Chapter -V
Search for Identity

Search is the basic instinct of humans. At mundane level, the search is for the basic amenities of life; at a higher level, the search becomes complex and ambitious. Great epics and chivalric romances of the past deal with the search theme. Ramayana is based on Rama’s search/quest to regain Sita. Gilgamesh’s search was for immortality. The knights of the Faerie Queen and the Arthurian knights of the Roundtable indulged in chivalric quests for glory, often risking their lives.

On the other hand, novels of realistic mode often deals with the theme of search for identity. Sometimes the protagonists run away from the materialistic jungle of city life and seek solace and meaning for life as can be seen in the fiction of Somerset Maugham, Arun Joshi etc.,

Feminist fiction features protagonists who look for an identity of their own, overcoming the sanctions and limitations imposed on them by the patriarchal society. These women battle to carve an identity through—their jobs, writing and following other creative pursuits, by shifting places/life partners etc. This chapter examines the protagonists of Marian Engel’s search for identity.

In Sarah Bastard’s Note book, Engel links the act of writing and its content to the maternal realm, then shifts to a new space. Like the protagonists themselves, writing emerges from between the dichotomous structures around them. “I have had,
now, time to recover; a smooth week in the womb,”(SBN7) is Sarah’s symbolic opening reflection. Her father’s funeral has brought her back to the family fold – now a firm female space, inhabited by her mother and three sisters. Moving into the maternal space of the womb, Sarah leaves the sphere of men in which she has been revolving. Her father’s death coincides with the dissolution of two affairs. The first with her brother-in-law Sandro, had resulted in the abortion of “Antonio”. The second involved her married friend Joe. Both affairs measure Sarah’s readiness to step beyond the bounds of propriety. By taking a brother-in-law and married friend for lovers. Sarah breaks the rules, going against the moral fibre of her milieu. This non conformist outlook is confirmed in the interview she gives to a reporter from the Toronto Star. The reporter expects Sarah to be a mirror reflection of her mentor Dr.Lyle, “a woman of integrity, vision, a genuine and quiet position in public life. All that one could desire “(SBN30).

This is the image that coincides with Sarah’s upbringing and background. Her father tells her “We must make our way in life, with self-discipline and industry “(SBN24). But Sarah constructs quite a different image of herself. When the interview appears, its unflattering depiction of Sarah supports her own self representation as Sarah Bastard. The interview depicts Sarah as a woman “hated because female, non conformist, self-important, intellectual, free, fucking, undressed – gorgeous, too good for this place, here “- (SBN 26). The Toronto star interview inserts itself into a constellation of narrative components that converge on the representation of Sarah Porlock. These includes her father’s death; her change of name to Sarah Bastard. Thus Engel’s protagonist moves towards self-definition on her own terms however “Socially inappropriate “or “illegitimate “. Thus Sarah
declares herself her “own Pygmalion” (SBN116) and describes herself as “melting and reforming day after day; like everyone else, never twice the same person, always the same, and something between “(SBN16). In this way, Sarah appears ever-changing and fluid. With her first protagonist, Engel creates a de-centred marginalized self who illustrates another mode of subjectivity. Sarah resigns from her university position, her university professor persona makes her feel “false phony “(SBN128). In a commitment to authenticity, she rejects the contractual bonds of paternal institutions to search for truth.

Sarah’s self determination occurs towards the end of the novel. Sarah and her mother spend an evening together. To her surprise, her mother does not oppose her resigning from the university and leaving Toronto. On the other hand, she supports Sarah’s freedom of choice. This seals Sarah’s decision to represent herself. The socially admissible Dr. Porlock, “lady Ph.D “, is transformed into the less “legitimate “Sarah Bastard, a woman writer.

