CHAPTER – 5

Expanding Dynamics of Feminist Narratives

The five select works of fiction, *Mama, Room, The Things We Do for Love, We Need to Talk About Kevin* and *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style*, which prove themselves as effective literary attempts in the realm of maternity discourses, trace the development of feminist narrative strategies. They constitute the new dynamics of textual politics synthesizing feminist ideology and its resultant aesthetic. The women’s fiction selected for the study exemplify a writing in which the female body or the female sexuality gains expression. This female writing in fact produces a matrix of discourses that has its own narrative strategies to construct the female body as a sign or a text as discussed by feminist thinkers like Cixous and Cameron.

For Cixous, *écriture feminine* is that special discourse which is “writing the feminine.” Cixous describes *écriture feminine* or “writing the body” in clear, well defined terms:

This is how I would define a *feminine textual body*: as a *female libidinal economy*, a regime, energies, a system of spending not necessarily carved out by culture. A feminine textual body is recognized by the fact that it is always *endless, without ending*: there is no closure . . . There’s *tactility* in the feminine text, there’s
touch, and this touch passes through the ear. Writing in
the feminine is passing on what is cut out by the
Symbolic, the *voice of the mother*, passing on what is
most archaic. (“Castration or Decapitation?” 53-54)

This citation briefly summarizes the characteristic features of *écriture feminine*, of “writing the feminine,” discussed by Cixous. According to the critical possibilities put forward by the entire works of Cixous, “writing” is not just about composing words on a page, it is rather a mode of living in the world (Bray 69-70). Hence, *écriture feminine* or “writing the body” is all about “living the body;” it is all about woman’s unique experience of “living her body.” Within Cixous’s works, the “feminine” signifies a subversive vital creative force. Thus, *écriture feminine* or “writing the feminine” is a female writing that produces a language, a discourse, which moves beyond the phallocentric discourse that renders the female body speechless. In other words, as Cixous views it, *écriture feminine* is a form of writing that explores woman’s immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal (Marks and de Courtivron 250). Such a writing that gives voice to the female body, according to Cixous, is thus characterized by the distinct feminist narrative strategies like references to female sexual desire, instances of tactility, references to the unique experiences of the female body like maternity, endlessness or open-endedness and so on.
Moreover, as suggested by Cixous, the repressed Maternal regains voice and expression in the female discourse produced by *écriture feminine*.

Like Cixous, Deborah Cameron is another feminist who hints at the interconnectedness between body, sexuality and living/writing in her study of language and sexuality. In Cameron’s view, the study of language and sexuality involves questions about how sexuality gets represented in a variety of discourse genres (*Language and Sexuality* 12). Cameron’s concept of language and sexuality deconstructs the phallocentric discourse. Challenging the patriarchal discourse, she suggests a new discursive realm where sexuality “does not pre-exist the language in which it is expressed” (*Language and Sexuality* 19). In other words, as Cameron points out, sexuality does not have meaning outside the language or discursive realm as it is in discourse, the use of language in specific contexts where words acquire meaning. In simple terms, as Cameron argues, “sexuality is ‘discursively constructed’” (*Language and Sexuality* 18). This notion in turn deconstructs the patriarchal discourse that defines sexuality as something that pre-exists the language, as something that is to be censored and repressed in the discursive realm. This notion replaces phallocentric discourse with a new discursive realm that freely articulates sex/sexuality without censorship and repression, challenging the
patriarchal system. Cameron explains:

... talking about sex is intrinsically a good and liberating thing... until very recently, the subject was so veiled in shame and ignorance that it could hardly be broached in discourse at all, and that we are still in the process of breaking that silence. We are apt to congratulate ourselves on our openness to sex-talk, contrasting our... attitudes favourably with the prudishness of... eras when such talk was taboo – censored in public discourse, and repressed even in private. (Language and Sexuality 18)

