him for only her peace of mind" (GC 20). The renunciation takes the form of a silence that attempts to negate the magnetism and chemistry between the protagonist and the husband. The triad spends the summer avoiding the issue, "drinking coffee on the wooden steps of our cottages" (GC 21) and "lying like lizards in the sun" (GC 22) throughout "long days [that] seduce all thought away" (GC 22), "postponing our lives indefinitely" (GC 22). But the sexual tension is palpable, encroaching on all attempts to ignore it, while the silence surrounding that tension is electric:

. . . by the bathing pool, or on the sandhills of the beach, the Beginning lurks uncomfortably on the outskirts of the circle, like an unpopular person whom ignoring can keep away. The very silence, the very avoiding of any intimacy between us, when he, when he was only a word, was able to cause me sleepless nights and shivers of intimation, is the more dangerous. (GC 22)

While an open admission of the mutual attraction between the protagonist and her beloved might actually dissipate it, silence only intensifies the attraction and, furthermore, places it in the realm of "taboo."

²In another kind of culture, the relationship between two women who love the same man might be quite different indeed. Anne Cameron provides an example of this in her observations about the differing views of the practice of polygamy that were held by male and female members of B.C.'s Nootka people: "The only surviving census came from the memorizers of the warrior society; from their perspective, a man had multiple wives, whereas the women memorizers' view was that several women shared one husband" (Cameron 11).

Much as the would-be lovers attempt to postpone the day, it seems inevitable that Nature will not be denied indefinitely. The protagonist recognizes this in her own body's response to the presence of her beloved:

But he never passes anywhere near me without every drop of my blood springing to attention. My mind may reason that the tenseness only registers neutrality, but my heart knows no true neutrality was ever so full of passion.

(GC 23)

Try as they might to silently ignore the growing sexual tension, all three members of the triangle are locked in a process the outcome of which is only a matter of time: the would-be lovers will be lovers, they will eventually be discovered -- at great pain to everyone -- and the lovers will be parted. The protagonist's uneasiness about the first kiss suggests that she foresees all of this: "He kissed my forehead driving along the coast in evening, and now, wherever I go, like the sword of Damocles, that greater never-to-be-given kiss hangs above my doomed head" (GC 25). Not even her suicide, she observes, would alter the fact of that kiss, which sets in motion the predetermined process: "It is written. Nothing can escape. Floating through the waves with seaweed in my hair, or being washed up battered on the inaccessible rocks, cannot undo the event to which there were never any alternatives" (GC 25).

It is because of her love for the wife that the protagonist has heretofore denied her desire for the husband; now, with the certainty of fulfillment looming ever nearer, her conflicting desires -- to consummate the relationship and

not to betray the wife's innocence and trust -- torture her. "I am infested," she says, "with a menagerie of desires. My heart is eaten by a dove, a cat scrambles in the cave of my sex . . . the hours test my endurance with an accumulation of tortures" (GC 26). The spectre of this betrayal, and of the wife's suffering, lurks behind the protagonist's "terror" and "apprehension" during her "five-hour wait" on the Monterey corner for their bus to arrive (GC 19), at the beginning of the novel. With betrayal so near, the wife's own love -- "as gentle as trusting as tenacious as the birds who rebuild their continually violated nests" (GC 27) -- and innocence arouse even further the protagonist's love, pity and tenderness: "When she clasps her hands happily at a tune she likes, it is more moving than I can bear" (GC 27); her hair "falls like sorrow, like mercy, like the mourning-weeds of pity" (GC 27); even her slenderness is "pathetic" (GC 27). The knowledge that the wife is to be sacrificed -- "She is the innocent who is always the offering" (GC 27) -- makes the protagonist lapse into a helpless silence that persists throughout the remainder of the novel. "How can I speak to her?" she asks. "How can I comfort her? How can I explain to her any more than I can to the flowers that I crush with my foot when I walk in the field?" (GC 27).

We are told, on the other hand, that the wife's silence about the obvious attraction between her husband and the protagonist "is propaganda for sainthood" (GC 20); this suggests that she has been aware of this attraction from its

inception, but trusts they will not betray her, and that this is what the narrator means by calling her "innocent." This innocence allows her to walk "with the light step of hope which only the naïve and the saints know" (GC 27). The wife is pictured as both naïve and a saint, herself being so free of "sinful" desire that she cannot imagine it in others.

The protagonist, however, is driven by desire itself, which seeks its own gratification, and when the moment comes she is powerless to stop it: "Under the waterfall he surprised me bathing and gave me what I could no more refuse than the earth can refuse the rain" (GC 28). The text here expresses the consummation of the relationship in terms of giving rather than the more usual metaphor of the man taking the woman, thus breaking the silence around the woman's view of consensual sex. It then goes on to confront the reader immediately with the reality of the adulterous relationship, by the sudden departure of the man who must go back to his wife: "Then he kissed me and went down to his cottage" (GC 28). The sexual act, occurring early in the novel, marks the end of the trio's time together -- from this point on, the protagonist sees the others one at a time, and the wife very little at all.

Yet the silent alliance between the two women intensifies with the forbidden sexual act under the waterfall. As in the rest of the novel, there is no dialogue between the two women (the rivals). The text describes both, however, in similar terms of uneasiness and dread, the

protagonist starting "at the slightest noise . . . ready to feel the roof cave in on [her] head" (GC 30), while the wife "knows nothing, but like autumn birds feels foreboding in the air" (GC 31). The latter's innocence soon gives way to her recognition that she has been betrayed; and, simultaneously, the protagonist is forced to see in the wife's eyes the ramifications of her actions:

I saw her face coming out of the dying geraniums. It was angular with the tears that should have blurred her prolonged torture. . . . her eyes pierced all the veils that protected my imagination against ruinous knowledge, to bleed me too in this catastrophic pool of birth.
(GC 35)

It is at this point that the protagonist's close identification with the wife's suffering -- an empathy that is to continue throughout the novel -- is fully established: "Is there no other channel of my deliverance," the protagonist mourns, "except by her martyrdom?" (GC 35). That this is a silent martyrdom only worsens the protagonist's suffering on the wife's behalf: "On her mangledness I am spreading my amorous sheets. . . ."; "[m]y room echoes with screams she never uttered, and under my floor the vines of remorse get ready to push up through the damp" (GC 36). The imagery of her remorse is that of violence, which she now acknowledges she has done to the wife through her desire:

I am blind, but blood, not love, blinded my eye. Love lifted the weapon and guided my crime, locked my limbs when, like a drowning man with the last lifeboat in sight, her anguish rose out of the sea to cry Help, and now over that piercing face superimposes the cloudy mask of my desire.
(GC 36-37)

Already -- long before she confronts the agents of society's laws -- the protagonist sees her adultery as a "crime" against the wife and furthermore acknowledges that her love, unlike a virgin wife's, has no place in her own culture: "... who will have any pride in the wedding red, seeping up between the thighs of love which rise like a colossus, but whose issue is only the cold semen of grief?" (GC 36).

The tables are turned when, as the protagonist has foreseen, the husband abandons her to return to his wife. The protagonist now perceives a shift in her relationship with her "rival," referring to the wife as "my gentle usurper, whom I also have usurped, my enemy whom I have both killed and been killed by" (GC 127). Yet even in her own agony at having been abandoned, the protagonist thinks of the wife's suffering:

Sometimes, when I squeeze the pain from side to side in my caged head, I say: If I am suffering, think what she suffered -- a hundred times more and without hope, and I was dazzlingly happy on top of her profound and excruciating misery.
(GC 99)

Through the relationship between the two female characters, By Grand Central Station thus breaks the silence around women's "rivalry," which in male-stream thought is often constructed as bitter, "catty," somewhat desperate, perhaps, but certainly not complicit, as it is in this novel.

Heterosexual love and the power relationship

Just as the text breaks the silence around the women's complicit "rivalry," it also breaks the silence around the love relationship, showing how for the man his side of the

affair with the protagonist is far more casual than hers: how he refuses commitment, abandons her, taunts her with his other lovers and insults her for being a woman. Despite all this, however, the protagonist remains true to her love for him, and the novel thus reveals how women who have chosen inappropriate partners -- those who abuse them emotionally and often physically as well -- will continue to love those partners against all reason.

The first time we see the man, as he follows his wife off the bus, the difference in the language that describes his attitude and the protagonist's marks the relationship's inauspicious beginning: he "fumbles with the tickets and bags, and shuffles up to the event" which, by contrast, the protagonist's "anticipation has fingered to shreds" (GC 19-20). This description depicts him as much too casual -- or perhaps sheepish -- about this event which means so much to her, a contrast that sets the tone for the relationship and establishes its power structure; that is, while her absorption in her love threatens to engulf her, his relative coolness affords him a power that she cannot have.

Within the silence around their attraction to each other, it is the man who takes control and speaks, initiating the only snippets of dialogue that are set off in quotation marks in this early portion of the text. First, in the café the trio visits, "He recounts their adventures and says, 'It was like this, wasn't it, darling?', 'I did well then, didn't I, dear heart?' / . . ." (GC 20). Later, he taunts

the protagonist with an account of an earlier sexual encounter with a male lover:

While we drive along the road in the evening, talking as impersonally as a radio discussion, he tells me, "A boy with green eyes and long lashes, whom I had never seen before, took me into the back of a printshop and made love to me, and for two weeks I went around remembering the numbers on bus conductor's hats."
(GC 23)

His "impersonal" tone suggests again that his attitude is casual, although it also seems intentionally hurtful.