Becoming a writer is what usually matters to Sarah. This novel is not an explicit exploration of the feminist concept of the mother tongue. Nevertheless, it links the protagonist’s entry into the mother space with her own decision to write for herself and to create her own context. For Sarah, becoming a writer involves “moving on from the study of the texts to the living of them “(SBN76). What she desires is to produce: “I want to produce I want to get into a world where creation – creation of anything – is a fact “(SBN136). Later Sarah explains to her students that she is unable merely to “recite the text “. What to look for, how to go about learning how to recognize untruth”(SBN169). She chooses people over texts, as she chooses reality over theory and the local over the universal.
In Sarah Bastard, Marian Engel presents an “other “image of female subjectivity – a woman actively engaged in re/presenting herself on her own terms. This self – representation is effected in the marginal space of the Bastard – a space of m/otherness. Sarah refuses to opt either for a maternal embrace or for appropriating others experience. Instead she consciously assumes her specificity and self-defined status as other, despite its “illegitimacy “. She drops out of the paternal realm resigning from the university and forfeiting social status and security. She opts instead for the materially uncertain and socially marginal position of the woman writer. *Sarah Bastard’s Notebook* represents an early revision of traditional notions of female identity as woman writer an innovative representation of women.

Sarah has the apparent freedom to privilege the intellectual over the biological, reject an academic life, reject marriage and break a major sexual societal taboo by having an affair with her European brother-in-law, Sandro. Leah – Sandro’s wife seems inscrutable to her husband and as a result is ever fascinating. Leah is obviously not politicized as a feminist who competes with men at their own game. On the contrary, her strength arises from the distance she places between herself and her husband on the basis of sexual difference. To Engel, the biological is part of identity. However, Leah is by no means the answer to questions about female identity. Sarah appears to have access to a wider range of options in her behavioural repertoire than does Leah, but the options are no more satisfactory. Sarah admits to once having been attracted to the idea of becoming like her academic mentor. Dr.Lyle. But Dr.Lyle constitutes a feasible model only as long as Sarah values the options offered by the academic world. Leah on the other hand has to do the best she can within her position on the margins of a patriarchal domestic world. Hence
neither Leah nor Dr. Lyle offers Sarah a portrait of womanhood that is workable for her. Sarah attempts to develop a more personal, individual understanding of herself. A trip to Europe promises Sarah exciting flexibility and new roles she can play. Her anxiety for her freedom emerges as the overwhelming result of the various social and historical forces that have brought her to the isolated place in her life. Her desire for freedom as a woman has not been refined in part because she has to bow to the pressure of societal interference that prevents her fulfillment as a woman. The outcome is Sarah merely dedicates herself to continue her battle against her society, even if the price of her participation is loneliness.

In her review of *The Honeyman Festival*, Susan Swan expressed the opinion that, "with her second novel, Marian Engel has permanently joined the ranks of revolutionary women writers. The novel may be a bit too cruelly female for the tastes of the male readers, but it’s about time women started telling their own story instead of leaving it to the likes of men" (Verduyn 79).

In this novel, the protagonist Minn’s mother Gertrude Williams plays a significant role in Minn’s self identification. Personifying the monolith of domestic maternal perfection. Gertrude Williams is an imposing woman – nearly six feet tall, “Her hair was crimped and thinning and bravely blued, her jaws locked in constant disapproval “(THF 92-93). She attended University, and was assertive and a disciplinarian. Minn recalls, “We were good people, we never stole or swore or drank or wore cheap shoes. We got up early, we went to Church on Sunday. We were workers, we never committed excesses, we didn’t touch ourselves or play with ourselves, we did our homework “(THF154). Minn is taught to make lists and finish things “Build! Organise! Preserve! ‘(THF68) these were the guiding concepts of
her mother’s world, together with the belief in progress. Though Minn wants to follow her own style of life, she resents her mother much, she remains bound to Gertrude, this is her progressive discovery. Minn’s mother figures increasingly in her thoughts. It occurs to Minn that, “something of Gertrude’s authority had crept into her “(THF100). She was startled to discover that her house reflects her mother’s style more than her own.

A key scene of the novel is Minn’s self identification when, in the early morning hours, a police officer shows up at her house looking for one of her student lodgers, echoing the voice on the other side of her door announcing his arrival. Minn asserts her authority and meets the law boldly. “Then she remembered that she wasn’t Mrs. Williams. She was Mrs. Burge she grew afraid of herself, she knew she was slipping”. She might have said Mrs. Norman”(THF150). But she did not use her husband’s name. She got the courage to face the situation only through her mother and not through her husband. Mrs. Williams’ command of authority is meagre relative to that of men. Law and order are in their hands. Minn rejects male authority. Her refusal to let the officer enter her home is reinforced physically. She lunges her sizable pregnant body – “her mother’s body” at the officer. Minn’s house is her domain, with Norman away as usual, the house becomes entirely Minns’.

