Chapter-III

Man -Woman Relationship

Man-woman relationship is the ultimate, basic human relationship. According to the Bible, God first created Adam, and later from Adam’s rib, he created Eve as a companion to Adam. According to Hindu Mythology, Lord Shiva accepted Goddess Parvati-his wife, as his literal half, by offering half of his bodily space to her; thus, came to be known as “Ardhanaareeswara” (half man/woman). Man and woman complement each other and constitute the most basic of all human relationships. They live, love/quarrel, procreate and ensure human existence in the world.

Engel’s novels feature memorable man-woman relationships of which this chapter attempts a study. Engel’s first novel was released in Canada under the title No Clouds of Glory. In the United States, it was released under the more evocative title Sarah Bastard’s Notebook. While various titles were mooted the latter most authentically, reflected Engel’s objectives and theoretical concerns in this work on the one hand, the novel questions traditional notions of female identity, through an exploration of the protagonist’s “Bastardy”. On the other hand it represents an imaginative and suggestive attempt to re-envision female subjectivity in a different way.

The protagonist Sarah did not hesitate or bother to declare her ‘Bastardy’. Sarah Bastard’s Notebook represents an early dismantling of traditional notions of self. The Western, liberal, humanist model of the coherent, rational, centred, autonomous self has been challenged by new concepts of identity including a vision
of self as de-centred or marginalized, fragmented or multiple. “Other” experiences of subjectivity have come into focus, foregrounding concepts of alterity and difference. This space of alterity, or otherness has been coded as “female “, and its exploration is a major theoretical project of modernity.

Modernity’s displacement of the “paternal fiction “is well illustrated in Sarah Bastard’s Note book. Again the title is evocative. The notebook is Sarah Bastard’s. This is her chosen surname, one she considers more appropriate to her sense of self than her family name, Porlock. Her conscious embrace of the “illegitimacy “of bastardy pushes Sarah on to the social margins and into the space of the m/other. Sarah declares herself, “I became my own Pygmalion “- (SBN 116) She also describes herself “I go on watching and in myself melting and re-forming day after day, like everyone else never twice the same person, always the same, and something between”(SBN 16). In this way Sarah appears ever-changing and fluid. With her first protagonist, Engel creates a de-centred, marginalized self, who illustrates an “other “mode of subjectivity.

With a Ph.D and a University teaching position before the age of thirty Sara attained name and fame. At the University she had a married friend Joe as her lover. Joe was living away from his wife Ruth. They lived together for some time. While they were travelling around the world unexpectedly they met Leah, Sarah’s sister and her husband Sandro. The handsome appearance and the behaviours of Sandro made Sarah to fall in love with him. Sarah became pregnant and she gave a name to the child in her womb as Antonio. But as she felt guilty she aborted the child and prepared to leave Sandro. At that time she gave an interview to the Toronto Star in
which she revealed her life style openly without hesitation or fear. This interview took place two weeks before the death of her father.

“I have had, now, time to recover; a smooth week in the womb” (SBN 7) this was Sarah’s symbolic opening reflection. Her father’s funeral has brought her back to the family fold after a long time, a firmly 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. At this stage Sarah received two letters. One from Joe holds the matter “Dear Sarah, these last two years have been a salvation and I am grateful, and would like them to go on. However, I was told yesterday that I could begin now to make a new hope for Ruth...”(SBN 14) and conveys that Joe has left Sarah to live with his wife Ruth.

The second letter from Sandro her brother in law which contains “Dear Sarah, I have decided not to risk a confrontation and will not come to your father’s funeral. I am sure that to your mother, New York is very far away, and I have written to say that business will not permit...”(SBN 14). Sarah understood that Sandro too left her alone at last. She mourned “My Sandro not being mine, and Joe has his wife...”(SBN 15). 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 bound of propriety. By taking a brother-in-law and a married friend for lovers, Sarah broke the rules, went against the moral fibre of her milieu. This non conformist outlook was confirmed in the interview which she gave to the reporter from the Toronto Star.
When the interview appears, its unflattering depiction of Sarah, creates some flutter and disturbance in her house. Her another brother-in-law Eldon questioned her about her life while she was in Europe. He also expressed his shock after reading the interview and said, “I was beaten over the head with the image of this wonderful, bright, intelligent, gorgeous Sarah, light of all our lives, universal favourite, everything a woman should be and a Ph.D to boot” (SBN 38). The interview depicts Sarah as a “vigorous untidy-bull like, with her black Volkswagen, mannish clothes, straight hair, flat shoes, heavy ring, nicotine stains, warts, and self importance “ (SBN 26). It shows her to the world as a woman who believes in individual freedom, free love and legalized homosexuality. This made her to change her name from Sarah Porlock to Sarah Bastard – an act of assertion and self representation.

