Chapter –II

Loneliness and Alienation

Alienation is “extreme separation from one’s own nature, from the products of one’s labour, or from social reality, which often results in an indifference or outright aversion toward some aspect of life that might otherwise be attractive and significant” (Illus.Dict.of Philosophy 14)

Both the sayings, “No man is an island” and “everyman is an island” are right in their own ways. On the one hand, humans are inter-dependent in their daily life. On the other hand, the existentialists point out that man has been surrounded by a hostile and indifferent universe. The social/psychological conditions of humans often make them alienated from the society. Every individual has an independent life and desires and attitudes of his own. When, an individual fails to connect with the ways of the rest of humanity, he often finds himself alienated and suffers from loneliness. This alienated state of humans has inspired creative writers of existentialist themes like Albert Camus, Kafka, Becket etc., Camus’ El Stranger, Kafka’s Metamorphosis, Trial and Becket’s Waiting for Godot etc., are fictional portrayals of loneliness.

Marian Engel’s characters are often sensitive and self-introspective. Known for their deeper level of existence, they often find themselves alienated, experiencing loneliness. This chapter strives to study the alienation and loneliness suffered by the characters figuring in the novels chosen for study.
Marian Engel wrote especially for the women of her generation. According to her, “At one point you have to make a conscious decision and that is, who your audience is”, she declared in a 1981 interview “when I took on most of the support of the family (I got divorced about 5 years ago) I had to decide.... I write for my peers....other women of my generation”. Writing for women of her generation, Engel gave them voices. Among these, one had singular resonance, writer Jane Rule has suggested. This was the divorced mother. Engel skillfully articulated this voice in her writing, through the protagonists who experienced divorce in real or symbolic terms. Feelings of separation are widespread among Engel’s female characters. Women are separated within, torn between social directives and personal desire. Split in their aspirations for artistic expression and representation, separated as mothers and daughters, women in Marian Engel’s world of fiction struggle to fuse, refuse and defuse the oppositional forces that shape female experience. Her protagonists are drawn simultaneously to thinking and dreaming, acting and imagining. This creates considerable tension in their lives, which are fraught with frustration and revolt, happiness and sorrow, pain and love. Loneliness and feelings of abandonment alternate with éclans of hope inspired by children and the promise of art.

In Marian Engel’s *Sarah Bastard’s Notebook*, the protagonist Sarah has three sisters, mother and brothers-in-law. Still, she decided to live alone in a far off place as she desired to have her own identity. It is a difficult evolution, for it involves a double departure. The first is from the father’s realm, Sarah must resign her position at the University, a male dominated institution and patriarchal stronghold. The second difficult departure is from the mother. But to get her own
identity she departed from the paternal and maternal relations and lived alone. Sarah had a love affair with her married friend Joe. But at one stage Joe left her, to live with his wife Ruth. This separation happens immediately after the death of her father. Another incident is that an “article about Sarah which appears in a newspaper, Sarah gave an interview to “Toronto Star” two weeks before the death of her father. The interview published in the newspaper described Sarah as “She believes in individual freedom, up to and including free love and legalized homosexuality” (SBN 26). After that, she resigned her job from Toronto University. She then must face a number of consequences: financial insecurity, loss of status, and social disapproval. She has to find a place, where she belonged. Particularly she has to face all the situations alone.

After resignation, she went back to her own empty life. Once when Joe and Sarah were waiting in a hotel to meet Leah and Sandro for a moment Joe left her alone and went with the countess somewhere. At that time Sarah felt “ [I felt ] unprotected and immediately hostile, must concentrate, find a friend” –SBN 6). Even in the midst of a party she felt lonely without a company or friend, but at the end she decided to live alone, all her life, as she was not satisfied with her friend Joe or with her brother-in-law Sandro.