Regardless of his intentions, benign or otherwise, his barbed words pain the protagonist:

"One should love beings whatever their sex," I reply, but withdraw into the dark with my obstreperous shape of shame, offended with my own flesh which cannot metamorphose into a printshop boy with armpits like chalices.
(GC 23)

Her shamed response indicates how much his words sting and wound her. Yet despite this, she continues to crave contact with him, and is dismayed when "days go by without even this much exchange of metaphor" (GC 23), so much so that her "tongue seems to wither in [her] throat from the unhappy silence" (GC 23). She scarcely seems to notice how much he hurts her and is far more concerned that they are wasting so much time that could be better spent loving each other:

. . . the moons that rise and set unused, and the suns that melt the Pacific uselessly, drive me to tears and my cliff of vigil at the end of the peninsula. I do not beckon to the Beginning . . . but I weep for such a waste of life lying under my thumb.
(GC 23-24)

It is ultimately up to him to stop this "waste of life"; the

protagonist has surrendered not only her power of speech but her power of decision. It is he, therefore, who assumes control and power, initiating all the movement in the relationship: he who "brushe[s] [her] breast in passing" (GC 23), and he who delivers the kiss of Damocles while driving in the car, then takes her hand "between the two shabby front seats of the Ford" (GC 25). So great is her desire and so complete her surrender that this is all it takes to overwhelm her, despite her best intentions, and despite her assertion that she is "as virile as a cobra" and has "assume[d] control" (GC 25):

. . . I was looking the other way, but now that hand casts everywhere an octopus shadow from which I can never escape. The tremendous gentleness of that moment smothers me under; all through the night it is centaurs hoofed and galloping over my heart: the poison has got into my blood.
(GC 25)

The text suggests that it is also he who initiates the act of consummation, telling us that he "surprises" the protagonist under the waterfall (GC 28).

Once they have made love, the lover too lapses into an apparently harmonious silence, one the protagonist interprets as being for the same reason as her own, because of the enormousness of their love: ". . . in the end all that we can do is to sit at the table over which our hands cross, listening to tunes from the wurlitzer, with love huge and simple between us, and nothing more to be said" (GC 30).

This silence lasts for some 40 pages in the text, and when we finally do hear him again, he is speaking words of abuse and

betrayal.

The lover's verbal abuse is presented in the text as part of the protagonist's retrospective lament for their separation, which is addressed to him and recalls some of his injurious words. Although both her mother and father have, in their different ways, rejected her, the lover's betrayal is the most painful by far: ". . . you said, out of your bruised throat, Don't have reactions against me because I spit phlegm. You did me the most injustice" (GC 72). She refers in this lament to arguments where he calls her "You Bitch" (GC 76); later, he lashes out at her, "You're nothing but a cunt!" (GC 93). He taunts her with having made love to his wife: "I've done this twice before, today . . . once with her, once with you, and once with the jawbone of an ass. One, two, three" (GC 85). His words have the power to injure her, but she consistently refuses to respond to this injury and indeed makes excuses for his viciousness, calling it for example "the rag ends of his fear" (GC 93), rather than naming it "cruelty," as she well could, and never once blaming him.

It is the lover's silence, however, that is far more injurious than his words, for it leaves the protagonist suspicious and uncertain of his love. When he abandons her, the man's silence takes on a new dimension of power -- the power to withhold his speech, his reassurance -- the one thing the protagonist craves: "I cannot hear him, and silence writes more terrible things than he can ever deny" (GC 97).

She, who has battled suspicion before ("I can carry love It's the stones of suspicion I stumble on" (GC 87)) and has overcome it with her love ("Did I say suspicion? No It's nothing. I love you." (GC 87)), now suspects "the battle is lost" (GC 97), for she feels that "It is not the same" (GC 97), and she has not his reassurance to give her hope. She suspects he has lied to her in claiming that his "absence was the mere mechanics of the thing" (GC 97), which she now does not believe, feeling instead that he has committed "the one sin which Love will not allow" (GC 97), abandoning her for his wife, thus "sin(ning) against love" (GC 97). By remaining with his wife, he can maintain a silence that gives him power over the protagonist, who can "do nothing, being paralyzed by doubt. [She] can only wait, like an egg for the twenty-first day, for him to arrive with all the west winds of irrefutable conviction" (GC 102). She is silenced by his silence and by her love for his wife; she "cannot call him" (GC 107) as long as he is with his wife, "[f]or her moving image prevents even [the protagonist's] cry to him for help" (GC 99). The protagonist's silence is enforced, forced upon her by her love for both husband and wife.

The lover's silence, which leaves the protagonist uncertain of his love, virtually gives him the power of life and death over her: "Certainly he killed me fourteen nights in succession" (GC 97), the protagonist says, by his absence and his silence, by being with his wife instead of herself.

"[I]f . . . she is his present, I am not his present. Therefore, I am not, and I wonder why no one has noticed I am dead and taken the trouble to bury me" (GC 98). He has killed her and "martyred [her], but for no cause, nor has he any idea of the size and consequence of my wounds" (GC 100); but he could so easily revive her: "But he may, O he may at one glance, restore me and flood me with so much new love that every scar will have a satin covering. . . . (GC 100). Instead, he maintains his silence and his distance, leaving it to her to risk everything by going to see him -- an act she calls her "final ultimatum" to fate (GC 114) -- and leaving it to her to call to him, "My dear, my darling, do you hear me where you sleep?" (GC 128). The novel ends with this question, the answer to which is forever suspended, although as readers we might speculate that he has now joined the rest of the world in being deaf to her love. Even this suspended question, then, breaks the silence around the intensity and commitment of the woman's love, in contrast to her lover's lack of commitment to her.

A woman's love: Fusion, not possession

So all-consuming is her love that throughout the novel the protagonist is always willing to risk everything, body and soul, for its sake. Her lover once says, "Women are so possessive" (GC 85), but By Grand Central Station clearly reveals that this is not so, at least not in the case of Smart's protagonist. The novel breaks the silence around the protagonist's desire not for possession of her lover, but for

fusion with him and, through their love, with all the world around her. She achieves this fusion with the natural world, but when she attempts to extend this to humanity she finds herself blocked by social laws.

The protagonist's love is all-encompassing: "[T]here is no reality but love," she says (GC 46). Her lover is "the centre of the world, of all worlds" (GC 30); he is "all things" to her: "the night, the resilient mornings, the tall poinsettias and hydrangeas, the lemon trees . . . the sun on the swimming pool" (GC 46). The whole world revolves around the love: "There is no angle the world can assume which the love in my eye cannot make into a symbol of love" (GC 43). So grand is her love that she can no longer perform everyday tasks or observe ordinary pleasantries: "But how can I go through the necessary daily motions, when such an intense fusion turns the world to water?" (GC 43). The protagonist's love makes her generous and expansive: "We can include the world in our love," she says, "and no irritations can disrupt it, not even envy" (GC 45).

This love, and the sense of union that accompanies it, brings the protagonist such a tremendous sense of power -- "I am delirious with power and invulnerability" (GC 48) -- that she feels she can comfort and even save the world's hungry and injured masses:

There are not too many bereaved or wounded but I can comfort them, and those 5,000,000 who never stop dragging their feet and bundles and babies with bloated bellies across Europe, are not too many or too benighted for me to say, Here's a world of hope, I can spare a

whole world for each and every one, like a rich lady dispensing bags of candy at a poor children's Christmas feast.
(GC 48)

This is but one example of what Jean Mallinson, in her article, "The Figures of Love," calls "the hyperbole of intensity, which can either murmur amore, amore, or ransack the treasure house of literature for figures adequate to love" (Mallinson 110). She goes on to observe that the "hyperbole of the language corresponds to the largesse of superabundant love" (Mallinson 110), which the passage just quoted demonstrates. This "superabundant love" makes the protagonist feel she has the capacity to cure the sorrows of the world with her hope -- but we have seen that this hope is false, as is, therefore, her sense of union with humanity.

As the world revolves around the protagonist's love when all is well, so it does when she has been abandoned. Everything around her is now disastrous; she no longer feels she can save the world. "Without the one Fact [love]," she mourns, "the 5,000,000 refugees, the corpses that died of starvation, the blood and the mangling, have absolutely no dam. 'Only Love can with a great gaze stop.' But where is Love?" (GC 98). The protagonist's power and confidence depart with her lover.

The protagonist's fusion with nature, on the other hand, is more complete, her love transforming her into a being who is fully integrated with the natural world:

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I have become a part of the earth: I am one of its waves flooding and leaping. I am the same tune now as the trees, hummingbirds, sky, fruits, vegetables in rows. I am all or any of these. I can metamorphose at will.
(GC 47)

Before the consummation, in the opening pages of the novel, the lush, sensual descriptions of natural elements demonstrate her already-powerful link with her natural surroundings. The redwoods and the castor-trees are "built on too grand a scale," she says, while "double size flowers grow without encouragement" and poison oak spreads so wildly that "it is impossible even to go into the damp overhung valley without being poisoned"; the creek "gushes," the stream "rushes loudly"; "cliffs . . . grow purple and massive" while the sea "booms" (GC 21). When her lover surprises her under the waterfall, she identifies herself with the earth: "he . . . gave me what I could no more refuse than the earth can refuse the rain" (GC 28). When he returns to his cottage, she remains in the woods, praying for absolution under the "cathedral redwoods" (GC 28) and receiving it: "But the new moss caressed me and the water over my feet and the ferns approved me with endearments: My darling, my darling, lie down with us now for you also are earth whom nothing but love can sow" (GC 28). With these lines, the protagonist's identification with nature is complete.