Minn’s former lover Mr. Honeyman is an embodiment of the stereotypically self absorbed American, who sees himself through a larger than – life self-serving sense of romance. He creates dreams and illusions as a film maker but demonstrates no interest in Minn’s Canadian reality. He uses his insistent Americanness to train her as an actress and interfere with her identity, but failed. Minn remained with her own Canadian background. Minn does not work towards transcending Honeyman’s
influence in any heroic sense. She remains herself by failing to become someone else. Though Minn was in love with Honeyman, she did not change her Canadian identity.

In this novel, Engel wedges the protagonist Minn between two major imperialist influences on Canadian national identity: the American pressure of her previous lover, Honeyman and the British pressure of her volunteer visitor Jane Regina. Despite her wish to pursue her independence as a Canadian Minn seems to have difficulty, over the course of the novel, in transcending the conflicting pressures that imperialism have placed on her. When Minn was alone at the time of her pregnancy she was met by a volunteer visitor Jane-Regina Magill – a walking cultural representative of oppressive and colonising historical British values.

Everything about Jane – Regina bespeaks an imperial presence, and the narrative effect is to place Minn in the position of resistant Canadian. She is a cultural Canadian inheritor. Her characterization does not depend on a transformed reality. Instead, her realisations came from recognizing the histories and social pressures that have made her who she is as a Canadian. Minn’s lax housekeeping and lock of control over her children were implicit rebellions against Jane-Regina’s regal pronouncements about how a domestic ship should run. Minn resists Jane-Regina’s imperialist pressures and she simply remains by being herself. Thus she did not change her attitude towards any imperialistic pressures. She follows her own culture and remain as a Canadian Woman.

Engel’s first two novels No clouds of Glory and The Honeyman Festival, were commented by critics that her work was “too personal” and that her novels
were essentially “Women’s books” while she was writing *Monodromos*. Engel remarked in an interview that she was concerned with the problem, as the interviewer phrased it, of being “thrown back increasingly upon a personal view of the world” (Brady 27). She also remarks that “after doing *No Clouds of Glory* and *The Honeymoon Festival*, I got very uptight about using too much of myself” (ibid. 27). So she attempted to overcome this subjectivity — and by implication, the strong autobiographical component — of her two earlier novels by shifting the focus of narrative attention from character to setting from an interest in interior landscapes and personal identities to a complex mediation upon place and cultural identity.

Audrey Moore, the protagonist of *Monodromos* is markedly different from Engel’s previous protagonists — the talkative, self-revealing Sarah Bastard and the blatantly pregnant Minn Burge. She tells more about her new island surroundings than about herself. Indeed, she seems almost bodiless. Audrey Moore’s quest is for an escape from personality “to know both the city and the island like an encyclopedia” (MD38). This theoretically informed novel takes place on a sunny Greek island — far from the day-to-day life of motherhood and children where female existence is to be elevated from everyday clutter to the world of ideas and books. The “I “of Engel’s first two novels is thus whittled down in her third novel to an “eye””. This eye is then plucked out of the familiar female framework of family and home and placed in the foreign setting of a Greek island or “eyeland.” The Visual imagery throughout the novel reinforces the equation of “I “and “eye. “Thus, the protagonist Audrey Moore is scaled down to a “seeing eye.” The seeing eye of narrator is as quiet about herself as possible. This eye/ I is silent and sees
only what she has learned to see – not what she wants to see. The novel examines
Audrey’s growing desire to “see for herself”. It also studies the simultaneous
reincarnation of the disembodied “eye “into a flesh-and-blood “I “, as Audrey moves
out of the abstract realm of the mind and into the concrete, sensual world of the
body.