When she met Leah and Sandro in France, Sarah gradually fall in love with her brother-in-law Sandro. His behaviour, approach and handsome appearance made her to move towards him which resulted in her abortion, of Antonio. Though she aborted the child, she longs for the child:

I still want my Antonio. He would have been like Sandro – another reason for squelching him – he would be strong to smile and loving
and – oh, unborn. I wanted someone to share the sadness of what I know. I wanted someone to show the world to. I wanted my Antonio. I still want him. – Sometimes I tell myself I am saving up for him, he and I will grow up on some Island together like Durrell and his perpetual girl infant under the olives, serious but carefree. I want him to be a dark, knowing little boy, big-boned and gracious. This male image of myself would comfort me, give me a shred of the future But what would I give him?(SBN 87).

Sarah soliloqued and longed for her aborted child. She also grieved. “Now I have no Antonio, no Joe, no Sandro, no Father”( SBN 91). When Sarah’s family advised her to stay there itself Sarah answered them: “What I need is not a year’s solitary with Ruskin, Browning, and the boys. I need two things – fresh air and some minds to sharpen mine on” (SBN136). She preferred to flee rather to stay with her family.

The words of Mrs.Porlock, “you do what you like. It’s your own life, you’re far too old to take us into consideration” (SBN 154) gave her the strength to become a writer and to move far away from her family. Thus Sarah remained alone all her life though she was born with three sisters and had two lovers in her life. She lost her married friend and lover Joe when he decided to leave Sarah with her mother and sister to live with his wife Ruth. Sarah moved away from her brother-in-law Sandro because of her guilty consciousness. Her sister Leah, Sandro’s wife never envied her. This behavior of Leah made Sara to feel guilty and she moved away from him . Thus disappointed by the love affairs with Joe and Sandro she decided to
live alone in a far-off place as a writer. Through Sarah, Marian Engel openly discusses a woman’s desire to choose her own path, away from the societal norms.

In her second novel, *The Honeyman Festival*, Engel described the mental agony suffered by a pregnant woman in her loneliness. Minn Burge mother of three children and awaiting the birth of fourth child lives alone with her other kids during her pregnancy period. In *Sarah Bastard’s Note book* – Sarah was almost a mother but in *The Honeyman Festival*, Minn Burge was a mother of three children. Her husband Norman Burge was a journalist and he was always away from his family. Minn Burge the lonely mother has to take care of her family, and has to face all the critical situations of life herself. The novel opens at 7.00 pm as Minn takes a hot bath prior to preparing for the party to mark the closing night of the seventh annual Honeyman Film Festival; it closes in the early hours of the following morning; within this twelve hours the sufferings faced by the protagonist Minn is effectively explained by the author.

Honeyman was a famous film director and Minn loved him when she was an actress at the age of twenty, working in his films. As the director was fifty two and was having his own family, he refused to accept the love of Minn. The past memories haunted her at the time of the party held in her house. In this novel Minn’s world is only superficially focused on her relationships with men. There is Honeyman of the title and there is Minn’s husband Norman. But Honeyman is dead and Norman is absent and Minn’s father like Sarah’s is mostly a memory. Minn loved both Honeyman and Norman. But she experienced both her relationship with Honeyman (he kept her literally imprisoned during their five years affair) and with her husband as a prison which shut her off from vital contact with the world, a
degrading submission to male domination. Hence, she describes her marriage as “captivity” and child bearing in metaphors of sexual slavery (Brady 24).

In *Sarah Bastard’s Note book* Sarah had only a married-friend and her brother-in-law as her lovers and she could not claim the authority on them. She suffered from isolation. But in *The Honeyman’s Festival*, Minn Burge had her own husband and her own children, eventhough she suffered from alienation as her husband was away from her because of his job.

During her stay with Honeyman in the hope of marrying him, she found that Honeyman was in love with another woman “Guinevre”, who had left her husband for him. She packed and left the rue Dragon and “She thought she would die of unhappiness, and discovered after a month’s hunching past cinema marquees and moping around the barricades of that year’s revolution, that nobody noticed, that she did not in fact die, “ (THF 128). Even in her young age, she thought of dying, unable to bear the loss of love with Honeyman. All these memories haunt her at the time of the party. Though she met many of her old friends and fashionable ladies in the party she felt alone and she was not able to mingle with them all. When the party came to an end everybody left the house and again Minn was alone. “She sat with her back very straight on the bottom step and without the courage to go up alone to bed”(THF 130). There was no one to take care of her in that night hours. Her mind advised her to “Go to bed. You have to live each night as if there will never be another one” (THF 133) but she could not sleep.