Even when she has been abandoned, nature imagery surrounds the protagonist. Although she herself now lives elsewhere, she knows "[t]he grass is already green in the

country" (GC 107), where her "future is already planted . . . and [her] hope getting ready to sprout with the cherry blossom" (GC 107). She describes her breast as "colder and less ignitable than Everest" (GC 107); she exhorts the "unfolding ferns" and the "butterfly in the wood" to "be [her] allies" (GC 113). But as the days and weeks of her abandonment have unfolded, her alliance with nature has changed: she has begun to describe nature as "only the irking weather," and flowers as "crude reminders of stale states of being" (GC 98). Nature imagery is slowly being supplanted by interiors -- the furniture, walls and mirrors in the hotel room where she continues to wait for him (GC 93-94) -- and by the unkind world that crowds in on the protagonist: the neighbours who "bore a hole in [her] wedding finger because it is bare, and . . . measure [her] belly like tailors, to weave a juicy bit of gossip" (GC 111).

Her pregnancy, which the neighbours daily measure, has also changed the dynamic with nature, from one of intense fusion to one in which she describes herself as a vessel: "Nature is using me," she says. "I am the seedbag" (GC 113). The baby growing inside her, allied with nature, fills the protagonist with an imperative to take care of herself and be calm, to "drink milk and close [her] ears to the shock of disaster and the rage of gossips and the thunder of war" (GC 112). The child "rejects calm, but . . . cannot dispel the loneliness" (GC 112), nor "dam [her] passion" (GC 113). It is the pain of this loneliness and passion that wrests the

protagonist from her "meadow of calm" (GC 113) to seek "that meeting which I must have or die" (GC 113), even though she feels it is not good for the baby: "Nature for her embryo fights like her tigeresses [sic] with all her weapons, but my mind is sharp with pain, and gimlets a hole through natural salvation" (GC 114). Hence, in the end, the same passion that intensified the protagonist's deep identification with nature now drives her to defy even nature's imperatives, as she has defied social convention throughout the novel.

Nature having been defied, its imagery in Part Ten of the novel becomes hostile: a "tigershark . . . tears [the protagonist's] mind to shreds" (GC 117); where earlier, water and the floods of passion were symbols of abundant love, now the protagonist "is drowning" in "the sea [of love] that floods" (GC 118); where before, she has asked natural elements to bond with her, now she calls for a hurricane to "be decisive" and "terminate" (GC 118, 123). The protagonist is afraid she will drown in the river (where her lover lives), and her most terrifying nightmare is that the waterfall of her blood (GC 120-21) will "freeze into ice" (GC 125). Even "the rose and the briar" are hostile: "It pricks my hand, the pretty flower" (GC 127). To the hostile nature imagery is now added the imagery of technology, evoked by Grand Central Station, itself an image that "stands for the whole world as man made it, the world of people in transit, isolated, the world of technology and law, where love is an outrage, speaking an alien tongue" (Mallinson 110). The

Journey of the protagonist, who has been so strongly identified with nature, to this "man-made" Grand Central Station, at the end of the novel, represents her final alienation from nature as well as her lover and indeed from love itself, an alienation already foretold in the title's "deliberate incongruity" (Mallinson 110) resulting from "the contrast between the Biblical echo [Psalm 137] . . . and Grand Central Station, a jarring twentieth century image" (Mallinson 110).

Female desire and transgression of the Law

The voice of the protagonist's intense passion, including the abundant nature imagery, is what Jean Mallinson calls "the hyperbole of hysteria, the frantic devising of extravagant messages for a world which turns a deaf ear...." (Mallinson 110, emphasis added). If the world "turns a deaf ear," as Mallinson suggests, the protagonist is effectively silenced because no one can hear her voice.² Her society -- our society -- has no discourse for the kind of love the protagonist experiences and desires. The protagonist's insistence on her particular love, therefore, forces her into a confrontation with society's laws and norms, both secular and sacred, a confrontation that is played out in the text within the love triangle, then in the larger society and with the protagonist's parents.

²As indeed the world did "turn a deaf ear" to Elizabeth Smart when By Grand Central Station was first published in 1945.

The protagonist's confrontation with the laws of her society is predicted immediately after the consummation of the relationship, when she apprehends the difficulty of continuing the necessary "normal" social relationship with her lover and his wife. She recognizes the conflict between following her natural "familiar" -- the woodsorrel and the dove who "guided (her) return" (GC 28) from the waterfall -- and conforming to social norms. She is content enough at first to be guided by them, but almost immediately notes the pitfalls, asking, "But what can the woodsorrel and the mourning-dove, who deal only with eternal, know of the thorny sociabilities of human living?" (GC 29). It is in a natural "church," among "the cathedral redwoods" (GC 28) that she prays for and receives absolution; but she also recognizes, with despair and terror, the power of the patriarchal, punishing god of her Judaeo-Christian ancestors: ". . . I stand ready to feel the roof cave in on my head, the thunder of God's punishment announcing the limit of his endurance. . . . The Thing is at hand. There is nothing to do but crouch and receive God's wrath" (GC 31). Her recognition of the Judaeo-Christian god's continued power over her, despite her own strong links with nature, can be read as an emblem of the dominance of patriarchal law over the older, more primal laws of the body and nature -- or, in other terms, of our society's privileging of "Culture" over "Nature"; and, in a society where "female is to male as

Nature is to Culture,"⁴ of the dominance of male values over women.

While the protagonist displays her fear of the wrath of God, she refuses to acknowledge, except in hindsight, the first warning signals of her society's disapproval in the secular realm, which appear in the tone of voice and "legal air" (GC 45) assumed by Mr. Wurtle, the hypocritical and "correct" bourgeois male with whom the couple stays near the beginning of their romance. "I cannot hear," she says, "beneath his subtle words the beginning of the world's antagonism: the hatred of the mediocre for all miracles" (GC 46). She turns a deaf ear to Mr. Wurtle's warning tones, concentrating instead on her passion and her love.

The confrontation between the protagonist's desire and love ("Nature") and both secular and sacred human laws ("Culture") occurs in Part Four of the novel, which documents the couple's arrest at the Arizona border, their separation by the police, and the protagonist's questioning at the police station. In response to the officers' questions about morality and fornication, the protagonist recites the Song of

⁴As argued most notably by Sherry Ortner in her 1974 article, "Is Female to Male as Nature Is to Culture?". In this article, Ortner argues that in our society and all known societies, "woman" is identified with nature, which she says every culture devalues and defines as being of a lower order of existence than itself. Culture, she says, is a means of asserting control over nature; hence, it is not only distinct from but superior to nature. Therefore, she argues, if women are identified as being closer to nature than men, they are by definition less cultured and therefore inferior to men: "Culture" is perceived to transcend "Nature."

-- a form of anger -- which, in a typical double standard, he is permitted to express to Alice: "he gets annoyed," she says, that she is not yet "over it," as he thinks she should be (IL 187).

On numerous occasions, Peter silences Alice when she expresses her anger and hurt at their separation and at Peter's affair with their friend, Anne-Marie. For instance, on one of the occasions when Alice drives Peter to the ferry, she recites a third-person narrative of her version of their story, which he repeatedly tells her to stop. She does so, although she ~~indicates~~ her rebellion by deliberately misunderstanding him and stopping the car as well as her narrative (IL 26-27). Later, he says he wants her to stop when she tells him about how she displaces her anger by chopping kindling, pretending she is "chopping off Anne-Marie's fingers, one by one" (IL 63).

Peter also deflects Alice with his own silence -- by refusing to answer questions, and by refusing to talk about their relationship and the separation. When Alice asks, "Peter . . . do you mean [you want to have] intense relationships with other women?", Peter avoids answering: "He gave me another kiss He tapped me on the nose. 'Get on with your book'" (IL 117). Elsewhere Alice says about the separation, "He doesn't even want to talk about it; he doesn't even want to try" (IL 88). Peter even uses silencing words to comfort Alice when she cries: "Hush. . . . hush now, I know" (IL 218).

has talked too much and in particular ought never to have spoken the truth; but she on the other hand feels they have prosecuted her "for silence and for love" (GC 54). That the issues are both love and silence only emphasizes the degree to which women's voices are not heard, regardless of how loudly they speak or in what kind of language, and the degree to which, in particular, women's expression of their own love and desire is repressed in our society.

A central avenue of the domination of women by men in Western patriarchy, including especially the repression of female desire, is the codification of sacred law, the Judaeo-Christian Bible and, in particular, the primary laws of that Bible, the ten commandments, which the novel's ten-part structure recalls. The presence of adultery in the text indicates that at least one of the commandments is violated; By Grand Central Station is a tale of that violation. The fact that the woman is single, however, means her adultery contravenes not only the seventh commandment -- "thou shalt not commit adultery" -- but also the fifth -- "honour thy father and thy mother." As a single woman, she is still her parents' property (particularly her father's), whose marriageability depends on her chastity. Commandments seven and five can be restated as "honour the patriarchal construct of monogamous marriage based on the exchange of women between men," and "honour the social unit that observes and perpetuates this exchange."

When, after her arrest, the protagonist is sent home by

the police and must face her father, she is once more silenced:

As I sat down in the swivel chair in my father's office, with his desk massively symbolic between us, I realized that I could never defend myself. What was my defence but one small word which I dared not utter, because jazz singers and hypocritical preachers and Dorothy Dix had so maligned it.
(GC 69)

"Love" is the word she dare¹ not utter in her father's massive presence -- in other words, within the patriarchal state -- because representatives of both the secular and the sacred have "maligned it." "The very word Love," we are told, "offends with its nudity" (GC 72). Her father tries to avoid her emotional intensity. If he "saw emotion approaching he smiled painfully, rocking in his swivel chair, hoping it would pass: 'Aren't you just a little obsessed about this thing?'" (GC 69). In her father's office, the protagonist is silenced by his unwillingness to give credence to her reality.