Here, we come across an explicit reference to the newly-evolving discursive realm that threatens and terminates the reign of oppressive patriarchal discourse which perpetuates the repression and censoring of sexuality. Thus, in a way, from Cameron’s study of language and sexuality we also derive the possibility of a special female discourse like ecriture feminine that gives voice to the repressed female sexuality, the female body. Such a female discourse constitutes a language which Cameron speaks about – one that is marked by its openness to the expression of sexuality. Therefore, reading Cixous’s concept of ecriture feminine along with Cameron’s concept of language and sexuality clears
the ground for the emergence of a new female discursive realm in the literary domain with its distinct feminist narrative strategies.

Maternity discourses construct female identity by giving expression to the repressed “maternal-feminine body.” The five select fictional works, *Mama, Room, The Things We Do for Love, We Need to Talk About Kevin* and *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style*, contribute to the new female discursive realm as they initiate effective maternity discourses and develop distinct feminist narrative strategies. In these fictional works by women writers, the Woman-Mother re-emerges as the integrated subject and she regains voice and expression by retrieving the female identity submerged in patriarchal discourses. The fictional works selected for the study therefore involve a writing where the “maternal-feminine body” is heard and where the immense resources of female sexuality spring forth. This writing establishes a new female discursive space, the maternity discourses, that redefines woman’s maternity as her real identity, the core of her sexuality, her body.

McMillan’s novel *Mama* is a fictional narrative that effectively illustrates the distinct feminist narrative strategies characteristic of maternity discourses. The novel proves to be an excellent fictional narrative that constitutes a feminine writing. In the novel, there are references to the intimate experiences solely belonging to the bodily territories of the Woman-Mother (Mildred). For example, a wonderful
reference to Mildred’s intimate and unique experience of maternity, to the bodily territories of the Woman-Mother, occurs at an instance in the novel:

Motherhood meant everything to Mildred. When she was first carrying Freda, she didn’t believe her stomach would actually grow, but when she felt it stretch like the skin of a drum and it swelled up like a small brown moon, she’d never been so happy. She felt there was more than just a cord connecting her to this boy or girl that was moving inside her belly. There was some special juice and only she could supply it. And sometimes when she turned over at night she could feel the baby turn inside her too, and she knew this was magic. The morning Freda came . . . From that point on, Mildred watched her first baby grow like a long sunrise. She was so proud of Freda that she let her body blow up and flatten for the next fifty-five months. It made her feel like she had actually done something meaningful with her life, having these babies . . . Having babies, . . . for Mildred it was unique every time; she didn’t have a single regret about having had five kids . . . . (McMillan 15-16)
Here, we come across a distinct female discursive space where the Woman-Mother’s body, the “maternal-feminine body” gains literary expression. This instance also testifies how woman’s maternity can re-emerge as the core, the defining source of her sexuality.

The novel *Mama* also produces an effective feminine writing in the sense that the fictional narrative carries numerous instances of tactile imagery. The sense of touch reigns over the entire narrative space of the novel as it forms one of the integral elements in the mother-child bond. For instance, a reference to tactility, touch, occurs in the context that refers to Mildred’s feelings while combing her children’s hair:

And when she pulled the brush back and up through their thick clods of nappy hair, she smiled because it was her own hair she was brushing. These kids . . . made her feel important and gave her a feeling of place, of movement, a sense of having come from somewhere. (McMillan 16)

Another similar instance of tactility occurs in the context where a reference is made to Mildred’s and Freda’s extraordinary joy in experiencing a sense of touch with each other. This occurs when Mildred visits her daughter Freda in California:

That night the two of them . . . crawled into Freda’s double bed and said goodnight to each other, but Freda was too wired up to fall asleep. A yellow glow from the
streetlight filtered throughout the room. It was so quiet, to Freda it felt like they were the only two people in the world.

She was thinking about all the times she used to sneak in bed with Mildred . . . Freda loved nestling up next to Mildred’s warm body.