Theatre plays a vital role in the novel. In her notebooks Engel long referred to *The Honeyman Festival* as “The Silent Companions”, the reference evoking an
important scene towards the end of the novel where theatre is the major motif. Minn’s guests have left, but she is unable to sleep. Her mind still racing, she finally takes out her “silent companions”. These are two-inch cardboard toy-theatre characters manipulable on wire slides. (THF 134), Taught by her former neighbor Mrs.McGregor, Minn has learned to cut out photos of real-life people and attach their faces to the figures. There is Proust and Disraeli (in place of Norman) Ali-Baba for instance, becomes Churchill and there are two sets of Gertrude and Alice – a Paris pair and the pair from home. There is none of her father, but there is one of father-figure Honeyman. “What she was trying to do was to create some kind of concrete landscape of her imagination, but she never succeeded at it. She was not desperate enough to talk convincingly to them and they remained papers figures” (THF 135). Minn tried to create an atmosphere that she is living with her loved ones through the paper figures, but she is unable because she can’t able to hear their voices. So she lived in a state of loneliness “She crammed them back in their boxes and got up to look out the window. There was a light rain falling, and she supposed bitterly that she could attach some significance to keep herself out of bed. “It’s late now, and I know I won’t sleep. I’ll be desperate”(THF138).

Though she was one of the grownups and a mother of three children, Minn still yearns for mothering. She calls neither Honeyman nor Norman as she struggles to fall asleep. She longs only for a mother: “O, Somebody come and cover me and mother me”(THF 146). Minn look after her children well. She feed them and nurse them in a good manner but she herself was in need of mother. She suffered to sleep and live alone not of fear but of lack of love and care. But she never neglects her
duty of mother. She lives for her children and she was ready to face all the situations of life alone.

She accepted the hard facts and realities of life:

Whatever happens, the universe will roll on some-how. It’s big enough to do without us, there’s a comfort. The tide will ebb and flow, the moon rise even if she isn’t cheese or snow. There will be war and murder and long winters and hot summers. You will have to have strong legs. We will sit in a circle longing for the lights of Moscow. We will bite each other’s fingers out of boredom to see the blood. We will continue to clean our houses. We will make artifacts. And the morning will come, and so will the night again” (THF 170).

Engel’s *Monodromos* deals with the loneliness experienced by Audrey-the protagonist. The main events of *Monodromos* (means ‘one way street’) take place in a sunny Greek island- far from the day-to-day life of motherhood and children – where female existence is to be elevated from every day clutter to the world of ideas and books. Thus Audrey Moore differs from Engel’s earlier protagonists. Neither married nor a mother, she is a “seeing eye”. Audrey came to the island in search of an ikon, a dog-headed saint, to satisfy the desire of her lover, poet Max-Magill. She also came there to sort out her ex-husband Laddie’s financial difficulties. She stayed in one portion of Laddie’s house and began to search the ikon. While Andrey ventured out for an exploratory walk. She came across a cock fight. “There within the perimeter of rattling gum trees, a circle of people, forty, fifty, a hundred of them, in clustered groups. Men, I move to see what they are watching: a cockfight” (MD 7). But Audrey discovers that the men are watching
fighting chickens, not fighting cocks as he observes: “They are chickens” (MD 8). Though she was not welcomed in the circle of men she move in to see the cockfight, she heard a whisper in Greek: “A woman is here. I look around. There is no other woman” (MD 8).

Andrey soon discovered the limits heaped on women on that island. She felt alone in that island as she acknowledged: “In this society I am handicapped by my femininity” (MD79-80). Reduced in size, she is also reduced to silence. Engel’s narrator forcibly limits the boundaries of perspective by refusing to search for what lies beyond. She remains locked within the walls of private experience out of fearfulness and because she is walled within the confines of gender in a society that has never tolerated female independence. She is imprisoned within an island culture and, in violating its sexual code by taking a lover, finds herself forcibly islanded.