The protagonist is also silenced by what she knows her mother would say: "Love? Stuff and nonsense! . . . It's loyalty and decency and common standards of behaviour that count" (GC 69). The mother's words are echoed in those of "the whole parade of unbelievers" who "[file] past: the leering police thugs, the insinuations of Mr. Wurtle and his conversational pin-pricks . . . the well-meaning matrons who, from their insulated living say, 'My dear, I think you would regret it afterwards if you broke up a marriage'" (GC 69-70). Man's Law and Man's Culture, as represented by the parents as

well as by these "unbelievers," has no room for the discourse of an adulterous woman, nor indeed for female desire in any form.

By breaking the silence around female desire, By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept subverts the patriarchal construct of Woman's position in society: that of silent object of male desire. We have seen that the protagonist acts according to her own desire, privileging love over all else, including social constraints, family, the law, and even her own happiness. Not only does she satisfy her desire out of wedlock -- in itself "illicit" in the eyes of the law -- but she does so with a married man, which is doubly illicit and termed "adulterous." Through narrating the story from the viewpoint of an adulterous woman, By Grand Central Station breaks the adultery taboo, and breaks the silence of the so-called "other woman." The novel is, therefore, a narrative triumph that profoundly challenges the institution of marriage -- the exchange of women between men -- which is a major conduit of male domination of women.

In spite of the subversion represented by the novel on the level of language, however, what emerges from the silence surrounding women's desire is the portrait of a woman as victim, for the very desire that so exhilarates the protagonist also overwhelms and nearly destroys her. In highlighting the fusional (and therefore self-destructive) element of the protagonist's desire, the novel also exposes the victimization inherent in the social construction of

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women's love as the most important aspect of their lives --
outweighing even the need for a separate identity.

Chapter Three

Voices from the Tide Pool: Anger and Grief in Intertidal Life

As By Grand Central Station breaks the silence around women's love and desire, so Audrey Thomas's 1984 novel, Intertidal Life, breaks the silence around the taboo emotions -- particularly anger and grief -- that underlie women's silence.¹ Intertidal Life breaks a taboo by revealing these emotions, using the device of a narrator / protagonist who can say in writing many things she cannot say out loud. As By Grand Central Station is a cry of passion, so Intertidal Life is a cry of anger and grief: the protagonist, Alice Hoyle, says she needs to write about her anger, and to "pull out from [her]self the great glistening sentences full of hate and fury and fling them, still wet and steaming onto these white pages" (IL 30). The protagonist in Intertidal Life breaks the silence around women's emotions by bringing them into the public realm, thereby crossing the boundaries within which women's emotions are usually allowed to be expressed: that is, among "women only," in the private space of women's conversations.

Whereas in By Grand Central Station, it is the father of the protagonist who attempts to deflect emotion ("... if he

¹In a conversation with the author, feminist counsellor Jane Keeler (University Counselling Services, Carleton University) remarked that in her workshops on women's anger, grief also surfaced so frequently that she began to change her approach and to deal with grief and anger as interdependent.

saw emotion approaching he smiled painfully, rocking in his swivel chair, hoping it would pass" (QC 69)) -- in this novel it is Alice's ex-husband, Peter, who avoids facing up to her emotions, making it very clear that he does not like her to be "dramatic" (IL 252); when she is, he "stare(s) politely across to the other shore" (IL 252). When, near the beginning of the novel, Alice confides to Peter that she is ill, he responds impersonally, "'That must be very worrying for you,' like a psychiatrist or social worker" (IL 12). Peter's inability to cope with Alice's emotions provides a metaphor for the repression of women's emotions in patriarchal society.

Because women's emotions are "taboo" (that is, they have no space in traditional patriarchal language and discourse), they literally correspond to the domain coded as "unspeakable." Therefore, the repression of women's emotions in language is tantamount to "women's silence." A key passage of Intertidal Life, one that describes the dynamic of silence and voice between Alice and Peter, introduces an apt if dreadful image for this aspect of women's silence:

And if he had understood about her frozen heart? Or frozen shell, really, for her heart was a little fish swimming vainly to and fro, to and fro, beneath the ice swimming backwards and forwards beneath the ice of her despair. . . .
(IL 189)

In both content and form, Thomas's novel breaks this frozen surface containing women's silence and all that has been repressed within it. Just as Alice emerges gradually and

painfully from her own silence in the course of the narrative, the novel's structure explores a whole area of "intertidal" (female) life -- the realm of "taboo" -- that has been frozen out of language and repressed by traditional discourse.

At the root of Alice's silence is her unspeakable grief at an abortion she had before her marriage to Peter. Like the love of the narrator / protagonist in By Grand Central Station, this grief and anger are "private" female emotions heretofore unexpressed and unexpressable within accepted social codes:

[F]ear and pain and all those vast quantities of blood, and the little dead thing in the basin had frozen her over, had tossed her out beyond her depth, where only the sea gulls mocked her cry of "me me me." So that when she returned to life, was flung back in, she had suffered a sea change of a most terrible sort and was dumb to tell about it.
(IL 189-90)

Frozen within her, Alice's grief and anger become the site of a private reality which only the act of writing can fully express.

This chapter examines the dynamic of silence and voice within Alice's relationship with her ex-husband, Peter, then with other women (her daughters and her adult women friends). Finally, it examines the text itself as an expression within literary language of the emotions Alice is denied in her social relationships.

Shifting the "taboo" zone

Intertidal Life shows how Peter encourages Alice to suppress her grief and anger at the "death" of their

marriage, just as she has done with her abortion. Her emotions are doubly inadmissible, first because of their inadmissibility in the public realm in patriarchal society, and now because the hippie counterculture, which Peter embraces, has reinforced their repression, with its credo of "mellowness" and "coolness," of never displaying anger or jealousy (in other words, of repressing all strong emotion): "Anger had been outlawed. Jealousy. Suspicion. Fear. Anybody who got angry, jealous, suspicious, who even raised their voice, was somehow inferior" (IL 95, emphasis in original); "soft voices were, of course, 'in'" (IL 33).

Adultery, on the other hand, is no longer "taboo" in this counterculture. In keeping with new anti-materialistic attitudes that place a high value on sharing, it has become acceptable to share people as well as money, drugs, food, living space, or the telephone. Peter therefore expects Alice to be willing to "share" him, to approve -- or at least not to disapprove -- of his desire to "have intense relationships with other people" (IL 117). In contrast with the social mores in Elizabeth Smart's novel, it is now not adultery but being upset about one's spouse's adultery that has become taboo; Alice's despair over losing Peter is not to be spoken. Not only does he want her not to voice her feelings, he even wants her not to have them. Despite the many other changes wrought by the so-called "sexual revolution" and other social upheavals of the 1960s and 70s, women's emotions are still considered taboo, and it is still

men who define the rules and women who are expected to conform to them.

In a conversation with her friend Stella, Alice observes that the fundamental power structure between women and men has not changed a bit. "The women cook and have babies," she says, "follow the men around, do the washing, all that." Stella adds that one thing that has changed is that now "the men don't earn money." "That's true," responds Alice. "Often the baby is the key to the welfare check, right? The key to his month's grub and dope" (IL 173). What has changed, in other words, is that these women's reproduction has also become a means of production -- which the men then appropriate. The text clearly indicates who benefits by this arrangement, in showing how the men participate in neither reproductive nor productive labour.

The text uses the example of Alice's and Peter's friends, Raven and Selene, the quintessential hippie couple, to show how this power structure operates. In the same conversation with Stella, Alice admits,

I used to think Raven and Selene were the perfect couple -- living off the land, never raising their voices, moving with the changes, never eating anything that died in pain. But they have the same fuck-ups as the rest of us. Raven treats Selene horribly sometimes, maybe often, and she comes back for more. Won't even let her have curtains in the new cabin -- "only essentials," he says.
(IL 173).

Raven "calls all the shots," Alice later tells Trudi and Stella (IL 210). Alice has even heard Raven raise his voice, "[a]gainst Selene. Judging her, putting her down" (IL 102).

She has also heard Selene say to Raven, "very low, 'All I want to do is follow you around like a dog.' Selene didn't have any more answers than Alice did: she just looked and sounded and acted as though she did" (IL 96). Selene never raises her voice, but instead sublimates her feelings by having asthma attacks. "Who was she trying to punish?" asks the text. "What was she trying so hard not to say?" (IL 180).

Regardless of what Selene is trying not to say, the point as far as Peter is concerned seems to be that she does not say it. He never sees Selene and Raven as anything but "wonderful people" (IL 34); long after Alice has realized what problems they have, Peter continues to believe they "never raise their voices to one another" (IL 102). This is the ideal to which Peter aspires, and wishes Alice would as well. Alice's goal, however, is contradictory to Peter's -- she wants to break her silence, not maintain it.

Alice and Peter: Silence and power in the couple

As in By Grand Central Station, silence within the heterosexual couple is gender-based, and can be an expression of power or powerlessness, control or resistance. Through the power relations between Alice and Peter, the text demonstrates the different relationships women and men have to silence.

Alice's silence is a measure of her oppression; encouraged by Peter, she represses her anger, jealousy, love and fear -- the voicing of which he now considers "laying

trips" on him -- in order to try to win him back by conforming to his new ideas of who she should be. From time to time, however, her anger escapes in the form of sarcasm, Alice's metaphor for which is unleashing the "little serpent who was always coiled up at the back of [her] tongue" (IL 41). When Peter tells her, for example, that he and his new lover Anne-Marie have something "higher" than he and Alice have ever had, the little serpent says, "You mean newer" (IL 41). When Peter insists, the serpent continues, "'Higher,' . . . what do you do, stick it in her eye?" (IL 41). Alice's sarcasm, however, like Selene's asthma attacks, is silence in another form -- it does not allow her to express what she really feels, but displaces it instead.