“Is that you, Freda?” Mildred always asked, knowing full well it was . . . “Get on in here, girl,” Mildred would say, and she’d lift the covers back and act like she was shuffling around to make room for her, but really wouldn’t move an inch. She loved the way her daughter felt against her skin. (McMillan 165-66)

Similarly, another instance referring to a more intense sense of touch which Mildred (the Woman-Mother) and her daughter Freda experience, this wonderful moment of tactility, occurs as the fictional narrative nears its end when Freda finally returns to her Mama:

. . . Mildred reached for her daughter as if she were a gift she had always wanted and had finally gotten.

Freda pressed her head into Mildred’s bare shoulder. A piece of red hair curled like a C within eye level. Mildred’s breasts felt full against her own, and Freda couldn’t tell whose were whose. They held each other up.
They patted each other’s back as if each had fallen and scraped a knee and had no one else to turn to for comfort. It seemed as if they hugged each other for the past and for the future. (McMillan 307)

This instance emerges as an excellent illustration of tactility or the sense of touch that runs through the entire feminine narrative space of the novel.

The novel *Mama* also effectively manifests one of the significant feminist narrative strategies characteristic of a distinct female discursive realm – the open-endedness. This fictional narrative is “endless, without ending.” The novel is open-ended as it ends without closure. As the novel nears its end, Freda returns to her mama Mildred and both decide to go out and party on the very same night. The novel ends as follows:

They went upstairs to change. They . . . use Mildred’s room . . . Mildred stood in front of the mirror, naked from the waist up. Her breasts hung down . . .

“. . . Would you mind plucking your mama’s eyebrows before we leave? You know I always loved the way you plucked ’em.”

“Yes, I will pluck your eyebrows.”

“Have I ever told you how much I loved you.”
Freda looked at Mildred, at her mama, as if she weren’t hearing her, as if the words weren’t coming from Mildred’s lips.

“I don’t know, probably.”

“Well if I didn’t, I’m gon’ tell you now. I love you, Freda.”

They stood there as if they didn’t know what to do next . . . Mildred sat down in an armless chair. Freda went into the bathroom to get the tweezers and Vaseline . . .

Freda shifted her weight from one foot to the other and put her hands on her hips. Mildred eased her head back in the chair and closed her eyes.

“Mama,” Freda said.

“What?” she asked, without opening her eyes. Mildred clasped her hands and wove her fingers together as if she were saying a silent prayer.

Freda looked down at Mildred’s face. “Nothin’,” she said. Freda was grinning so hard her cheeks hurt. (McMillan 306-08)

Thus, as the fictional narrative ends, there is no closure, but only an ongoing process of becoming, an ongoing process of knowing. Moreover, this instance also bears references to the woman-mother’s
bodily territories. So, in brief, McMillan’s novel *Mama* serves as an effective literary manifestation of the various feminist narrative strategies characteristic of a new female discursive space.

Like *Mama*, Donoghue’s novel *Room* is another fictional narrative that also effectively generates a new female discourse of maternity with its own distinct feminist narrative strategies. The novel can be considered an excellent illustration of the new feminine writing. This fictional narrative constitutes a new female discursive space in the sense that it brings in numerous instances of tactile imagery. The sense of touch, which is one of the inevitable elements in the mother-child bond, runs throughout the narrative space of the novel *Room*. For instance, Jack describes his experience of having a bath with his Ma once in *Room*:

> We undo our ponytails and let our hair swim. I lie on Ma not even talking, I like the bang of her heart. When she breathes we go up and down a little bit. (Donoghue 18)

Similar instances of strong sense of touch run throughout the novel. Another such instance comes when Jack describes how he waits for Ma to roll him up inside a rug as part of their plan to trick Old Nick and escape from the locked room:

> I wait for Ma to roll me up. Instead she just looks at me.