Audrey’s artistic self has been lost in the shadows of her life with men. First eclipsed in her marriage, it is subsequently obliterated in her relationship with the poet Max Magill. She left her husband Laddie and falls in love with the poet Max. But she was not able to enjoy the company of her lover, as she came to the Greek island in search of an ikon for the sake of her lover. In that male dominated island women were denied of their freedom. She felt aloof in that island. Life on the island presents many distractions. Though she meets new people and make friends and also takes a new lover Xanthos – She was unable to feel free with them.

At last Audrey reached the monastery in the mountains that is reputed to house the ikon of the dog-headed saint. She struggled a lot on her way to the mountain. When she reached in an exhausted and filthy state, the bishop wastes no
time in demonstrating that he is a vulnerable human and tried to seduce her. Engel does not downplay the bishop’s sexual expression, but her focus, as always is on Women’s experience. Andrey’s is one of separation from her physical self. This is underscored by her repeated statements of alienation, “I am detached from myself” (MD 225). “I feel very far away from myself” (MD 226) and “I’m not connecting” (MD 226). Thus she struggled alone to escape from the bishop. Andrey’s struggle with the bishop of Maloundia marks a struggle within. This is an age-old duel, involving the sensual and sexual self. This conveys Andrey’s darkest moments and deepest anguish.

Whenever Andrey asks the people of Greek island about the location of the dog headed saint, their reactions range from disinterest to bemusement. Disappointed by their behavior she wrote to her lover Max, “one always wants one’s friends to live one’s pseudo-life; but I am living the only one available to me “(MD 106). Thus she expressed her agony and loneliness in that Greek island.

Engel’s *Bear* attracted attention and brought notice as well as notoriety to its author. The novel is yet another fictional study of solitude. The novel ventured boldly into territory long deemed off limits to women. It is a pivotal extension of Engel’s previous work – a brilliant step in the author’s ongoing 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. In *Bear*, Engel sheds light on the unendurable positions in which Canadian society has placed its intelligent older women. . . Lou forms a peculiarly erotic friendship with a pet bear that belongs to the house, as a potential alternative to, and a possible compensation for, the humiliating and
disappointing relationships she has had with men(enotes.com). Regarding the novel, Emily M.Keeler opines that "Lou’s journey of self-discovery is a heart-rending portrait of the difficulty of maintaining a work-life balance"(national post.com). At the same time she also adds that "Engel is being funny as hell, describing her protagonist’s mounting frustration with her official task, and cracking at everything en vogue in '70s literature: “She felt like some French novelist who, having discarded plot and character, was left to build an abstract structure, and was too tradition-bound to do so”(national post.com). In the novel, Donald S. Hair has found much more than the story of a woman in love with a bear. He claims mythical and specifically Canadian elements in Bear(Canlit). S.A. Cowan has found similarities in setting, plot, and theme between Bear and Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness: “In Bear, Canadian novelist Marian Engel's heroine finds her identity and learns how to live her life through an encounter with reality in the form of the wilderness. The meeting is archetypal, reminiscent of the confrontation with the “night of first ages” experienced by Marlow and Kurtz in Conrad's Heart of Darkness. . . “(Ariel) Coral Ann Howells has identified pastoral, porn and mythical elements in Bear. She relates the scenario of the novel to the Canadian wilderness myth(Ariel).