Peter, by contrast, often uses silence as a means of control, hence a means of maintaining his power. Peter keeps secrets from Alice; he withholds his words; he uses a "new voice" that suits his new self-image, while repressing and silencing the "old" parts, those he no longer wants to admit as being part of himself.

At the core of the different kinds of silence demonstrated by Alice and Peter lies this issue of control. Although they are now estranged, Peter still enjoys a certain power that originally accompanied his role as Alice's husband (symbolized in the novel by the fact that Alice took his name when they were married) and which he now refuses to relinquish. One instrument of his power and control is coercion; another is his own silence; a third, his annoyance

-- a form of anger -- which, in a typical double standard, he is permitted to express to Alice: "he gets annoyed," she says, that she is not yet "over it," as he thinks she should be (IL 187).

On numerous occasions, Peter silences Alice when she expresses her anger and hurt at their separation and at Peter's affair with their friend, Anne-Marie. For instance, on one of the occasions when Alice drives Peter to the ferry, she recites a third-person narrative of her version of their story, which he repeatedly tells her to stop. She does so, although she indicates her rebellion by deliberately misunderstanding him and stopping the car as well as her narrative (IL 26-27). Later, he says he wants her to stop when she tells him about how she displaces her anger by chopping kindling, pretending she is "chopping off Anne-Marie's fingers, one by one" (IL 63).

Peter also deflects Alice with his own silence -- by refusing to answer questions, and by refusing to talk about their relationship and the separation. When Alice asks, "Peter . . . do you mean [you want to have] intense relationships with other women?", Peter avoids answering: "He gave me another kiss He tapped me on the nose. 'Get on with your book'" (IL 117). Elsewhere Alice says about the separation, "He doesn't even want to talk about it; he doesn't even want to try" (IL 88). Peter even uses silencing words to comfort Alice when she cries: "Hush. . . . hush now, I know" (IL 218).

Once, when Alice asks Peter about a telephone call in the middle of the night -- whether it is Anne-Marie who called -- he physically silences her by putting his hand over her mouth as he says, "Don't ask" (IL 83). Earlier the same evening, he gives her positive reinforcement for her silence, by commenting, "Do you realize this is the first time in a long time you haven't tried to lay any trips on me?" (IL 82). What he means is that she has been silent altogether: they have spent the evening "in front of the fire, sipping wine and saying nothing, but it was not an uncomfortable silence" (IL 82). This is precisely what Peter has repeatedly said he wants -- a quiet woman and no trouble.

The most dramatic and most physical instance of how Peter uses anger to dominate and silence Alice is the passage in which he hits her to make her stop shouting "at the top of her voice" that Anne-Marie is a "fucking bitch, fucking bitch, fucking bitch" (IL 85). Alice later says he hit her because she has "dare[d] to tell him he's a hypocrite and a jerk" (IL 88). The beating has mixed results: on the one hand, it silences Alice; on the other, it is a turning point in Alice's frozen silence -- she speaks up for herself, becoming more assertive of her rights and feelings. Soon after the incident, for example, Peter decides "to find a little basement suite somewhere so [Alice does not] have to be 'disturbed' if [she] want[s] to come into town" (IL 87). Alice just listens to Peter's plan, without saying a word. When she refers to this talk later in the text, she puts

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quotation marks around the word "conversation," to indicate that it was one-sided and that she was the silent partner. Later, however, Alice displays assertiveness (although she does eventually give in) about Peter's control over her affairs, when she reacts strongly to his having given friends permission to stay at the house in town on a weekend when Alice was supposed to have the house to herself. "I'm not your wife any more," she declares, "and any decisions about house, cabin, anything like that had better be joint" (IL 120). Her strong, direct reaction is an indication that she has begun to escape from Peter's domination, and contrasts with her earlier silence about his decision to move out of the house.

By silencing Alice on the few occasions we see him do so in the text (and from these we can extrapolate many more), Peter in effect "trains" her to be ever more silent, and to be "someone she hoped Peter would find attractive, would want to get to know again" (IL 222). For example, when Peter asks Alice for two dollars to give to a young man on the ferry, Alice represses her resentment, knowing that if she said anything, "Peter, the new Peter, would be confirmed in his belief that she was ungenerous, 'uptight,' still 'locked into the Protestant work ethic,' or whatever it was the freaks said" (IL 46). Through Peter's disapproval of what she does say, Alice has learned what he wants from her, and has mixed responses to this. Sometimes she rebels, as in the passage where she objects to his having given his friends permission

to stay in the house without consulting her; at other times, as in the example just given, she quells her verbal response, and represses her emotions.

This "training" extends to Alice's behaviour as well. Once, when Alice puts a hand on Peter's knee, he says, "Don't start" (IL 48). With the passing of years, Alice stops approaching Peter altogether, even though she may only want comfort from her middle-of-the-night fears about her illness and upcoming surgery. When she thinks about this, she wonders,

And would he have taken her into his bed and held her, offered comfort? Or would he, before she had had a chance to whisper out her need -- "Peter, I'm frightened" -- would he have said, half-asleep but wakened by her footsteps on the ladder, "Now Alice, you know it's no good. Don't start anything, okay?" (IL 13)

Peter has so effectively silenced Alice's behaviour and gesture, as well as her speech, that she does not even consider asking for support at that time -- which would after all have been reasonable enough under the circumstances -- fearing summary rejection.

On the occasions when Alice as a character represses her voice, her position as narrator allows her to speak the things the character Alice does not. The text voices outright not only what the character Alice represses, but also the fact that she is keeping silent. For example, when Alice wants to ask the children whether Peter slept with Selene and "she couldn't do it" (IL 98), it is the narrator who poses the question in her place, simply by stating her

inability to speak. Also, in the scene in which Peter says that this is the first time Alice has not "laid any trips" on him in a long time, the narrator tells us, "Alice wanted to say, 'I hate that kind of talk' but for once she said nothing" (IL 82-83). That night, after they make love, the character Alice is again silent, again repressing her desire to say what she feels:

Alice lay awake, her hand between his legs, knowing she must not say "I love you," knowing that would spoil it all. Knowing she must not say, "Please, I want yob back." Saying over and over in her head, like a rosary, all the things she must not say.
(IL 83, emphasis added)

Alice finally reaches the point where she barely speaks to Peter at all, because she cannot continue to repress and control herself: "I no longer speak to Peter on the phone," she says, "it's too humiliating; I always cry. I'm supposed to be 'over it' by now I guess and he gets annoyed" (IL 187).

While Peter wants Alice to be silent, he seems incapable of "reading" her silence, beginning with his evaluation that "she is cold" about the abortion, never guessing that she is actually traumatized (IL 189). As he does not understand her silence when it indicates trauma, so he cannot "read" her contented silence, when for once she is "mellow" and happy, as he purportedly wants her to be. After they make love on the ridge, Peter asks Alice what she wants; she answers, "nothing." "She . . . did not even try to speak what was in her heart," we are told (IL 35). The text explains that Alice gave this answer because "she didn't understand the

question. She was so full of contentment that she said, almost half asleep, 'Nothing.' Because it did not seem to her at that moment that there was anything more to want" (IL 37). Would it have made a difference if Peter, like Lear in the passage from the Shakespeare play that is quoted in the text, had asked Alice to speak again? The text raises this question, then abandons it, leaving it to the reader to answer for herself. The reference to King Lear, however, implies that Alice, like Cordelia, would still have remained silent. It is in any case a moot point, for Peter neither repeats the question, like Lear, nor explains it: his silence seems to indicate he is satisfied with Alice's answer, although he clearly misinterprets it, apparently taking it as tacit permission to give her "nothing," and continue his relationship with Anne-Marie.

The scene, juxtaposed as it is with the one from Lear, forms the hub of the tragedy in the novel, the death of the marriage. As in Lear, the tragedy is predicated on the man's inability to understand the woman's silence. The text wonders, "If she had talked to him, then? If she had caressed him? If she had said I really love you I just don't know how to get through to you?" (IL 35). Perhaps indeed the "right answer" to Peter's question, which escapes Alice at the time and even years later (IL 38), would have been "love"; she later reflects that this is actually what she meant: "'Alice what do you really want.' 'Nothing,' I said, 'nothing.' When what I meant was 'love'"

(IL 166). Yet all evidence is to the contrary, for Peter has made it eminently clear that he considers it "laying a trip" when Alice does tell him she loves him. Even Alice's love has become a "taboo" emotion.

Alice cannot win, either by speaking or by not speaking. In the context of Peter's affair with Anne-Marie, she muses, "And if I had, in the end, said nothing? Had not challenged him? Where would we all be now?" (IL 107). Evidence in the text suggests that nothing would have been different, because Peter never understands Alice's silence, any more than he understands about her "frozen heart."

Not only does Peter control Alice's silence, but he uses his own silence as an instrument of control. He keeps secrets from her -- that is, he keeps the truth silent and hidden; he even lies to her. When he and Alice first make plans for the new room, he makes a sketch of the room, then of Alice sitting up in bed drinking coffee; when Alice tells him to draw himself beside her, he hesitates, then smiles and says he is "already up" and has "gone fishing" (IL 20). Considering that at this point, he is already seeing Anne-Marie, his moment of hesitation and silence emerges as one of duplicity, a moment during which he searches for words that will satisfy Alice without actually telling her anything at all -- in other words, for a way of having a "voice" and "silence" at the same time.