> My feet my legs my arms my head, her eyes keep sliding
over my whole me like she’s counting. “What?” I say. She doesn’t say a word. She leans over, she doesn’t even kiss me, she just touches her face to mine till I can’t tell whose is whose. My chest is going dangadangadang. I won’t let go of her. (Donoghue 167)

Here, we come across a strong sense of touch that amalgamates the bodies of mother and son. This instance is, therefore, an excellent manifestation of tactility that is characteristic of the new feminine narrative space of the novel.

Apart from such instances of tactility in Room, the novel is also a feminine narrative body in the sense that it is characterized by endlessness or open-endedness. The sections of the novel are open-ended like its very climax: as the novel ends, there is no closure, but only a process of becoming. For instance, the section of the novel titled “Dying,” that narrates Ma’s and Jack’s struggles to escape from the locked room and Old Nick’s tyranny and their final escape, ends as follows:

Ma’s grinning. “We can do anything now.”

“Why?”

“Because we’re free.”

I’m dizzy, my eyes shut without me. I’m so sleepy I think my head’s going to fall off. Ma’s talking in my ear, she
says we need to go talk to some more police. I struggle against her, I say, “Want to go to Bed.”

. . .

“You mean in Room?” Ma’s pulled back, she’s staring in my eyes . . .

“Oh, Jack,” she says, “we’re never going back.”

The car starts moving and I’m crying so much I can’t stop. (Donoghue 193)

Here, we find that the fictional narrative, rather than giving a clear-cut conclusion to this section, makes this section an open-ended one. It fills the readers with innumerable questions and worries about how Jack will get adapted to the outside world until all our minds are finally silenced by the triumph of Ma, successfully regaining an independent life for herself and Jack in the Outside. The novel ends with Ma and Jack leaving behind Room forever, they have determined to reclaim their hold on life and the ideal maternal space in a patriarchal society. The ending of the fictional narrative is made all the more beautiful as it marks a process of becoming rather than a clear-cut closure. As the novel ends, Ma and Jack make their final visit to Room along with the police. The novel ends as follows:

. . . I tell Ma . . . “It’s not Room now.”

. . . Ma does a tiny smile . . .
“Can we say good night . . . ?”

“I think it would be good-bye.”

“Good-bye, Wall.” Then I say it to the three other walls, then “Good-bye, Floor . . . Good-bye, Bed . . . Good-bye, Eggsnake . . . Good-bye, Wardrobe.” In the dark there’s the picture of me Ma did for my birthday, I look very small. I wave her over and point to it. I kiss her face where the tears are, that’s how the sea tastes. I pull the me picture down and zip it into my jacket. Ma’s nearly at Door, I go over. “Lift me up?”

“Jack--”

“Please.”

Ma sits me up on her hip, I reach up.

“Higher.”

She holds me by my ribs and lifts me up up up, I touch the start of Roof. I say, “Good-bye, Roof.”

. . . “Good-bye, Room.” I wave up at Skylight. “Say good-bye,” I tell Ma. “Good-bye, Room.”

Ma says it but on mute.

I look back one more time. It’s like a crater, a hole where something happened. Then we go out the door. (Donoghue 400-01)
This open-endedness marks *Room* as a typically feminine narrative body which “is always endless, without closure.” Rather than “closure,” the sections of *Room* are marked by a process of “becoming” that marks the typically feminine, the “female.” Thus, what occurs in the novel *Room* is an ongoing narrative in process, a feminist narrative strategy belonging to the new female discursive space.