Pursuing authenticity for herself, Sarah inverts the constructed “illegitimacy “of the bastard and exposes the lies and ‘real ‘illegitimacy of the world of the fathers, brothers-in-law and lovers. Sarah’s brothers-in-law Sandro and Eldon personify this world and paternal delegitimation. Ironically, Eldon is in fact illegitimate, in the usual sense of the word, while Sandro is illegitimate by nominal attribution: “superior bastard “ (SBN 65) are Sarah’s words for her brothers-in-law. She also describes Eldon as “self-made, responsible, concerned, and people say that this country needs more men like Eldon. Except physically, he is perfectly designed for the protection of the status –quo, giving his articulateness generously to support the decisions of authority, offering up his bastardy to the criticism of such minor flaws in society as can be acknowledged without disturbing the long colonial sleep. With men like Eldon at the wheel, our inner lives can slip quietly away and leave us emptily in peace “(SBN 40). In her rejection of half-truths and her quest for
authenticity, Sarah deliberately drops out of what she calls Eldon’s “Tit World“ (SBN 142). Sarah decided to move away from this Tit World. Dejected and disappointed by the behaviour of her brothers-in-law and Joe, she terminated all her male relationships: "Now I have no Antonio, no Joe, no Sandro, No father“ (SBN 91). Thus declaring her bastardy, she turns away from the domain of the male world. This novel depicts the lives of so many women in the world. Sarah on the other hand is a sort of female anti-hero, a woman taken at that point when she realizes that her life has not worked out the way she hoped or expected. Though her relationship with Sandro and Joe are central, she did not worry for them and she decided to lead a new life as a writer by staying far away from all her relatives.

*The Honeyman Festival* is an effort to demonstrate the discrepancy between the idealized puritan ethos and female reality. Engel’s notebooks of the time suggest that while writing this novel, she was interested in things that widen not narrow, the world view. The novel offers a widened vision of the lives of women, a vision that embraced the realities rather than the fictions of female experience.

The novel is the story of Minn Barge, “housewife and mother”, awaiting the imminent birth of her fourth child. At seven-and-a-half months pregnant. Minn’s manifest femaleness presents an impressive contrast to the sleek, male dominated world of filmmaking and cinema. This world was of Honeyman whose work was being celebrated by a film festival and the party was going to be held at Minn Barge’s house. Despite its title, the novel was not primarily about Honeyman or even about the relationship Minn had with him in her early twenties. Pursuing the project of her first novel, Engel explores the world of women, probing its nuances and its darkness.
In the novel, Minn lacks deep relationship with men. Her love for Honeyman is onesided; Norman is often absent and the father is no more than memory. Her father was a lawyer with a drinking problem, he was once the provincial premier. Minn had “a vague memory of loving him as a child, before he disappeared into the maw of politics... what did she know of him? The Honourable Gentleman in permanent eclipse”-(THF 137). As the novel opens at 7.00 PM in the evening and closes in the early hours of the following morning the time scheme is reduced to approximately twelve hours. Minn’s relationship with her father, Honeyman and her husband Norman everything were revealed only through the past and present memories of Minn. The relationships were not focussed directly.