In the narrative fragment that follows, Alice challenges Peter about his silence and duplicity. "Why didn't you talk

to me?" she asks (IL 20, emphasis in original). His response, which does not really answer the question at all, is that he "still wasn't sure" what he thought and how he saw their relationship (IL 20). This answer does not explain why he did not talk about his thoughts and feelings, why he felt he had to be "sure" before he talked to Alice about it, rather than to discuss openly with her his doubts and questions -- as a couple. The text does not directly answer Alice's question either, but it seems clear enough from Peter's references to his discussions with Anne-Marie that he at any rate has "uncoupled" himself from Alice, exchanging intimacies with Anne-Marie instead.

Alice later speculates on another reason for Peter's silence:

I suppose it is hard, maybe impossible, to admit to the wife of your youth that you want Romance, you want somebody to see you as mysterious, worthy of being explored. That you want to be 'new' to someone, that what you have with one another is no longer enough. He doesn't even want to talk about it; he doesn't even want to try.
(IL 88)

In the textual silence beneath Alice's use of the word "admit" lies the ideology of capital 'R' Romance, which Alice is suggesting that Peter should know better than to want -- should know, as she herself does, that "'in love' is intense and transient but that what follows is equally good and perhaps better" (IL 88). Her musings, combined with references elsewhere in the text to Peter as "Peter Pan" further suggest that Peter is also trying to recapture his youth -- that he has fallen prey to the cult of youth-

worship, which is part of the ideology of the hippie subculture to which he subscribes, as well as part of the dominant patriarchal culture.

Whatever the reasons behind Peter's secrecy and his silence, the result is that he gains power and control over Alice. His silence around his own feelings and around his affair with Anne-Marie keeps Alice exactly where he wants her -- available to him sexually and emotionally, but out of the way, on the island (where she stays full-time with their three daughters, while he works on the mainland during the week, coming to the island on weekends), when he is in town and wants to be with his new lover. Even after Alice finds out about the affair, his control acts on her in subtle ways, as we have already seen. His expectation that she accept everything he does, combined with her continuing love for him, keeps her behaving, as Stella puts it, "like a mother (w)ell, an ideal wife, anyway. You allowed him to do as he pleased, go where he would and come back anytime, all is forgiven" (IL 177). As Stella observes, Peter's expectations, both spoken and unspoken, elicit from Alice the mothering behaviour he desires.

Peter controls Alice with his own silence, by withholding words -- specifically, the word "love" -- and using new ones, in his new hippie voice, instead. Rather than signing notes to Alice, "love, Peter," as he has in the past, he now uses a dash: " -- Peter." Alice reflects that Peter "could hurt her so easily and so unconsciously for of

course, in his new philosophy, the '---' would be automatic. 'Love' was a sacred word, to be used only when you really meant it" (IL 73). Under his new philosophy, Peter also adopts new words and a new voice that are in keeping with the " -- Peter." When Alice telephones him, he answers, "Oh. Hello there." Alice thinks, "'There.' An expression like '--- Peter.' The kind of thing you said when an old acquaintance called you up. Somebody you never expected, or wanted, to hear from again" (IL 75). In his "new voice," Peter tells Alice, "That was nice" (IL 42) after making love with her, ensuring that she understands it does not, however, "mean" anything to him.

Peter uses both his silence and his "new voice" to exert control over Alice -- over her words, her behaviour and even her feelings -- with some success, limited though it is by Alice's strength and independence, by her struggle to break her silence through her writing and through confiding in women -- both her daughters and her women friends.

Silence and voice among the women

In the "intertidal" zone of female life -- life without Peter -- Alice can speak more freely. The conversations among the women cement their friendships, so that even the silences Alice shares with her women friends and with her daughters are often complicit and comfortable, in contrast to the power struggle implicit in the silence between Alice and Peter. Yet Peter's shadow falls across all of Alice's relationships -- because of it, there are pockets of silence

that Alice must never break with her daughters; they subtly ally themselves with Peter against their mother; at the end of the novel's flashback sequence, they are about to leave Alice to spend the next year with their father. Similarly, the nature of the adult women's silence changes as Peter befriends Alice's friends, interposing himself between them so that the other women gradually draw away from her -- just as in women's lives, patriarchal language imposes silence on women's relationships with each other.

Even in the "women-only" space of Alice's house, grief at first silences Alice and her daughters, preventing them from talking to each other about her separation from their father: "Hannah and I sit, each at one end of the kitchen table, heads bent over our work, unable or unwilling to talk about it" (IL 40). Alice tries to spare the children her anger and other feelings about Peter; "I try not to let them see it but it's there. Sad and angry and hurt" (IL 101). Since Peter does not want to hear Alice's expressions of grief and pain, and Alice wants to spare the children, she often feels that the only time she can speak her rage is when she is alone: making some excuse to drive alone to the other end of the island so that she can yell to herself, or waiting until the children's monthly trip to town, when she takes the opportunity to express her helpless anger, "pounding the floor, weeping, rage rage rage" (IL 79). Alone, she can "[turn] on the radio very loud and [howl] like a forsaken dog" (IL 43).

Gradually, Alice and the children settle into a new life together, a new female life. Although at first Alice complains, "Here I am on this island with three kids and a drafty house with no inside doors, no privacy for any of us in our shock and grief" (IL 39-40), she later sees the lack of doors as positive, lending intimacy to the cabin and drawing the four of them closer together: "Each one could feel the others' presences in the night. Sorority. In the best sense" (IL 147). In the same passage, she describes their daily routine of getting up early and going to bed early, each going about her own business quietly and simply, as being "a pleasant routine for all of them. Alice had never felt closer to her children. . . . It wasn't Peter's absence, really, although of course that had something to do with it" (IL 147). In the silence of this female world, by contrast to her tense silence with Peter, Alice is comfortable and relaxed.

Yet despite Alice's deep contentment with her life with her daughters, she must maintain a certain silence because they are Peter's daughters too, and she does not want to force them to choose between their parents -- perhaps because she fears she might lose, for she feels they blame her, but not Peter, for what happened. She tells Selene, "I know that they feel I'm responsible for the breakup of our marriage. They align themselves with Peter in very subtle ways" (IL 181). Hence, Alice cannot be completely open with her daughters despite feeling so close to them; because of the

shadow of their father, there are certain things she must always repress.

It is with her adult women friends that Alice can be most free of her silence. Alice and Selene become very close, and have intimate conversations, such as the one about the children blaming Alice for the breakup; Alice also takes care of Selene when the latter leaves her lover, Raven. Alice and her friends, Stella and Trudl, have many heart-to-heart discussions about a variety of subjects: childbirth, menstruation and the moon, sex, marriage, Peter, and the hippies -- in short, the many intimacies of the "taboo," "women-only" space.

Alice admits to Stella and Trudl, as to no one else, "Sometimes I'm so full of rage and despair I want to scream. I want some kind of awful revenge. But I'm ashamed of those feelings" (IL 178). She confides to Stella, "I even pray for Peter to come back to me" (IL 214). It is Stella who shares Alice's contempt for the "yoga-and-yogurt crowd," the "Peters with their Wendys" (IL 94); it is Trudl to whom Alice admits having once made love with Selene (IL 167), describing the experience as maternal rather than erotic, and as "a conversation," a meeting on a "deep plane of utter despair" (IL 168). Even though Alice is so good with words, there is a part of the experience to which she cannot put words -- that both she and Selene had orgasms, but without passion: "I can not explain," she says (IL 168, emphasis in original). Alice's inability to do so places the experience of making

love with Selene in a zone that is repressed even among women, for it is a realm that is truly beyond words and beyond language, and hence cannot be spoken but can only be expressed through the body. The women's conversations -- be they verbal or sexual -- account for their closeness in the "female" zone.

Alice imagines this closeness as a thick rope that connects her to all three of her friends:

So that, if she had had to step out into the dark, she could, as she had once done on a small ship caught in the tail end of a hurricane, pull herself forward safely, even in the most severe of storms. Could move from her cabin, to Trudl's, to Stella's, even over to Selene's in the most awful storm of blind despair or self-hatred and know that so long as she held on tightly to their friendship she would be all right. That there would be warmth and light and a change of clothes and something hot to drink.
(IL 164)

When Alice shares this image with each of her friends separately, each of them agrees that it is perfect. The friendships with these women, which allow Alice to break her deepest silences, sustain Alice during her despair, making it all the more difficult when the women leave on trips without her -- first Selene, to New York, then Stella and Trudl, to California. When Stella and Trudl go to California together, leaving Alice behind, she feels acutely the loss of this female friendship; she writes, "Who will I talk to, this diary? What if they don't come back? There's Glenn and Harold, of course, . . . but I need girl friends" (IL 185, emphasis in original).

When they do return, they figuratively leave Alice

again, this time emotionally -- far more irrevocable than mere geographic distance. Selene comes back only briefly, simply fading out of the text, after renewing her relationship with Raven -- another man who has been close to Alice and now draws a woman friend away from her -- and leaving again with him. In the case of Stella and Trudl, it is Peter who draws them, Peter with whom they decide to paint a mandala, an enterprise that takes so much of their time and emotional energy that Alice is not only left out, but left behind by her friends -- so much so that, eventually, both Stella and Trudl even drive by Alice's house without stopping.

Trudl claims the new distance between them is not only because of the mandala but because Alice reminds her too much of her mother: "He left when I was thirteen. I watched my mother's pain for years. Now I watch you. I can't go through all that again. You open up too many wounds. I was sure it was all my fault" (IL 200). Yet despite Trudl's assurances, it is largely the mandala project that drives a wedge of silence between Alice and the other two women. Because of it, Trudl and Stella begin to keep secrets from Alice -- that is, to be silent toward her -- as well as spending less time with her. When Stella tells Alice they have found a place to do the mandala, and Alice asks where, Stella and Trudl look at each other and smile. "'We can't tell,' Trudl said. 'It's a secret.' Alice was seven years old and in the girl's cloakroom. 'Two's company, three's a

crowd'" (IL 196). Alice feels more and more left out as the secrecy continues: "The trouble was, the Mandala Club was to be an exclusive and secret society of three. The trouble was, two of the three were Alice's best and virtually only friends on the island. The trouble was, the third was Alice's husband" (IL 197).