Moreover, the novel *Room* involves such a writing where the “maternal-feminine body” is heard and where the enormous resources of female sexuality spring forth. This fact is illustrated in the feminine narrative space of the novel which is filled with several images of woman’s maternity – the core of female sexuality. One such instance that contains the image of woman’s maternity occurs in Ma’s narration of the story of “The Little Mermaid” to Jack in *Room*:

This mermaid is sitting on the rocks one evening, combing her hair, when a fisherman creeps up and catches her in his net . . . he brings her home to his cottage and she has to marry him . . . He takes away her magic comb so she can’t ever go back into the sea. So after a while the mermaid has a baby . . . But whenever the fisherman’s out fishing she looks around the cottage, and one day she finds where he’s hidden her comb . . . And she runs away to the rocks, and slips down into the
sea . . . she takes her baby, Jacker Jack, with her, he’s all knotted up in her hair. And when the fisherman comes back, the cottage is empty, and he never sees them again. (Donoghue 84)

In this context, we find that Ma, by revisioning the fairy tale of “The Little Mermaid,” by attributing the same with the power of maternity, symbolically connects her own life with the revisioned tale; she connects herself with the character of the “Little Mermaid-as-mother” while telling the story to her son, Jack. The vital, creative energies of woman’s maternity also get revealed in Ma’s reference to the experiment with “baby monkeys” as she talks to Jack at an instance in the Clinic:

Like, there’s this experiment with baby monkeys, a scientist took them away from their mothers and kept each one all alone in a cage---and you know what, they didn’t grow up right . . . they got bigger but they were weird, from not getting cuddles . . . Sick in their heads . . . Biting themselves and stuff . . . See, if their mothers were there, they’d have cuddled the baby monkeys, but because the milk just came from pipes, they---It turns out they needed the love as much as the milk. (Donoghue 276)
Such references to the images of maternity that bear testimony to the vital, creative “maternal-feminine body” occur frequently in the novel’s narrative space. For instance, it is interesting to note that we find references to only Virgin Mary and Baby Jesus throughout Donoghue’s novel *Room* in the prayers of Jack and his Ma. The use of “Baby Jesus” over “Jesus” in the novel also illustrates the feminine writing which the fictional narrative generates: the new female discursive space where the “maternal-feminine body” gains literary expression.

There also occur frequent references to the bodily territories of the Woman-Mother (Ma) in the feminine narrative space of the novel *Room*. For instance, a reference to Ma’s (the Woman-Mother’s) bodily territories occurs frequently in the novel whenever Jack expresses his desire to get suckled or breast-fed by his Ma. One such instance is described in the voice of Jack as follows:

> In bed I remember, I pull her T-shirt up.
>
> “Ah,” says Ma, “I don’t think there’s any in there.”
>
> “Yeah, there must be.”
>
> “Well, the thing about breasts is, if they don’t get drunk from, they figure, *OK, nobody needs our milk anymore, we’ll stop making it.*”
>
> “Dumbos. I bet I can find some . . .”
. . . We cuddle hard. Her chest goes *boom boom* in my ear, that’s the heart of her.

I lift up her T-shirt.

. . . I kiss the right . . . I kiss the left twice because it was always creamier. Ma holds my head so tight I say, “I can’t breathe,” and she lets go. (Donoghue 378)

This instance not only bears a reference to the bodily territories of Ma (the Woman-Mother) but also carries an effective manifestation of tactility characteristic of the feminine writing. Another similar instance that makes a reference to the Woman-Mother’s (Ma’s) bodily territories occurs when Ma describes to Jack her experience of giving birth:

“. . . remember the cord that goes to the belly button . . . the girl baby, it got tangled when she was coming out, so she couldn’t breathe . . . I could feel the top of her head, it was all slippery, I pushed and pushed, I was shouting, ‘Help, I can’t, help me---’ . . . She came out blue . . . She never opened her eyes . . . The cord was all knotted around her neck” . . . There’s tears falling all on the blanket. Ma’s . . . crying but on mute . . . Her eyes are shut but the water still slides out . . . “The her part of her, that went straight back up to Heaven” . . . Ma nearly smiles . . . “Maybe it really was you, and a year later you
tried again and came back down as a boy” . . . The tears are falling out again, she rubs them away . . . “I was ready, this time I wanted it to be just me and you . . . You were born with your eyes open.” (Donoghue 255-57)