Audrey came to the Greek island in search of a “dog-headed saint “, ikon for
the sake of her lover. This novel revolves more around the identity of the island
than around the identity of self. Audrey came to understand that “to know the
authorship of the dog-headed saint would be to know the island “(MD152). She
arrives on the island with all the trappings of life with Max. Armed with lots of
books – guide books and island encyclopedias – all male authored, she sets about
exploring her new surroundings. She soon discovers the limits imposed on her as a
woman in that island. The island’s sole women artist, Aphroulla attests to the
particular constraints placed on female artistic expression. “Women are not allowed
to express themselves here, and merely to pick up a paint brush is a form of cultural
rebellion”(MD75) explains Aphroulla. Aphroulla is herself a rebel. As a child, she
had wanted to become a painter. The only way she would realize her dream of
attending art school was to marry the island’s Mad-man who took her to Paris. On
returning to the island, Aphroulla’s fate was the familiar denunciation as a “Crimson
Woman”. “There is no way to be free here, as a woman”(MD146) she concludes.

The setting of the novel is symbolic and important. As the title means “one
way street”, the island is a unidirectional society mirroring the larger world and the
history of patriarchy. Audrey Moore’s artistic self has been lost in the shadows of
her life with men like Laddie and Max Magill. She has allowed the men in her life
to shape her views and set her agenda. Audrey admires the artist Aphroulla, the sole woman of the island who succeeds in living independently. Typically, Engel’s protagonist has learnt to behave and to carry out men’s instructions. Even after her divorce from Laddie, Audrey remains susceptible to summons to help him. After she has sorted out her ex-husband’s financial problems, she takes some time to explore her island surroundings. But rather than seeing for herself, she strives to see the island as Max might. Like Engel’s other protagonists, Audrey is drawn to the protected and familiar male world of books and other attractive artistic expressions of men’s thinking and ideas.

Throughout the novel, her quest for the meaning of the island is linked to her search for the “ikon of the dog-headed saint” - a pagan relic of an animal God. After a long struggle and travel on a donkey’s back she reached the ikon in the mountains. The dog-headed saint turns out disappointingly to be “only a small ikon, a Christopher who prayed to the Virgin because he was excessively attractive to workmen. She endowed him with an endearing long hound’s head with a flaring nose like a Crocodile” (MD230-231). Audrey can’t able to understand anything from the ikon. Her apparent lack of understanding might be read as a failure, based on her inability to create a recognizable individuality. But there is a successful dimension to the protagonist’s situation. Audrey has in fact understood something which is revealed in the sequence of the dancing boy, the powerful and compelling resolution of the novel in which Audrey is pulled back into the world of the skin and flesh. The dancing boy who has the face of an idol and the smile of a snake, summons forth from another order of existence, where the rational is displaced by the inexplicable. “There is no understanding”- Audrey realizes. In the dancing boy, Audrey glimpses
“the old, remembered thing” (MD 238) “This boy has been taught to remember the old-not wholeness, but chaos. He will be Laddies final disaster (MD238). Audreys begins to believe that knowledge and value may be found in chaos and multiplicity. These offer an altered vision-an “old “way of seeing, looking for wholeness and simplicity, dichotomies and trinities. Her new understanding suggests that “It’s not that one doesn’t understand…..there is nothing to understand. Before leaving the island Audrey tells herself that “Landscape is meaningless, it doesn’t matter where you live, it matters how” (MD245). She returned to England.

Marian Engel described Bear as “almost an empty novel... People bring their own content to it. And they make it what they want it to be” (Verduyn 117 ). This was certainly evident in readers’ and critics’ response to the work. ‘Bear ‘has been read skillfully and convincingly in a variety of ways as a quest for identity, pastoral or romance, a mythic, a critique of colonialism, an exploration of the maternal, a love story, pornography, and a celebration of sexuality and the erotic. According to Margaret Gail Osachoff, Engel’s Bear, is the perfect example of a modern pastoral idyll of the primitive type with, Lou, the heroine, leaves a dull job and loveless sex with her boss in the city and goes to northern Ontario for the summer in search of a new identity. After experiencing love for a bear, she returns “clean and simple and proud,”2 reborn or revitalized and ready to start a new life... (Univ. of Windsor Review.)

Bear is a pivotal extension of Engel’s previous work – a brilliant step in the author’s struggle with the challenges to female expression. The novel takes its place in an artistic tradition wherein women retreat to nature to escape a male culture that
is inimical to female self-development and expression. Through this novel, Engel again explores questions of Women’s representation in and through art and writing.