As a young actress, Minn was in the films of the famous director Honeyman. He was a father figure but Minn falls in love with him. Minn candidly acknowledges having played the demanding child to his knowledgeable father role: “a father chosen instead of imposed, who knew things she wanted to know and taught them to her”. (THF 17). As Engel’s focus is on female relationships more might well be made of Minn’s relationship with the fatherly Honeyman. He was a catalyst, who “made it look easy to live, as if living were some road you strode along and not the puritan hurdle –course she had been taught to believe in”(THF 18). Only Minn loved Honeyman, but Honeyman did not, he wanted to use only her talents in his films once “when she lay beside him in bed and drew the heathen blanket of southern Ontario guilt around her, he turned to her, he comforted her, he talked to her, taught her what she was”-(THF 17) and advised her to be herself. While Honeyman wanted to make her an actress, Minn replied that she did not want to become an actress and she left him as she was unable to get him as her lover.
After that, sometime later Minn married Norman, a journalist and began to lead a new life. Her so-called “happy past” with Honeyman is identical to her “unhappy” present. She found both her relationships with Honeyman and with her husband suffocating and denying her the essential bonding with the society. In fact, Honeyman kept her literally imprisoned during their five-year affair and Norman cared more for profession than for Minn. As the result, Minn finds marriage and child bearing meaningless.

At the party Minn met many of her friends, but she stood away from them as she did not like to mingle in their fashionable world. As the party came to an end Minn was left alone and she was haunted by the memories of past and present. At that time there came her friend John Colebrook. “He was tall, diffident, destitute, He lived from drink to drink “ (THF 139). Minn, “had met him in the salvation Army book store. He knew about editions. He was English. Norman did not like him”(THF 140). “He was grey, he was sixty now”(THF 140). Minn served him with beer. She also cleaned his nails and cuts the nails. As it began to get late in the night and Minn felt sleepy, she asked him to move from her house though she knew that John had no place to go in that rainy night. Even though Minn gave him some money and advised him to find some roof anywhere as she puts it bluntly: “I can’t have you stay when Norman’s away“(THF143). Thus, Minn is sensitive to the ways of the society. In Minn’s part of town, the homeless, alcoholics and drug addicts are far more familiar than cinema’s beautiful people or society’s fashionable workers. Minn feels that her stern upbringing has made her, a disciplinarian.

Audrey Moore, the protagonist of *Monodromos* is unique among Engel’s protagonists. When the novel begins, Audrey is shown, free from binding
familial relationships but is sensitive to people and places. She is a Canadian, working in London. She got divorce from her husband Laddie, who was a pianist. After that she falls in love with a married English Poet Max Magill. Audrey was drawn to the protected and familiar male world of books and other attractive artistic expression of (men’s) thinking and ideas. What she loves about Max is “the head on his shoulders, his refusal to have to do with the waffle, tripe and spook in a world that is larded with them (MD 47).

Audrey Moore is unable to live up to creative potential as she is perpetually dominated by the creative men in her life. In the beginning, she was impressed with the music of Laddie her husband, then with the poet Max Magill. Audrey has allowed the men in her life to shape her views and set her agenda. When Max asked Audrey to go to the Greek Island to find out the “dog-headed saint ikon”, Audrey accepted the order without hesitation. Also Max requested Audrey to settle the financial problem of Laddie the ex-husband of Audrey who was living in the same island. Though Audrey got divorce from Laddie and was living far away from him, she accepted the request of Max to settle the financial problem of Laddie.

Audrey knew nothing about the sunny Greek Island. But she came there and stayed in a sparse room in her ex-husband Laddie’s house not only to settle his financial problem but also to find out the dog-headed saint ikon for the sake of her lover poet Max Magill. She arrived 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 got ready to explore her new surroundings. Audrey soon discovered the limits imposed on woman on that island. “Women are not allowed to express themselves” (MD 75). She goes on to acknowledge her predicament: “In this
society, I am handicapped by my feminity, I can’t take on any male enterprise at all “(MD 79-80). She wrote to Max about her situation in that island.