Here, we come across a wonderful openness in the Woman-Mother’s expression of her maternity as a unique experience, an experience which forms the core of female sexuality. This openness in the expression of female sexuality can also be taken as an effective feminist narrative strategy characteristic of the new female discursive space that the novel creates. Moreover, Jack’s immense joy in receiving kisses from his Ma, his pleasure in “having some” (that is, in being suckled or breast-fed by his Ma), the novel’s frequent open references to the bodily parts like lips, tummy, breasts, vagina, vomit, pee and so on, make Room an excellent illustration of the feminine writing. So, in brief, Donoghue’s novel Room is a literary attempt that brilliantly generates a new female discursive space with its own distinct feminist narrative strategies.

Like Mama and Room, Hannah’s novel The Things We Do for Love is also a fictional narrative that produces a new female discursive space of maternity with its own distinct feminist narrative strategies. The novel involves a feminine writing as its narrative space contains instances of tactility which, in turn, is an experience intrinsic to the mother-child bond. We come across such an instance of tactility in the
context where Angie (the Woman-Mother) talks to Lauren after the girl’s return. Lauren comes back with her baby to Angie towards the end of the novel. Angie (the Woman-Mother) is filled with inexpressible joy at the girl’s (Lauren’s) return:

“Oh, Lauren.” At last, Angie closed the gap between them. She touched Lauren’s damp cheek in the gentle kind of caress she’d dared so easily in the past. “I should have told you more about what it was like. It’s just . . . it was so hard to think about the day I had Sophie. The few minutes I held her. I knew when you looked into your baby’s eyes, you’d be as lost as I was. That’s why I never decorated the nursery. I knew, honey.” (Hannah 429)

At this instance, there is “touch” – an intrinsic experience in the mother-child bond – and this instance also refers to the inexpressible extraordinary joy that accompanies this wonderful moment of tactility. Here, a reference is also made to the unique experience of woman’s maternity which forms the core of female sexuality. Another similar instance of tactility occurs as the novel nears its end when Angie wholeheartedly accepts and invites Lauren to her house after the girl’s return:

Angie pulled her into a fierce hug. For a heartbeat, she couldn’t let go. Finally, she took a deep breath and
stepped back . . . She reached out for Lauren, and then said quietly, “Come on. We don’t want to be late.”

Lauren swallowed hard. A quivering smile curved her lips even as she started again to cry. “I love you, Angie.”

“I know that, honey . . .”

Together, hand in hand, they walked across the wet grass and went into the house. (Hannah 432)

Here, again, we come across an instance of tactility which forms one of the distinct feminist narrative strategies characteristic of the feminine writing that generates a new female discursive space. Similarly, another instance in the novel that bears a moment of tactility, a moment of touch, occurs when Lauren holds her baby-son for the first time in the hospital:

. . . Lauren saw her tiny, pink-faced son for the first time . . . The nurse gently positioned the baby in Lauren’s arms. She barely noticed when the nurse left. She stared down at this baby of hers, this miracle in her arms, and even though he was so tiny, he seemed like the whole world. Her heart swelled at the sight of him until it actually hurt to breathe . . . All her life she’d been looking for someone who was related to her, and here he was, snuggled in her arms . . . she had a son. “Johnny,” she whispered, touching his tiny fist. He held her finger.
She gasped . . . Lauren squeezed her eyes shut . . . Slowly, she opened her eyes and gazed down at her son through a stinging blur of tears. “. . . I’m your mommy,” she whispered. (Hannah 415-16)

This instance clearly manifests a strong sense of touch, one of the inexpressible experiences in the mother-child bond, and the extraordinary joy that runs along this remarkable moment of tactility. Moreover, this instance also makes a reference to the unique experience of woman’s maternity which, in turn, is the defining source of female sexuality.