Marital breakdown and Psychotherapy were crucial features of Engel’s life during the 1970’s and her writing bore testament to these experiences. Her writing, ever focussed on women’s concrete experiences, presented parallels with her own life and also declared differences. While describing her difficulties of her marriage breakup, Engel pointed out one of her novel “Joanne”. In that novel the protagonist Joanne after her married life had breakdown. She bounced merrily off into the future. But in her personal life it was not easy as she made it in “Joanne “. For Engel, these were difficult years, “I didn’t walk out with my head high. I copped out. I changed my mind every week. I cried. I raged, stormed and fulminated“(B120). Emotional intensity built steadily until the tension finally burst, partly through the creative release that was Bear. Thus, Engel got her own identity as a writer. This work made her to feel bigger-grown up and confident, and no longer an insecure little child. Many of her protagonists reflect Engel’s choice in life, to write and to grow through writing and to get an identity of their own.

Bear can be read fruitfully with reference to the personal concerns and crises Engel was dealing at that time. Thus the questions of identity is posed in both the ‘cahiers ‘and ‘novels ‘. Lou’s question to the bear and to herself – “who and what are you? (Verduyn 124) is echoed in Engel’s cahier in entries such as “You can’t tell what kind or man you want if you don’t know who you are “(B124). In Bear, Marian Engel’s concentrated focus of vision allows her, for the first time to get behind the subjective preoccupations of the early novels and to grasp directly the relationship between personal identity and the social order. As a result, Bear
develops a far more positive and compelling vision of life than the preceding novels. Its heroine seeks a rapprochement with the natural environment and ultimately with the realities of social experience in her search for a more clear – sighted engagement with life. Unlike Sarah and Minn, she does not take the easier route of withdrawal into the inner life by resigning herself to determinism or by oversimplifying distinctions between idealism and reality; and unlike Audrey, her individuality is not overwhelmed by her environment – it is defined by her relationship with it.

In *Bear*, Lou is an old tarpaulin woman with no originality, no pride, no sense of self. “She lived like a mole, buried deep in her office, digging among maps and manuscripts” (B 1) As the novel unfolds, it becomes increasingly clear that Lou is experiencing significant psychological problems and is in the grip of serious depression. She was forty years old and that she was as old as the yellowed papers she spent her days unfolding. These take the form of troubling questions not about her work but about “her own self”. She hears voices. There is an existential screaming inside herself and she teeters towards depression, in the past, Lou has overcome her crises of identity and depression with the help of a practical voice inside her. It justifies her existence by reminding her that she is “of service. But this time the crisis unfolds differently. The estate house in which she stayed comes with a Bear. The bear initially is dismissed by Lou“, who is thrilled at the prospect of the intellectual treasures she expects to find in the house; but the bear gradually comes to claim more and more of her attention until it preoccupies her thoughts completely.
Lou breaks the taboo and ventured boldly into the territory long deemed off limits to women. She begins to have sexual relationship with bear, Lou’s bear provides comfort and security to her, which she didn’t get from humans. There is also a meaning to be derived from the bear’s homonym “bare”. With bear, Lou “bares “her soul. She then “bears the reminder of that experience in the form of a scar across her back, which marks her as one of Engel’s tattooed women. One evening by the fire, the bear experiences an unanticipated erection. “Lou crouches in the animal posture “(B113) in front of the animal. “ The bear’s paw reaches out, and its claws rip her skin wide open“(B113). After this incident, pitched into a fever by the gash on her back Lou sinks into a symbolic state of semi consciousness. When she regains consciousness, she sees “ a long red congealing “ marking from her shoulder to buttock, it is not, “ the mark of Cain, “(B115) Lou insists. She feels no guilt. The mark she bears is from a “ claw that had healed guilt”(B121).

Her scar is like a tattoo, the mark of a woman who has broken a taboo. Lou has stepped beyond social sanctions on female desire and sexual identity. Her body has been “used and bent and violated and broken” (B136), like the tattooed woman’s. Like her, Lou has resisted. Her body is a pictograph, its scar an external expression of the internal psychic pain she has endured. It is not guilt that she feels but renewal. “ She felt not that she was at last human, but that she was at last clean, clean and simple and proud “(B117). The novelist, fully capable of distinguishing between life and death, holds the moral evaluation in a tight ironic perspective. The reader is not being invited to approve of Lou’s action as a victory of female selfhood; on the contrary it is an act conceived in extreme desperation, a measure of
her tragic alienation from a humane community. She got her own identity mingling with the nature world apart from human world.