This time, Alice refuses to be silent about her feelings; she expresses her hurt and discomfort to each of the three members separately. To Trudi she says, "maybe I'm just paranoid, but I don't like it. I don't like what's happening to you and me and Stella. I hardly ever see either of you any more and when I do, you act funny" (IL 192). Trudi, although she admits to "feeling funny" about the arrangement (IL 191), equates the mandala work with Alice's own desire for privacy for her writing, an equation that Alice rejects.

Alice confronts Stella even more directly, voicing her pain at the three of them "baring [their] souls" (IL 220) to each other in Alice's kitchen when Alice is not there, and at her feeling that both Stella and Trudi have been withdrawing from her to

play silly little games with my ex-husband, whom I still happen to love, as you well know. You have both become the giggly little students and have exalted him to the position of guru. He is a good teacher, I know that, maybe a brilliant one. But you and Trudi aren't really doing this mandala thing just to learn about painting, are you? It's a secret society you've formed, with all the attendant whispers and rituals of such a society. We used to have clubs like that in grade school. And they always involved leaving somebody out. (IL 220)

Stella's response is no more than a verbal shrug: "You have your writing. . . . We happen to be painters" (IL 221).

Alice is skeptical of this as well, sensing that there is a difference, and that the mandala group is an excuse.

Both women's responses demonstrate a silencing technique similar to those Peter has used on Alice: a closed statement of fact -- or opinion -- that brooks no discussion. Peter's response when Alice confronts him on the same issue is of the same genre, and is totally unsympathetic: "You always wanted to have your finger in every pie," he says (IL 220).

As the secrecy of the mandala club intensifies, the silence among the women grows. Alice expresses her hurt and disappointment with her women friends by withdrawing from them as well, refusing, for example, to carry a message from Trudi to Stella on one occasion ("Send a carrier pigeon, why don't you?" she tells Trudi [IL 219]), and on another, telling Stella that Peter should "leave his messages [for Stella] somewhere else [rather than at Alice's house]" (IL 197). Alice and her daughters become more silent as well, as if the silence were contagious: "All were heavy with the coming summer, drugged with dreams. Sometimes they did not speak to one another . . . for hours" (IL 218).

The women's silence can be traced back to Peter -- who has kept secrets from Alice and has lied to her -- for, the more involved they are with Peter, the less they speak with Alice. This has happened once before, with Anne-Marie, who used to be good friends with Alice until her involvement with

Peter. During the affair between Anne-Marie and Peter, before Peter leaves Alice, the two women have an odd, veiled conversation, in which Alice conveys to Anne-Marie how much she still loves Peter, and how afraid she is that he has fallen in love with somebody else. Alice says she "knew, of course, somewhere way inside, that she [Anne-Marie] was the one. I knew that and I felt that now she would have to call it off. Now that she understood. Now that she knew how much I cared. I kept it all pushed very far down. My knowing" (IL 107). During this entire conversation, while Alice is saying in a veiled, silent way that she wants Anne-Marie to break off with Peter, Anne-Marie confides nothing and admits to nothing. Instead, she merely deflects Alice in the same tones that we have seen Peter, Stella and Trudl use: "What if he is in love with someone else?" she challenges. "You've had the odd affair, you know you have" (IL 105, emphasis in original). Only when the affair between Anne-Marie and Peter is over can Alice and Anne-Marie start to talk again, Anne-Marie being the one, for instance, who tells Alice about Peter's new affair, with Penny (IL 153).

Through her experience with Anne-Marie, Alice learns a great deal about breaking her silence in the "intertidal" zone of female friendship. In the one private conversation we are shown between these two women, Alice attempts to put her point across indirectly, or "silently," to Anne-Marie, and discovers that this approach is not useful because it does not really help her to achieve her goals. Yet speaking

openly about the affair is even worse, because she does so in public, intruding on a dinner party where Anne-Marie and a new lover are guests, and declaring, "Anne-Marie only likes husbands" (IL 77). Alice considers this confrontation disastrous -- not to Anne-Marie but to herself -- because it is "such a naked, public exposure of [her] anger and grief, right out of character" (IL 77). Alice applies what she has learned about female friendship to her relationship with Stella and Trudl, breaking her silence directly and privately, which at least is less disastrous to her.

Stella and Trudl, however, have aligned themselves with Peter, and have absorbed some of his silence. Alice sees all the women -- herself as well as her friends -- as "moon ladies" who circle around Peter, "the sun, the hub, around which first Alice, then Anne-Marie, then Penny, now Stella and Trudl, revolved" (IL 239). As Alice hears Stella's or Trudl's car go by without stopping, she feels "the dark pull of the man" (IL 218). She sees him as a magician who isolates her from her friends,

who was taking her friends away from her, gathering them in under his magician's cape, Peter with his magic box of colors, his warm sympathetic voice ("Alice, sometimes I think I am a woman"), his strength.

Will or nil he, he drew these women to him as surely as though he controlled the tide. And she, left behind on the shore, amidst the purple stars, the crabs, the bladder wrack. She might hate them but she could never blame them.

(IL 218, emphasis in original)

Within a year of his departure, Peter magically transforms the women's relationships with Alice to resemble his own secrecy and silence with her, leaving Alice, like the hairy

hermit crab with its too-small shell, alone and stranded in her tide pool, her island house -- without even her daughters, for he takes custody of them in alternate years -- and with only her writing to sustain her.

Writing: A True Breaking of the Silence

Alice's status as an artist is key to her ability to break her silence despite everything and to get out from under Peter's control. Because Alice has always had her writing, she has never been completely controlled by Peter, a fact that is symbolized in the novel by her wedding ring "never having been engraved" (IL 14), so that she has never been entirely "his," despite having taken his name when they married -- and having at one time "loved being 'Mrs. Hoyle'" because it gave her "status" and "protection" (IL 172). As a writer, Alice has her own status -- she is a "subject" who uses her writing as a form of action to counteract Peter's control and to stop being a "thing" to which Mr. Hoyle has given his name (Hutcheon 29), to stop playing "according to Hoyle" -- or according to his rules.

By virtue of her occupation as writer, Alice in effect "speaks" for herself in a way the other characters do not, which allows her to break out of the bounds and limits imposed by realist representation. Audrey Thomas uses Alice to deconstruct the stereotyped "image of woman" in patriarchal discourse, by presenting her as multiple and complex, rather than unified or one-sided -- Alice is a hero who does not conform to the image of woman, but shatters it.

Her contradictions are allowed to exist side by side and unresolved in the text, rather than being "sewn up" tidily at the end. In the novel Alice refers to herself as "Alice Hoyle: 1000 interlocking pieces" (IL 158), jigsaw puzzle fragments that the reader must assemble for herself. These fragments reveal a multiplicity of roles that together form the character, "Alice," rather than the "either / or" construction of Woman favoured by patriarchal discourse, which allows women to be "mother" or "sex kitten" or "writer" or "wife" -- Madonna or whore, never both at once.

The construction of Alice as a character who is writer, lover, wife and mother (among other things), but is not totally fulfilled by any one role, subverts this unitary image of Woman. At the same time, it deconstructs both the image of "Mother" as the totality of female fulfillment and self-sacrifice, and the image of "woman writer" as childless monster.² The novel's portrait of the artist as a single mother also transforms the image of "artist" from one of total self-absorption (a discourse that remains with us even today) into one in which the artist must also live in the real world and remember to do things such as paying the bills, cooking meals and making Halloween costumes.

²In The Madwoman in the Attic, Gilbert and Gubar argue that women writers have traditionally been constructed as monstrous and "unnatural," because they have resisted "female" socialization (Gilbert and Gubar 53 ff.).

By revealing multiple aspects of Alice, the text breaks a silence around a reality that women share: they can be many things at once, and need not confine themselves to images and roles that patriarchy expects from them. We see Alice as both an artist who needs time to herself in order to work, and as a mother who nurtures, loves and gives time to not only her own biological children, but her friends and her friends' friends. We also see Alice as a lover -- of both Raven and Selene, as well as Peter. At different points in the novel, Alice is portrayed as both dependent and independent, weak and strong; she has many conflicting desires and needs, often simultaneously. For example, when Raven and his friends "invade" her house and create havoc -- dirtying dishes but never washing them, drinking all her tea, playing very loud music and so on -- she is angry with Raven but at the same time wants him to comfort her; when they make love, however, "[a] second Alice watche[s] them laughing cynically" (IL 123). This "second Alice" is one who, like the narrator of Intertidal Life, can stand outside the character Alice, observing and reporting everything she sees, hears or senses.

As a character who is a writer, Alice is a character-within-a-character who narrates her own story, which is reproduced as the novel-within-the-novel that forms Intertidal Life. She speaks in both the first person and the third, and it is sometimes difficult to determine exactly

which of these voices is that of the "narrator" and which the "character" Alice -- for although it appears that the character is the Alice of the third-person narrative, who writes and narrates the first-person narrative, there is evidence to suggest that it could also be the other way around: on the drive to the ferry -- told in the first person -- during which Alice stops the car and tells Peter to get out, Alice recites a third person narrative (IL 26-27). The complexity of this "fragmented" or "split" subject is reminiscent of looking into two mirrors facing each other, and seeing endless reflections within reflections therein.