Near Laddie’s house, there lived a tailor Pamos who was fifty years old and had five sons and two daughters. Audrey often goes to the shop at night and all the friends of Pambos, make music for her. They love music and Pambos remarked Music as “I like, you like, we like, she like Music is good “(MD 56). Audrey too liked to hear music and she replied “I like music I like Mr. Pambos very much. I also like his shop “(MD 56). Audrey got many friends through Aphroulla the only female artist of the island: Petronella a teacher at British school, Michaelis from Athens who works for the United Nations measuring water, Megas who operates an actor’s group from a post in the Post Office. Maro – Megas fiancée. William—a news paper reporter and Ahmed, an architect from Libya.

Audrey took a part time job at Mr. Loizos Sperdiakis’ company to meet out the expenditure of her stay at the island. She also took a new lover in that island, “Xanthos “a married man. Though she got many friends and a lover, she was not much interested in them. After all, she came to the island in search of the dog-headed saint ikon for the sake of her lover poet Max Magill. While the dog-headed saint ikon might be vital to Max, it was of little importance to the island’s inhabitants. After some initial inquiries, Audrey wrote to Max that “all the people I’ve met so far would be insulted to hear of the dog-headed saint. They want to belong to the modern world “(MD69).

After Max’s death, Audrey prepared to seek the monastery in the mountain to fulfill Max’ wish. She struggled a lot to reach the monastery on a donkey back.
Her new vision continued to unfold at the monastery where she arrived after a great struggle. The Bishop at the monastery makes carnal advances on Audrey.

Audrey argued with the bishop and insisted “you are a holy man, you should not be doing this “(MD 226). But the bishop replied that he was both a monk and a man, and he continued to force her. After a long struggle, Audrey stood up with all dignity and courtesy and said, “Sir I am your guest please let me go “. The bishop stood across from her with dignity and said “Madame I shall show you to your room “(MD 228). Audrey’s struggle with the Bishop of Maloundia amounts to a struggle within herself. Her encounter with the bishop leaves her angry, sad and humiliated. It shows her suppression of sexuality and denigration of her body, and her refusal of corporeality. “He wanted me. I was disgusted and flattered by it. I was dirty. I did not want to be wanted “(MD 236). Torn deeply within herself, she spent the next few nights, sleepless, feverishly weighing her thoughts and her feelings. Audrey’s confrontation with the bishop illustrates a struggle that is central both to the novel and to the body of Engel’s work. This is the struggle between a thinking and a feeling approach to life.

Though Audrey had two lovers in her life after her divorce from her husband Laddie, she did not encourage the approach of the Bishop in the monastery. This shows her separation from herself and a psychological block experienced by her. Audrey behaves as she has been taught, that is as she ‘should’. Desire is denied, sexuality suppressed. Towards the middle of the novel, Audrey was besieged by a *yaya* - a grandmother who sat outside the entrance where Audrey and Laddie lived. The grandmother believed that Audrey was the woman with whom her son was having an affair with. Audrey was indeed having an affair with a married man but
not with the son of the *yaya*. Nevertheless the old woman sat outside the door denouncing her with loud noise. As the siege continued for longer than expected Audrey became restless. This scene also points out her character that she did not want to hurt anybody by her behaviour. She lived separately without disturbing anybody, she accommodates herself to the rules followed by the people of that island. Through this Engel wanted to show “how hard it is to fit into another society, whether it is indeed morally possible” (Verduyn 115)

*Bear* reiterates Engel’s exploration and struggle against dichotomy. This novel overlays this struggle by “addressing sexuality, eroticism and love from a woman’s point of view. The protagonist Lou befriends a bear. At first merely intrigued by the ideas of the bear, she becomes sexually involved with it. This shows an artistic tradition where in women retreat to nature to escape a male culture that is inimical to female self-development and expression. Bear can be read fruitfully with reference to the personal concerns and crises. Engel was dealing with at the time. Marital breakdown and psychotherapy were crucial features of Engel’s life during the 1970’s. Lou’s question to the bear and to herself – “who and what are you?”(B 24) is echoed in Engel’s cahier. Lou’s need to love and be loved is overlaid with her indecisiveness about whether to take an intellectual or an emotional approach to life. These tensions are expressed in Engel’s note books.