*The Glassy Sea* marks a significant transition between *Bear* and Engel’s final novel, *Lunatic Villas*. In *Bear*, women’s social integration is left up in the air with the stars. But in *The Glassy Sea*, the protagonist rejects and then revises the values of social integration and isolation, which her family and society have taught her. The theme of identity is located in the play on names, which recurs throughout the novel. Rita is the diminutive of Marguerite, the protagonist’s full name, although she never uses it. Instead, she is known as Sister Mary Pelagia throughout her ten years as an Eglinante nun and in her subsequent marriage to Asher Bowen, who does not like “Rita “, she is Peggy – another diminutive of Marguerite. Rita later comes to know that “Marguerite means pearl “- the symbol of perfection (TGL 72). But she lost this perfection when “Martha” in Rita asserts and the spiritual “Mary “in her declines.

*The Glassy Sea* integrates artistic expression and personal experience, both through conjunctions between the novel and Engel’s note books of the time and through Rita’s story. Her experience as a nun notwithstanding, Rita’s letter tells a tale similar to that of Engel’s other protagonists. Rita is attracted to the authentic life, “My religion was, I think, aesthetic and literary only” (TGL91) she confesses. Rita is drawn to the world of books and philosophical reflections. At the same time, she is anchored in the concrete “real “world, both by her family’s practical approach to life and by the social expectations she faces as a girl and woman. Rita struggles to meet the imperatives of the contradictory forces in her life.
As a child Rita wanted to know more, “to be certain, To know. To know not, as she thought, philosophy, but something more important. The Truth. The Truth for her“(TGL160). For her interest in the aesthetic life, Rita encounters opposition from her family. Seeking to circumvent the social expectations of women in her milieu (Marriage and motherhood), Rita makes the unusual decision to become a nun which was unacceptable to her mother. Despite her mother’s disapproval, Rita embarks on a new stage in life as Sister Mary Pelagia. She got her own identity as an Eglantine sister. The convent offers her opportunity to read and think as well as work. Rita is as happy there as Lou in her island retreat.

After ten years as an Eglantine Rita’s dancing self begins to emerge, even as she argues inwardly – in her mind “with St. Augustine, with Paul, with all the Christians. If it was our nature to have these feelings, why was it evil to accept them? Why must we fight them down so hard?”(TGL87). Visions of herself as Venus makes Rita pause and she is not entirely surprised when sister Mary Rose, the sister superior of the Eglantine House says there is no future for her in Eglantine House. The order is slowly dying, and unlike the other sisters, Rita is young enough to start a new life. Thus Rita returns to the society to live the life of an ordinary woman. Rita says, “The change in my life was sudden and violent”(TGL91).

Rita marries Asher Bowen and gets a new identity as Mrs.Asher Bowen. In the beginning Rita was afraid of the womanhood and so she chose the aesthetic life as nun. But as time changes Rita got into marriage life. At first marriage with Asher seems heaven for Rita. Asher fills the emotional space in Rita. But misunderstanding rises when Rita expressed her desire for children. Asher was attracted to the Mary in Rita. He guides the former nun back into society and
encourages her to resume her University studies. He did not like to see Rita as mother and from that he begins to avoid her. Rita against the wish of her mother, joined the Eglantine house and became a nun, in the beginning. And now against the wish of her husband she gave birth to a son Chummy – but sadly and symbolically, a hydrocephalic child. In Asher eyes, Chummy is “a punishment “(TGL118) for sins. After two years, Chummy died and Rita became deeply depressed and drinks to quench her sorrow. Asher begins to live with another woman and he makes arrangement to Rita whereby she must move and stay away from him. Thus, Rita ends up on the east coast living alone in a house.

Rita finds herself isolated from society and her efforts for a successful and satisfying integration have demonstrated the limited possibilities available to women. By becoming an Eglantine, she had initially avoided the predictable female socialization of her milieu leading to service. But after a decade, when she entered into the society of the normal she became a wife and mother but in which she could not continue, she lost her husband and child, and again, she was isolated. In that lonely situation she begins to realize herself “Life I decided, is a sentence between brackets; these brackets must be seen to contain what is, not what might have been “(TGL143).