The novel *The Things We Do for Love* also carries a distinctly feminine narrative space in the sense that the fictional narrative is open-ended or endless. The novel ends as follows:

Lauren immediately went to the stereo and turned on the music. It was still set to her favorite station. An old Aerosmith song pulsed through the speakers, rocked the house with sound. She turned it down quickly, but not fast enough.

Conlan came thundering down the stairs, stumbled into the living room . . . Lauren froze, looked up at him. Her smile slipped. “Hey, Conlan, I---”
He ran across the room and pulled her into his arms. He twirled her around until both of them were laughing. “It’s about time,” he said.

“She’s back,” Angie said, patting the baby gently, smiling at the noise. She looked over at the Winnie-the-Pooh lamp on the counter. At last it would light a baby’s room. “Our girl’s come home.” (Hannah 432-33)

Thus, as the novel ends, there is no clear-cut “closure” but only a process of “becoming.” In other words, the novel is an ongoing narrative in process without ending which in turn makes the fictional work an excellent manifestation of one of the distinct feminist narrative strategies characteristic of the feminine writing.

The novel’s feminine narrative space also contains references to the “maternal-feminine” bodily territories. For instance, such a reference occurs when the pregnant Lauren studies her naked body in the mirror:

. . . she climbed out of bed and stumbled to the bathroom, where she took a long, hot shower. When she was finished, she stood on the frayed scrap of a towel that served as their bathmat and studied her naked body in the mirror.

Her breasts were definitely bigger. Maybe her nipples were, too; she couldn’t be sure about that, her nipples
never having been high on her to-notice list. She turned sideways. Her stomach was as flat as ever. There was no sign there of the new life that grew within. She wrapped a towel around her and returned to her bedroom. (Hannah 253)

Here, the “maternal-feminine body” gains literary expression. Thus, by making a reference to the “maternal-feminine” bodily territories, this instance emerges as an effective illustration of one of the feminist narrative strategies unique to the feminine writing. The novel also contains instances carrying images of maternity. For example, we come across such an instance in the novel when Angie enters a maternity shop in order to buy Lauren some maternity clothes:

Angie looked down the street. The ironwork sign for Mother-and-Child hung at an angle above the sidewalk. The last time she’d been inside the store had been with her sisters. Angie had been pregnant then, and smiling had come easily . . . It might hurt a bit, might remind her of a few of her harder times, but those feelings were part of who she was, and in the end, it was more hurtful to run away than to face them. “I want to be there for Lauren. She needs me” . . . Angie said, smiling . . . . (Hannah 347-48)
This instance also illustrates how woman’s maternity re-emerges as the core of female sexuality, the defining source of emotions that springs from the female body.

Moreover, the narrative space of the novel *The Things We Do for Love* also carries instances where the repressed female sexual desire gains literary expression. Such an instance occurs when Angie and Conlan meet:

Angie had forgotten how it felt to be really kissed. It made her feel young again; better than young, in fact . . . There was just this feeling moving through her, electrifying her body, making her feel alive again. A tiny moan escaped her lips, disappeared. Conlan pushed her back. She blinked at him, feeling that edgy near-pain of desire . . . She grasped his arm. He flinched, tried to draw back. She wouldn’t let him. In his eyes, she saw uncertainty and fear. A hint of hope was there, too, and she seized on it. “Talk to me,” she said . . . She touched his face again, gently . . . They stared at each other in silence . . . “Make love to me,” she said, surprising herself. The desperation in her voice was obvious. She didn’t care. The wine had made her bold . . . “All our lives we’ve followed the rules . . .” She paused. “That
was where we got caught . . . ” She leaned toward him, so close he could have kissed her if he chose. “But there’s no map for us anymore. No right way . . . Take me to bed,” she said softly. He cursed. There was anger in his voice, and defeat. She seized on that. “Please. Love me.” He groaned and reached for her, whispering, “Damn you,” as his mouth found hers. (Hannah 262-64)

Here, the female sexual desire, female sexuality, which is forcefully suppressed in accordance with the golden rules of patriarchy, regains expression and manifestation in the narrative space. This in turn testifies the novel’s emergence as an effective illustration of the feminine writing, generating a new female discursive space with its own distinct feminist narrative strategies. So, in brief, Hannah’s novel *The Things We Do for Love* is a literary attempt that evidently serves as a distinctly feminine narrative body displaying the feminist narrative strategies of a new female discursive space.