The protagonist Lou was a married woman who was reeling under severe depression and ennui. Though Dick was an understanding husband, he could do little to help Lou to get rid of her depression. Lou was undergoing psychological transformations which she could not realize. The sinister part of the crisis was Lou’s severe self-deprecation and inferiority complex. This crisis
was because of her thought that she grew 40 years old and she was not wanted by her husband and children. Her condition is diagnosed as serious. In due course, Lou loses her weight, neglects her, children and her own well being; above all, she thinks of suicide.

Then, she is offered a job to catalogue a library in the Pennarth estate situated on an island in the bush north of Toronto. The library once belonged to Cary Colonel John William who was no more. Lou came to know about the Bear, which Colonel Cary had adopted. The bear initially was dismissed by Lou who was thrilled at the prospect of the intellectual treasures she expected to found in the house; but it gradually came to claim more and more of her attention until it preoccupied her thoughts completely.

Lou’s life was marked by her attraction to the world of books and ideas. This intellectual and rational world is increasingly at odds with the obscure forces that begin to manifest themselves in her life. To Lou, the bear at first is no more than an idea, one that strikes her as “joyfully Elizabethan and exotic “(B 18). Lou sat and stare the bear from a safe distance, registering the concrete reality of the bear. It is “not a joy bear, not a Poob bear, not an airlines koda bear. A real bear “(B 22). In addition to its materiality Lou was struck with the bear’s amazing physical ability to change appearance – both in terms of size and sex, she observed that it was “indubitably male” (B 24). This maleness, manifested in subsequent sexual encounters between Lou and the bear.

The novel mapped the bear’s slow but steady invasion of Lou’s physical and psychic space. She unchained the bear and let it to swim in the lake, soon she also
joined the bear to swim. one day, she let the bear into the house and was surprised to found that it knew the way to library. then it became regular where it spends the evenings dozing by the fire while Lou works in the library. Lou and the bear resemble a couple. The resemblance between Lou and the bear, reinforced by their physical appearance. Lou decided that the bear was “not a creature of the wild, but a middle aged woman”(B 25).

At one stage, Lou is unable to withstand solitude. Her professional chores fail to help her in overcoming the vacuum in her. To quote from the novel, “Oh, she was lonely, inconsolably lonely; it was years since she had had human contact “(B 78). She hugged the bear and drowned herself in its fun. She felt the love of the bear and surprisingly finds it comfortable to mix with the animal: “Bear! she cried, I love you. Pull my head off”(B 95). She just wants the presence of bear who is her only companion in the island.

While she was working at the Institute in Toronto, Lou had sexual relationship with her Director. “she had allowed the procedure to continue because it was her only human contact “(B 78). There was no love or care in it. Moreover it became something that she was doing to herself. But with the bear, Lou felt the love and care. She did not get the love from human being for which she longed, but she got it from the wild creature. Though she felt guilty and had broken a taboo, she loved the bear.

Another person who often came to the island to supply the needs of Lou was Homer. In her state of guiltiness one day Lou went to meet Homer. They sat on a log side by side and began to drink. When half bottle was gone, Homer plucked her
sleeve and took her into a decayed bunk house where they had sex. "He excited her, and it was good to have that enormous emptiness filled, but she felt nothing with him, nothing "(B 109). Both with the director and with Homer, Lou felt nothing except grief. Thus, no human was able to satisfy or make her happy except the bear. At one stage when the bear and Lou were close to each other, the bear injures her. She had a long red mark on her back from her shoulder to her buttock. The mark she had on her back healed her guilt and she left the island and the bear to the city life.

Thus in this novel the protagonist stepped beyond social sanctions on female desire and sexual identity. Ironically, she got satisfied with the world of animal more than that of humans.

The novel, The Glassy Sea also pursues an exploration of women's struggle within. The tension between instinct and intellect is extended to the struggle between "Mary and Martha ". The Glassy Sea shifts attention from sexuality to spirituality. Bear's predominantly physical/sexual focus on a single summer in Lou's life is replaced by The Glassy Sea's interest in the physical spiritual vicissitudes of a lifetime. Engel places her ongoing examination of women's experience in a religious context.