It was at this time Brother Anthony Stone came there with a letter from Bishop of Huron with a request to Rita to reopen the Eglantine House. This was a great shock to Rita and at first she rejects the proposal immediately. But Anthony Stone stayed there with Rita to convince her. It takes almost a month for him, to make Rita to accept the proposal. With his clever and compassionate arguments he counter all Rita’s reasons for remaining a recluse. Ultimately, Rita faces the fact that
as Anthony succinctly sums it up, “Eglantine House exists. We need you to resurrect it; we are calling you; for practical reasons; and because we think you can do it” (TGL153). Racked with longing, torn between thinking and feeling Rita like Engel’s other protagonists, navigates the dark and accepted to open Eglantine House as Sister superior.

Rita envisions a newly reopened Eglantine House as, “a kind of hospice “, a hostel or commune for women. “I want a core of women helping other women to put their lives..... in order. You must love one another or die ! it is women I am committed to working with and I shall do that...” (TGL161) For Rita it is a vision where by women can move out of destructive situations, and learn how to be, rather than choose not to be. Planning Eglantine House, Rita discovers a sense of self and certainty that has eluded her all her life. “Now I know who I am and what I want, “she is able to say, “I am certain of this as I am of very few things “(TGL161). Rita’s newly acquired sense of self acknowledges the “bloody – minded Martha “in her. Rita realized the Mary in her and she left the window open for Mary and roses.

Becoming Sister Mary Pelagia for the second time marks the end of “feeling small “ for Rita, an experience familiar to all Engel’s protagonists. She finds her own voice. She speaks for herself. She is no longer spoken for. The world reappears for Rita at the end of The Glassy Sea and she situates herself squarely in the middle of it as Sister Superior of the newly reopened Eglantine House. Rita’s experience have measured the possibilities that society offers to women. To change society and its constraints on women, requires planting oneself squarely in the middle. Thus Rita regains her identity as Sister Superior.
The Lunatic Villas conveys a discernible shift in the author’s writing. Engel is always concerned with women’s reality, while her previous works were focused on an individual’s experience – one woman’s voice – Lunatic Villas presents several voices, both male and female. As a literary alchemist, Engel has turned the ordinariness in life as extraordinary in the novel.

The novel renews Marian Engel’s commitment to representing women’s reality in art. The narrative is mainly on Harriet Ross a free-lance writer and a mother of many children. Children constitute a key theme in Lunatic Villas. In fact, the novel was released in the United States under the title “The year of the Child “. In this work Engel affirmed children and childhood as vital links to the world of the imagination and fantasy. Lunatic Villas deals with the daily lives of women. Engel also pointed out, it is as a novel about the “surrealism of everyday life”.

In cultivating the social, Lunatic Villas responded to the self-generated challenge of Engel’s earlier works. Bear and The Glassy Sea treated woman’s exploration of self in isolation from male-dominated society. In Bear, Lou’s societal reintegration was different with a mark on her back. The Glassy Sea presented a possible scenario, with the re-entry of Rita into the nunnery life after giving birth to one child. All these show how a woman can reintegrate in to the society, once they have explored and established an identity distant and different from it.

Lunatic Villas considers new possibilities for women’s social survival. These involve a move beyond, “Patriarchal motherhood “and “the father’s dream” towards women’s dreams for self-expression and artistic representation. The protagonist Harriet Ross is Lunatic Villas spokesperson for motherhood as it really is. Both her
professional work as author of “Depressed Housewife “and her personal experience as mother to seven children suggest that there is a dark side to motherhood as it has been construed and institutionalized in contemporary Western society. *Lunatic Villas* points to children’s and adolescent’s problems of identity, difficulties of self expression, struggles with sexuality and confusion about the world. In this novel also Engel depicted the dark side of childhood and motherhood. She also points towards a possible alternative to traditional motherhood, or “Patriarchal motherhood”.