Engel’s writings ever focused on women’s concrete experiences, presented parallel with her own life and also with declared differences. When Engel’s marriage life was broke down, she cried, raged, stormed and fulminated, she changed her mind and finally she decided to jump into the art of creative writing to escape from her disappointment. Thus the protagonist Lou of Bear was a married woman and had three children, and turned forty, which displeased her more than she
had thought it would. “Her husband Dick could be considered an understanding husband, but this is of little use to Lou in her state of depression. Lou is undergoing critical changes/ transformations whose nature she does not fully comprehend. The most concrete manifestation of the Crisis is that Lou no longer sees her reflection – “not in windows or in safety glass or in mirrors” (Verduyn 121). She consults a psychiatrist, who diagnoses her condition as serious but is at a loss to help her. Lou neglects her children and her house. She loses weight and contemplates suicide. Drowning would be best., she decides during long strolls on the beach. On one of her walks, she discovers a cove with a gully of sand like a warm nest. She lies in it and begins talking to a mirror trying to coax her lost image back into it. In the sand she writes strange sentences, whose syntactic oddity and semantic opacity seem symbolically significant rather than grammatically erroneous. Thus the short sentence, “I love you, me”, contains three personal pronouns. Is Lou addressing herself or someone else? Does the pronoun ‘me’ refer to Lou or to some other “ME”? So to escape from her depression she lived like a mole, buried deep in her office, digging among maps and manuscripts as a bibliographer. In this situation Lou accepted the offer to catalogue a Library of Colonel Cary, in the Pennarth estate situated on an island in the bush north of Toronto. Living along in that island shecatalogues not only the books of the library but also her thoughts and feelings. “She was somewhat isolated, but she had always loved her loneliness” (B 18).

Colonel Cary had the habit of writing details about bears on slips of paper tucking them at random into books in the library. The slips fall out as Lou catalogues the volumes. They teach her about bears including the one who shares Lou’s forest domain. At first Lou was afraid to near the Bear but gradually they
became close to each other. Lou enjoyed the company of the Bear. She begins to feel the love and care of the Bear on her. Lying beside the bear with her book, Lou’s own longing and desire become unleashed. She is simultaneously overwhelmed with loneliness which neither work nor books can overcome: She felt terribly lonely since she had no human contact for years. She tried to hide her agony among books but in vain. When she was in the Toronto Historical Institute her Director had sexual contact with her, a contact Lou allowed because it was the only human contact. But now the sexual interaction of Lou with the bear was different from her sexual interaction with the director. She felt loved and cared and curiously felt peaceful with the animal and comfortable in the world. She wants nothing from the bear, only that he “continue to be, and to be something to me. No more, Bear” (B 96). Without any human contact Lou spent a whole summer in the Pemarth estate with the Bear. She felt that she was neglected by her husband and her children as she was old and she was forced to live alone. But the opportunity to catalogue the library in the lonely island made her to enjoy the company of Bear. Engle’s protagonist begins to live with nature world to avoid the domination of male culture in the city life.

The relationship with Bear which gives her satisfaction does not exist through-out her life. Because in the climax of the novel when the Bear finally becomes aggressive, it makes a red mark on the back of Lou with its claw, which made her to come to a conclusion that she cannot spend the whole life with the beast. But the mark she got on her back healed her guilty feeling that she had broken a taboo. Again she entered into the city to live among her books and manuscripts.

According to Elspeth Cameron, Engel’s protagonist was well aware of the deeply ingrained dichotomies in the fabric of the Canadian life: the winter
lives and summer lives of completely different quality.” *Bear* presents the “summer life” of Lou, a Toronto archivist, who goes to northern Ontario on a research assignment. The “winter life” Lou leaves resembles that of a hibernating animal. *Cameron asserts that the protagonist of* *Bear* escapes alienation and “hibernation” by coming together with nature (*Journ.Can.Fiction*).

*The Glassy Sea* is a complex renewal and extension of Marian Engel’s concern about representing women’s experience. The novel examines the social dichotomies and dualisms whereby women are separated as Marys and Marthas, saints and sinners, virgins and sex objects. Society’s dualist perceptions create division within and among women. The female self is divided as the external social gaze is internalized. Women’s identity is lost, mothers and daughters are split apart and women become isolated and lonely.