The protagonist Rita hails from a rural family. Rita's mother Eleanor Heber used to say that they were "plain folks, country people "(TGS 20). Hardwork, discipline, order, self-sufficiency, these were the values honoured by Rita's family. They formed the foundation of what she came to call her "ghastly Puritan background, the perfectionism. I can't work it out of myself"(TGS 12). Like that of
all Engel’s protagonists, Rita also struggled a lot against her heredity and environment. Family and milieu present early constraints to individual and unconventional desire. The social expectations of women in her milieu was marriage and motherhood. According to her family ‘Marthas’ are good hard workers and Mary’s were not. But Rita was interested in the aesthetic life.

Rita got afraid of her womanhood by the wedding of her university roommate Christabel. Christabel was a perfect beautiful daughter of a rich knitting mill owner. She became pregnant by Rita’s cousin, John-a poor Ph.D student before marriage “It was n’t a joyous wedding” (TGS 50). Also it was not a memorable one. Rita suddenly saw, “I remember my knees saw as they crumbled, that the marriage would be disaster(TGS 50). Christabel’s life ends in tragedy.

To escape from this pain and tragedy, Rita decided to join the Eglantine House to become a nun against the wish of her mother. She became Sister Mary Pelagia and enjoyed ten years of happy life. As the Eglantine House was closed, Rita entered the society, for normal life. According to her, “The change was sudden and violent “ (TGS 91). Insecure and lacking the sense of self she could not understand what she wanted and what was her vision and dream. In this situation Rita met Asher Bowen. Unlike the other men Asher did not ask Rita to dinner. He asked her to come to church. They had a whirlwind romance and they got married. At first, the marriage seems a happy one with Rita’s showering her total devotion on Asher. Rita compares Asher to Eglantine Sisters,” I was empty. I handed my void to him…….He filled my mind, my thoughts, my body. He sat beside me in church. During sacraments his face gleamed pale and fanatic; he had a
intensity I had never seen in any Eglantine but Mary Elzevir. I loved him very much
“(TGS 105).

When Rita wanted to have children, Asher disapproved the idea. Asher was attracted to the Mary in Rita and he guides the former nun back into society and encourages her to pursue her university studies. But he seemed repelled by Rita as mother. A real woman has replaced the ideal woman he had sought as a wife. Rita became pregnant and Asher remained indifferent. Thereafter he began to sleep in a separate room. Chummy, a hydrocephalic child was born. Rita loved him and began to take care of him. But Asher could never able to love him. He began to develop his public profile and kept Rita and Chummy out of his sight. While Asher devoted himself to his election campaign, Rita devoted herself to Chummy. To her surprise, Asher won the election. To her despair, Rita lost Chummy and her faith.

Rita became deeply depressed and became alcoholic. Her depression was aggravated by the effective breakdown of her marriage. She also discovered that Asher was in love with Katie Rogers, his secretary. Rita’s drinking behaviour had become an embarrassment and Asher made an arrangement whereby Rita should leave the area. Finally, Rita resigns herself to live alone in a house by a beach, marking the failure in her relationship with men. In becoming an Eglantine, she had initially avoided the predictable female socialization of her milieu. But after a decade, when she returned to the society to serve as a wife and mother it ends in tragedy. For the second time Rita found herself isolated from society. Her efforts for a successful and satisfying woman have been destroyed and she understood the limited possibilities available to woman. Thus her life with Asher Bowen came to an end.
Rita wrote a long letter to Philip ‘Yurn’ - the Bishop of Huron all about her life. In that letter she mentioned about Dr. Stern – a psychiatrist who played a vital role in Rita’s life. She expressed “you know Philip, I thought being with Dr. Stern might lead me to some big mystical experience I guess I’d read too much Jung. But it didn’t”; he was a logician. I don’t remember much of what he did, except let me cry a lot, but when he really got me working on myself, what he did was lay out reality like a deck of cards, so that instead of the mysterious id, I was contemplating what was; not what had been, not what should be, but what was “ (TGS 139).

Thus Rita begins to be herself by the treatment of Dr. Stern. She described “Life I decided, is a sentence between brackets; these brackets must be seen to contain what is, not what might have been”(TGS 143). But Rita’s this neat and tidy summation of life and her self-sentence as crazy lady by the sea were disturbed when Brother Anthony Stone, possessor of a Canada Council grant to work on the history of the Protestant monastic establishment in Canada entered into her life by the sea coast.