According to Quebec feminist writer, and theoretician Nicole Brossard, “patriarchal motherhood” means women are reduced to being ‘reproducers ‘, of the human race and are disallowed a concurrent role as ‘producers ‘or even as active participants in culture rather than passive “object of art “(Verduyn 169). In *Lunatic Villas*, Engel too moves away from patriarchal motherhood. In a vision that is resonant of Brossard’s, the authoritative father no longer rules over the family. Mother adopts creative roles in addition to those of bearing and raising children. Hence, Harriet’s household is not overseen by a father or by any other man. Moreover it operates on the authority of Harriet and with the helping hands of some women friends and neighbours. Though Harriet is not the biological mother of all her seven children. She remains the owner of all her children. Finally and most importantly, Harriet transcends the restrictive role of woman as reproducer by engaging actively in the production of language and literary form. She is a writer. She writes columns about violence against women for her “Depressed Housewife “series. With this, she got her own identity as a writer and also a mother of seven children.
*Lunatic Villas* proposes modifying the father’s dream, revising parental roles, altering family structures and fostering new roles for women. These are concrete proposals for moving beyond patriarchal motherhood and allowing women to participate in society and culture as more than reproducers – as producers as well. Harriet Ross exemplifies this possibility. That she is a writer supporting seven children is important on two counts; it demonstrates a shift in the evolution of the woman artist in Engel’s work, and it allows *Lunatic Villas* to be, among other things, a book about writing. Harriet Ross is a writer but not of fiction. She writes a column called “Depressed Housewife “for ‘Household Words’ which the magazine’s editor, decides to discontinue. This decision creates a serious financial blow to Harriet. Though, Harriet took this situation in a positive dimension. She realizes that the time has come to move beyond “depressed housewife“(LV 238) and possibly beyond patriarchal motherhood. In this sense, she does not regret the magazine’s cancellation of her column. “They’re right, and I’ve wanted to get rid of her for years, Harriet thinks, she’s past her time and she’s boring me, she makes me feel like a women’s liberation sell out “(LV238). Cancelling the column frees Harriet to become a “serious “writer, an artist. Like Sarah Bastard, Harriet Ross is on the brink of becoming a “real “writer. Indeed a model exists and she is Harriet’s neighbourhood friend, writer Marshallene.

In her writing Marshallene aims at capturing and recording “the details about this country[Canada] that had never been written down “(Verduyn 173) She draws her material from her own family history from ancestors and children. Hers are “the novels about our darker selves, the selves that people who want to take things away from us make up for us “(Verduyn174) Marshallene writes about greed and pride
and rape, “The literature of rape is incomplete from the female point of view “she asserts and she finds a way of telling it. This was the writer’s task as Marian Engel saw it: “devising different methods of seeing”, envisioning the whole crystalline structure. In this, Marshallene succeeds brilliantly earning a reputation as a “sensitive and, what is rarer still energetic critic of Ontario society and a poet of the super-consciousness “(LV136). Women who express their vision of the world remain an affront to society’s expectations and standards about what woman should be. Like Aphroulla, the only female artist in Monodromos’s Greek island, Marshallene represents “cultural indelicacies “(LV 136) Remarkable in their talents, these women are marked out as outrageous, almost freakish and grotesque, like the tattooed woman. Thus Marshallene is another of Engel’s tattooed woman. But she is one who has succeeded in becoming a somebody, an Artist. She was particularly herself. She is a positive note in Engel’s work, in contrast to earlier tattooed women/artists who do not fare as well. Thus, Marshallene stands a role model to Harriet to become a serious writer of fiction.

At the end of the novel, Harriet was affected with parrot fever. She was kept alone. Still, she has dreams of hope, "Was it hope or grace, “She wonders, “the last virtue in the chest that connected us to God” (LV240). Mrs.Saxe the elderly English Woman who was living with Harriet’s family trained her son Mick to participate in the Trans Canada bicycle race, and she too participates in that race. They also won the race by coming first and second. Harriet was jubilant. She does not nurture any philosophy for life; on the other hand, hers is the celebration of being alive in spite of life’s complications, clutter, chaos and confusion. After all,
there is hope, dream and imagination to surmount life’s challenges. Not only Harriet, the entire locality celebrate the victory of the mother and the son.

Thus search/quest of various types in which women indulge have been portrayed by Engel in her novels. The next chapter focusses on various narrative techniques employed by Engel to project her artistic/feminist vision.