The fragmentary subject, Alice, is mirrored in the fragmentary narrative of Intertidal Life. As the use of a split subject breaks with the patriarchal tradition of a unified subject, so does the non-linear narrative break from the dominant realist tradition in story-telling, in which a unified subject tells a story from beginning to end, with no breaks, unidentified fragments or temporal jumps. The narrative is not a chronological account but a dyschronic one: a re-ordering of apparently unrelated events by theme, rather than by time.

A symptom of this anti-chronology is the use of the word "today" immediately following a segment that appears to be in the "present" narrative, when the reader cannot possibly know when this "today" might be, except that it is not part of the same "present" narrative (IL 25). Another symptom is the use of the months of the year as section titles to introduce the

segments of first-person narrative -- without giving any indication what year they refer to, having already said that the text spans ten years. To be sure, it soon becomes clear enough that the segments so labelled all take place within one year, the first year of Alice and Peter's separation, and that these segments are in fact in chronological order. Still, on first reading, the labels do nothing to clarify the chronology.

Taken separately, the novel-within-the-novel form and the flashback form are each variations rather than major departures from the dominant realist mode of narrative. Both of them together constitute a greater departure, but even so this in itself would be relatively unremarkable, were it not for the way Thomas uses the combination as a device to allow the split subject to speak in different voices.

The frame story is straightforward enough in terms of time: it is the narrative of the present, which begins on page one with Alice's awakening to the foghorn, continues with the story of Alice and Flora on the beach, then fades into flashback, presumably in Alice's memory; it picks up again in Part 3 with Alice and Flora packing things in the island house, and ends with Peter and Flora in the rowboat. It appears to be told simply enough in the third person by an omniscient narrator. As with the first-person narrative, this third-person voice is confounded by another third-person voice, the one of the "flashback" sequences. The text does not differentiate between these two voices, yet the character

of the two narratives is quite distinct: the frame story, if all the fragments were lifted out of the remainder, would be choronological, if still fragmentary; the flashback sequences, however, contain huge and frequent temporal jumps.

The flashback sequences can be likened to the intertidal life of the title, with tide pools separated, however, by time, not space; the reader is a temporal beachcomber who, under the guidance of author / narrator, moves back and forth among them without transition, observing closely and at random the movements in that microcosm of tiny tide-pool creatures. The third-person voice here is rather too close to events within the tide pools to be omniscient, rather too involved to step back and re-order the reality chronologically. Instead, this involved voice delivers a narrative that uses the rhythms of memory, those links and leaps we have come to associate with stream-of-consciousness writing.

Within the third-person narrative of the flashback sequence is the first-person narrative, the "novel-within-the-novel." If the flashback narrative can be likened to a stroll along the beach at low tide, we could conceive of this narrative as being one in which the first-person Alice is a tiny creature (maybe the hermit crab with the shell that is too small) inside one of the tide pools, the tide pool of the year she and Peter separated. This is the innermost layer of the novel. Its distinctive voice is one that flits from topic to topic, sometimes commenting from a different point

of view (from within, from underneath) on the flashback segment that has just occurred, sometimes simply engaging in wordplay, presenting an etymology or a re/definition that may or may not illuminate a flashback segment.

The multiple voices adopted in Intertidal Life resist the Cartesian construction of knowledge which dominates our culture. Alice, as protagonist, is a symbol of the text's resistance of this linear, unified system of knowledge, for she is described as having a "mind . . . full of bits of esoterica. But often not complete. Like knowing a phone number but not the person to whom it belonged" (IL 5). By resisting a closed, unified knowledge and embracing the fragmentary, the "useless," the text opens a space for fragmentary knowledge, breaks the silence around it and validates it.

Thus the fragmentary structure of the narrative of Intertidal Life resembles the tide pools to which the title alludes; during low tide, everything is exposed. The text moves from one pool to the next, both temporally and spatially, revealing an intricate microcosm in each fragment of narrative. The island setting is itself a kind of permanent tide pool, a microcosm of people who think they are safe but, like the hairy hermit crabs who always choose "houses that are much too small for them" (IL 260), are exposed to the scrutiny of the author and readers. Like the beachcomber at low tide, the reader of Intertidal Life can never see the whole: just as the whole beach is much too big

for an individual of ordinary size to see all at once, the whole picture of all the lives portrayed in the novel never emerges.

The reader, however, can piece together for herself the many fragments; from the information she is given, she may restructure the narrative into a pattern. The intricate network of narrative voice in this novel requires the reader to do just that, allowing what has been repressed and "frozen" in women's experience to emerge and reveal its value, like the "wealth of life" -- the many and various fish, shellfish and seaweeds -- exposed in the "intertidal zone" (IL 269) when the tide recedes.

Conclusion

The women writers whose work is analyzed in this thesis have overcome the many material and intellectual barriers that threaten to silence them at every turn. Their greatest act of subversion is simply to write about their own lives and their own realities, for doing so moves that experience out of the private, "women-only" realm of "taboo" into the public realm, an act that transforms the very discourse that represses and silences women. Through their written words, these authors and many others claim for women a new voice in the making of culture, by redefining what can be expressed in language.

The short stories examined in Chapter One reveal the intricate dynamic of women's silence by treating it as both theme and backdrop; they introduce as well a sampling of other themes traditionally considered "taboo," such as women's love for each other, wife beating, child sexual abuse, and death. These stories transform and subvert narrative realism by changing the parameters of what can be said within that form.

Elizabeth Smart's By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept, discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis, transforms the already taboo topic of adultery by telling the tale from the perspective of the "other woman," thus giving her a place in discourse that has traditionally been denied. The voice of this other woman is a cry of passion and desire, of a love

so all-encompassing as to embrace the entire world, both natural and human, extending even so far as to include compassion and alliance with her lover's wife. The novel expresses not only the joy and pain of a love that seeks fusion rather than possession, but also its dangers: the danger inherent in the social construction of a woman's love as precluding all else, and consuming her identity in the process. By Grand Central Station maintains the thinnest possible narrative line throughout a fragmentary text rich with allusion and imagery, thus pushing formally as well as thematically at the limits of what can be said in language.

Audrey Thomas's Intertidal Life, examined in Chapter Three, reveals that while the content of what is coded as "taboo" may shift depending on specific socio-cultural circumstances, it is always the dominant group that determines this content, and the muted group that must conform. Thus, in the hippie counterculture portrayed in the novel, the adultery taboo that was so important in By Grand Central Station has been supplanted by a taboo against showing any strong emotions, such as jealousy, anger and grief. Just as the protagonist in By Grand Central Station transgresses the law as constructed and enforced by representatives of her patriarchal society, Alice in Intertidal Life constantly struggles to rebel against her ex-husband's domination and control. Her success hinges on her status as artist, which allows her an identity separate from Peter, thus helping her avoid the disastrous total fusion and

self-abnegation experienced by the By Grand Central Station protagonist. The novel's fragmentary structure, a reflection of Alice's multiplicity, demands the reader's active participation in assembling the fragments to form a narrative, one that allows what has been repressed and frozen in patriarchal discourse to emerge.

Both novels and all the short stories reveal, overtly or subtly, the relationship between women's silence and male domination. Often, the texts reveal that there are no words in patriarchal discourse which allow women to name the domination itself, as we are shown in "Secrets": Mavis and June keep it secret that they have been forbidden to take jobs by their husbands, but it is by their very silence and by the insistence of hidden meanings beneath the words that Isabel Huggan indicates the extent to which they are dominated by not only the men themselves, but by a society which validates male power. The silences are similarly provocative in Huggan's "Sorrows of the Flesh," where Mavis never links her own relationship of subordination to her husband with Jerry Wheeling's battering of his wife, Mayruth. "The Wednesday Circle" shows how there are simply no words for a 14-year-old girl to use, even among women, to name her sexual abuse by an adult male ("The Wednesday Circle"); male domination is not named overtly in "The Real World's" treatment of Annie, who is oppressed by her family for being suspected of being a lesbian, then for becoming pregnant by her father's friend, nor in the references to lesbian

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precisely because the women share a complicit rivalry in the silence of their isolation from each other, controlled by the man between them. The complicity of their rivalry has no place in patriarchal discourse; their potential for voicing their friendship remains locked in the space of "taboo" to which even they themselves have no access.

Intertidal Life does reveal fragments of what can and does exist in the taboo space of "women-only," by detailing some of the conversations between Alice and her women friends, Alice and her daughters. Yet a similar problem exists in these relationships: Peter comes between Alice and each of her friends and daughters in turn (except Selene, who is spirited away by another man, Raven).

In "Secrets," Isabel Huggan also details the content of this space coded as "taboo," showing how even women whose lives are so circumscribed by their husbands' overt domination can maintain important friendships among themselves; it is the women's voices, connected by telephone wires, that sustain them. Women's voices also pervade the two short stories by Jane Rule, whose texts present an alternative form of resistance: attentiveness to women's words in the women-only spaces that Rule creates.

All of these texts trace out the beginnings of true communication between and among women, even within patriarchal discourse.

A pattern begins to present itself, even with such a small sampling of writers as this thesis has used. Women's

writing about their own lives by definition breaks the silence around male domination of women -- surely one of the major taboos feminists have struggled to name -- because this domination pervades our culture at all levels and hence is central to women's experience. Just as in the real world women's struggles and celebrations within patriarchy have begun to erode its foundations, women writers' struggle to name the various facets of our collective experience, even within patriarchal language, transforms patriarchal discourse itself. The voices of women's texts have begun to circulate, not only among women but within patriarchal culture as a whole, constituting a form of resistance and a base of power in the public realm that has traditionally been confined to the private. All five writers represented here have made a significant contribution to breaking the silence around women's experience, moving it from the space coded as "taboo" into the open space of culture.

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