Brother Anthony Stone brought a letter to Rita from Philip – Bishop of Huron. In that letter Philip made a request to Rita that the Eglantine House should be re-opened again and Rita should accept to be the Sister Superior of the House. Rita rejected the idea and argued with Br. Anthony Stone that she was no longer a Christian in the orthodox sense. Like Dr. Stern, Br. Stone too played a key role in Rita’s development. It took almost a month for Br. Stone’s clever and compassionate arguments to counter all Rita’s reasons for remaining a recluse. “He was not interested in theories, he said, he was interested in facts; sounding more than he knew like Dr. Stern “(TGS150). Finally caught between the proverbial rock and a
hard place, Rita accepted to re-open the Eglantine House and agreed to be Sister Superior. Re-establishing Eglantine House might provide women with other possibilities in life. She remarked that “I will do this work for the good of my own immortal soul; but I will do it also knowing that I came here out of a need, not to serve, but to belong “(TGS 161). Thus Rita again entered the nunnery life which once gave her peace and happiness.

Engel’s works were often concerned with female issues. But her *Lunatic Villas* deviates. Instead of depicting an individual woman’s voice, it presents both male and female voices. Engel herself described this novel as a domestic novel and it deals with the everydayness and the nitty-gritty of women’s domestic lives. 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. The prologue provides historical context, sketching out the origins and development of Rathbone Place and framing the portraits of the people living there.

The narrative centers around Harriet Ross, a free-lance writer”(LV 221). She is the author of a column called “Depressed House Wife“, published in a popular magazine. “For twenty years Harriet has written about welfare and aprons, abortion and fitted sheets, hyperactivity and hyperacidity“(LV16). Her articles chart the complications, chaos, and craziness of the “ordinary “lives of “ordinary women“. Harriet was living with her seven children though she was not the biological mother of all her seven children namely, Mick, the twins—Patsy and Peter, Sim, Melanie, Ainslie and Sidonia. Though four of them are not born to her, she remains devoted to all her children.
Mothers adopt creative roles in addition to those of bearing and raising children. Harriet’s household is not overseen by a father or by any other man. Moreover it does not operate on the basis of hierarchy and authority. Harriet looks after her family with mutual goodwill between her and children and with the help of her friends and neighbours. Harriet’s first and much loved husband ‘Tom was an American draft dodger. He died unexpectedly from a heart attack during a peace march. Tom told her wife Harriet, “Children don’t belong to any body. You have to earn them “(LV 33) and Harriet is an apt illustration of the belief that Children can be raised by parent-substitutes.

In this way, Mick who was born to Tom and Harriet has to grow up without his father. He is an angry child, whose speech impediment results in a grotesque articulation of the ambivalent attitudes that exist towards mothers. “When his anger overflows, “speechless” Mick hurls hunks of frozen mud against the house and emits ‘ancient arcing screams ‘, Fuck off, off of you mothers, go fuck yourself sluts, buggers “(LV 61). Harriet “clutches her stomach, she hears herself talking faster and faster, “I can’t stand it, you see I can’t stand it......stop Mick, she thinks, stop it hurts...... From nowhere, Mick yells, ‘No, No, No, ya old bitch ‘. She wants to run to him, plead, concede. I did it Mickey, if you’ll only stop. I’ll say I did it, whatever it is: bore you, bought you a house, raised you, felled you, failed you. Mick ! “(LV 62 – 63). Harriet loved her son much, but the behaviour and the vulgar words of her son in his anger hurt her much. She was not able to get the love from her son. Her experience with Mick stirs up difficult childhood memories of her own.