The protagonist Rita is a Heber, member of a rural Ontario family. Conservative and pragmatic were the values honoured by Rita’s family. Like that of all Engel’s protagonists, Rita’s struggle is in large part against her background and upbringing. Family and milieu present early constraints to individual and unconventional desire. Rita’s early insight manifests itself in a dramatic, physical way of her university roommate Christabel’s wedding. Christabel became pregnant even before her marriage and Rita explains, “If girls got pregnant then they got married – …that most marriage are disasters – and arranged with my consciousness to absent myself from the pain of this vision” (*TGS* 50-51). Christabel’s life as Martha ends in tragedy and this creates a fear in Rita’s mind to become a Martha. She was interested in the life of Mary. Her interest in the aesthetic life 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. In Eleanor Heber’s (Rita’s mother) eyes, “to withdraw from the world to contemplate one’s spiritual heritage was to be an irritant, not a worker but a shirker” (TGS 63). Despite her mother’s disapproval, Rita embarks on a new stage in life as Sister Mary Pelagia and Eleanor Heber rejects Rita and never reconciles with her. Thus, Rita lost her family and began to live alone in the Eglantine House with other sisters.

During her second year in the convent her father died and Rita’s mother did not invite her to the funeral. When Rita went to her home to mourn her father’s death she was treated so formally as a visiting stranger by her mother which made her to weep. Her mother did not bend to her. She totally lost the love of her mother. After four years her mother also died. Rita’s sister Shirley came from Texas to settle the property. Rita spent two days with her sister happily and when Shirley went back to her family, was back to her loneliness. She admits: “I had to stay on alone to close the sale, the emptiness slapped me: big nothing again. A void I had met before, before I was born even, and would meet again. I was never able to fill that void with prayer” (TGS 94). Devastated by a feeling of loss, Rita compares her emptiness to an egg:

Loss, round complete, an enormous egg. I clung to it and wept. What had I lost that I did not have to lose? Family? Innocence? I did not know then. But my loss was an egg and it had one of those faces on it. Mother used to draw on our eggs when she was in good humour, a face with a terrible frown; and I could not reverse it, turn it upright, to
a smile. It was too big for me, my arms could not encompass it (TGS 92).

After ten years, Rita left the Eglantine House and entered into the worldly life. She married Asher Bowen- “the perfect profile”. At first, marriage to Asher is utter bliss for Rita. As she later acknowledges. “I invested Asher with all my emptiness. I made him God, home, Mary Rose, family (“TGS 104) all in one. Asher easily fills the void. But this happiness does not exists longer. When Rita expressed her desire to have children, Asher Bowen rejects that idea. But Rita became pregnant and from then onwards, Asher began to avoid Rita and slept separately. When Rita gave birth to a sadly and symbolically hydrocephalic child Chummy, Asher hated both of them and left them to live separately.

When Chummy died Rita became deeply depressed and drank to assuage her sorrow. Her depression is exacerbated by the definitive breakdown of her marriage and the death of her child. His wife’s drinking has become an embarrassment and Asher made an arrangement whereby she must move and stay out of province. Rita ends up on the east coast, living alone in a house by the beach.

For the second time in her life Rita found herself isolated from society. Her efforts for a successful life in the society had failed. As a young woman, Rita had glimpsed the potential of life as an Eglantine. But this had been usurped by the return to the “norm” for women of her time and place. Reintegrating into the society a decade later, Rita serves as expected-and winds up a wreck on the beach.

_In Lunatic Villas_, Engel is always concerned with women’s reality. While her previous works focused on an individual’s experience – one woman’s voice –
“Lunatic Villas” presents several voices, both male and female. Concrete everyday realities where anchored. In an interview with Graeme Gibson, Engel explained her view on writers, “What writers could do was to take the ordinary data of life that is available to everyone and to “represent” it in other ways, “so that the pattern can be more clearly seen”. For Engel, the writer’s job was one of seeing and “devising different methods of seeing” the ordinary everyday world around us” (Verduyn 162)

*Lunatic Villas* renews Marian Engel’s commitment to representing women’s reality in art. The narrative revolves around Harriet Ross, a self-described “single – self – employed free lance writer” (LV 221) and the mother of seven children. Harriet is not the biological mother of all her children. She has given birth to three, by two different men, ‘Mick’ is her son by her first husband Tom, while twins Patsy and Peter, were born of her brief marriage to Micheal Littlemore. Harriet’s other children (Sim, Melanie, Ainslie and Sidonia) are unrelated by blood. She is the author of a column called “Depressed House Wife” published in the magazine “Household Words” and earns a modest income.

Just like the title of her column “Depressed House Wife” she is also a depressed house wife though she lives with her seven children. Her own son Mick is an angry child, whose speech impediment results in a grotesque articulation of the ambivalent attitudes that exist towards mothers, when his anger overflows, he used to scold her mother in a vulgar manner, and it hurts Harriet and she clutches her stomach. Her experience with Mick stirs up difficult. Childhood memories of her own. Her mother died young in obscene circumstances, and Harriet grew up alone at home with her father. Mr. Mickle is an angry man who vents his rage on his daughter. Her son’s verbal abuse reminds Harriet of her father’s physical abuse.
Mick and Mickle share more than a name. Each harbours a rage that finds its outlet in violence and aggression. Mick lashes out against his mother and Mr.Mickle against his daughter. Both times the person hurt is Harriet. From her childhood she longs for love and care which she never gets.

In *The Glassy Sea*, the convent is presented an intriguing alternative to women’s alienation and solitary existence. But convents are not widely accessible, and they are thus of somewhat limited viability as a solution to isolation. In this novel Engel placed her characters smack in the middle of life’s chaotic realities, as represented by the “Lunatic Villas” of Rathbone Place, a short dead-end street in downtown Toronto. The chaos and confusion generated by the seven children magnified by Harriet’s dealings with neighbours and family, social workers and lawyers, psychologists and doctors, as it really is. Both her professional work as the author of “Depressed Housewife” and her personal experience as mother to seven children suggest that there is a dark side to motherhood. Harriet’s household is not overseen by a father or by any other man. Harriet’s authority over her children functions on that of mutual co-operation between Harriet and her children and the helping hands of some women friends and neighbours. Thus she has to face all the problems of her family alone.

Harriet’s neighbour Marshallene is also a successful writer of fiction. Once she expressed her view on marriage to Mrs.Saxe. “Marriage is a state for which I am sublimely unsuited. I dislike housework of all kinds..... I am no help and no comfort to anyone. I am a writer, and writers are notoriously self-centred. I do not have to look at the outside world to find my material, nor do I need to live out someone else’s life to survive. I resist the husband’s attempt to dominate me, except in bed,
and this brings on ever stronger attempts to dominate me. I short, I don't need a husband” (LV 196). Thus she continued to live alone even in her old age. Mrs. Saxe, an elderly English woman who came on her bicycle too lived alone though she was married and got children. After her entry into Harriet’s family she began to train Mick to ride bicycle and stayed with their family. When Harriet was asked, when Mrs. Saxe would go, she answered “Oh, sure, she’ll never go. She’s another one of my orphans” (LV 211). Thus, Harriet adopted this old woman also as one of her children.

For six months, Harriet has been committing adultery with Vinnie Palmer, her neighbour. She defends her action citing Sylvia’s physical inability and the former was filling the vacuum. Though she felt guilty for her action, she could tell herself it’s better for the children that she has no lover, but she won’t. Damn the children. They will have lovers of their own, why shouldn’t she?” (LV 109). As she was unable to get love and care from her grown up children she loved Vinnie and decided to continue the relationship with him. She has to convince herself that she is violating a rule, because of her loneliness among her children.

In the end, when Harriet was afflicted with a highly contagious disease called psittacosis, she was admitted in the hospital. No one were allowed to enter her room, she spent some days in unconscious stage “She wakes, crying like a parrot where’s Mick? Where’s Tom? Where’s Peter? Where’s Pat? Where’s Mel? Where’s Sim?” (LV 222). She slept again. Thus though she lived with her seven children, neighbour, friends and family in the end she suffered alone with her disease. There was no one to take care except the doctors who wear mask and treated her. Thus
Harriet Rose spent her whole life in alienation in the midst of her children and neighbours.

Thus, Engel has marvelously captured loneliness and alienation suffered by humans. The next chapter is the study of most basic/deepest of all relationships, that is, the relationship between man and woman.