Harriet’s mother died in obscure circumstances and Harriet grew up alone at home with her father, Mr.Mickle. Mickle married another woman. Harriet’s father
was an abusive man of whom no one knew or would believe it. “A decent honest, upright man, elder of the church “(LV67) and he was regarded as a “pillar of the community “(LV 64). But alone with his daughter, he was a violent and hurtful man. “There was only me, clutching the middle leg of the dining-room table.”Harriet has thought herself behind the chesterfield. Papa is coming home. He hands his hat to Mrs.Deans. “Where’s Harriet? “Thunk Swat , He could have used his cane “(LV 63-64). 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. In her childhood and even in her motherhood, she was denied love. Even the much loved husband Tom too was not alive. During the crucial years of childhood and adolescence, abuse is neither an uncommon nor a new phenomenon. The novel depicts male abuse as recurrent and widespread. It resurfaces in Harriet’s life this time perpetrated by her second husband, ‘Micheal Littlemore ‘.

When Mrs.Saxe, Harriet’s friend asked her to tell about her second husband, Harriet said “Michael Littlemore, is in his way, a greedy darling........I was a fool to marry him, but a lonely fool, and he kept me company “(LV 104). She also told her that while Harriet was in the hospital with her twins the doctor leaned over suddenly and hissed, “Get rid of that man “(LV 104). Later she discovered the reason for the doctors word, that Michael the Authority on Everything had told the doctor that how to deliver the babies. After that Michael went to the office of the magazine for which she was writing and told them that they should hire him only, and not Harriet. Michael was a business man, but he was not earning anything, and he did not give any money to Harriet to maintain the family or to look after the children, but he tried
to get her salary in a crooked way. He failed to produce because he was at the race track. And one day when she was tending the children and had not made his bacon and eggs, he blacked her eye and at that moment Harriet threw him out from her life. Thereafter she began to live separately with her children. And sometimes she accused herself for her love failure.

Michael Littlemore continued to trouble Harriet. He got an opportunity to marry a rich girl Susan Forbush a well-to-do social worker. After their marriage Michael filed a case on Harriet Ross to get back his twins Patsy and Peter. Thus, again he disturbed the life of Harriet. Though Harriet was not earning more to take care of her children she fought the case to retain her twins. Till the end of the novel, Michael Littlemore did not give love, care or support to Harriet; on the other hand, he troubled her in many ways. Thus Harriet’s second marriage life also failed.

Nearby Harriet’s house there lived many families, Pen and Elaine, Eph and Claudie, Bob Robbins and Fred, Roger and Olivia, Vinnie Palmer and Sylvia, Babs and Harry. Among these Vinnie Palmer is a lawyer and Sylvia spends her life in wheelchair because of an accident she met with. They have no children and they raised birds – an aviary in their home. Vinnie Palmer is described as “a man of regular and healthy habits“(LV 130) and the “successful product of a successful mother“(LV 132). The most recent concerns are his affair with Harriet and their contacts on Thursday nights. For months, they have been committing this adultery though Harriet felt guilty, for adultery is against the Bible. She justified it on the grounds that “since Sylvia doesn’t provide sexual services for Vinnie and Vinnie purports to want sexual services, she Harriet might as well provide them”(LV 108).
Harriet was aware that it might be better for her children that she might not have a lover; but she decides to live for her own. She lost her first husband, and her second husband too left her to live with other women. In this situation she was alone with her children. They were grown up and they were busy with their own work. Loneliness and want of love made her to accept the relationship with Vinnie. Thus, she justified her adultery.

In the same novel, another couple Roger and Olivia seemed to be a golden pair. But the shine was tarnished when Olivia the wealthy wife discovered that she was pregnant. Her reaction was quite different from Roger’s: “I want an abortion” Olivia Sobbed, “I don’t “- Roger replied, “It’s my body”- she argued, “Your body is housing my child “’ he commented (LV 90).

Olivia disliked being a child herself and did not want to have a child. At the end they came to a decision that Olivia would deliver the child and Roger would raise the child. The same happened. Olivia delivered a female child, handed over to Roger and left him to live separately. Thereafter, Roger adopted the role of father as well as the mother of his child.

In such a way the man woman relationship has been portrayed by Engel in her last novel Lunatic Villas. This novel 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.
Thus, Engel has delved deeply on man-woman relationships in her fiction. The next chapter deals with the portrayal of female bonding (a life-valve for women) in Engel’s novels.