Shriver’s novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin* is another fictional narrative that also initiates a new female discourse of maternity, exhibiting the distinct feminist narrative strategies appropriate to this new female discursive space. The novel constitutes a feminine writing that makes references to woman’s maternity, the unique experience of the female body. For instance, in the novel, there occurs a reference to
contractions which Eva (the Woman-Mother) undergoes during her pregnancy period. At an instance, in one of her letters, Eva addresses her dead husband and recollects:

... women ... many of those ... begged for an epidural at the first contraction.

Not me. I wasn’t brave, but I was stubborn and prideful. Sheer obstinacy is far more durable than courage, though it’s not as pretty. So the first time my insides twisted as if rung like a wet sheet, my eyes bulged slightly, the lids widening in surprise; my lips compressed. I impressed ... with my calm. I meant to. We were lunching at the Beach House again ... my water had broken, gallons of it, or so it seemed, and I had drenched the bench. You paid the bill ... leading me by the hand back to our loft ... I would astound Dr. Rhinestein with my gruff practicality. I knew this was a natural process, and I was not going to make a fuss. So when another contraction doubled me as if I had just been caught unawares by a right hook, I merely exhaled a little hoof. (Shriver 87)

Here, we come across an instance where the “maternal-feminine body” gains literary expression. This instance is further followed by
Eva’s (the Woman-Mother’s) recollection of her experience of giving birth to her first child, Kevin. Eva recollects:

I may be capable of toughness in respect to certain kinds of pain, but if so, my fortitude dwells in my calves or forearms but not between my legs. This was not a part of my body that I had ever associated with endurance, with anything so odious as exercise. And as the hours dragged on, I began to suspect that I was just too old for this, that I was too inelastic approaching forty to stretch to this new life. Dr. Rhinestein said . . . sternly, *Eva! You really must make an effort* . . . There were times after about twenty-four hours that a few tears would leak down my temples, and I hastily wiped them away . . . In the end it was the threat of a cesarean that did it . . . I had an abnormal horror of being sliced open. I didn’t want the scar . . . I feared for my stomach muscles . . . So I *made an effort*, at which point I had to recognize that I’d been resisting the birth. Whenever the enormous mass approached that tiny canal, I’d been sucking it back. Because it hurt. It hurt a whole lot . . . but the emotion on which I fastened in order to push beyond a critical threshold was *loathing*. I despised being spread out like
some farm exhibit with strangers gawking between my canted knees . . . I . . . blow up . . . breasts get puffy and bloated and sore . . . I was . . . ripped to ribbons ramming a watermelon through a passage the size of a garden hose . . . pushing past that threshold I met such a red blaze of agony that I could no longer afford the expenditure of loathing. I screamed, and I didn’t care . . . And suddenly it was over . . . In the very instant of his birth, I associated Kevin with my own . . . . (Shriver 88-90)

At this instance, again, the “maternal-feminine body” gains expression and manifestation. The above mentioned instances, in fact, bear references to the immense bodily territories of the Woman-Mother (Eva) and the unique emotions that spring from her body. Likewise, the female body gains voice and expression throughout the feminine narrative space of the novel as it is entirely narrated in the voice of Eva (the Woman-Mother). This in turn marks one of the distinct feminist narrative strategies characteristic of the new female discursive space that the novel generates.

The novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin* also manifests a feminine writing in the sense that its narrative space carries instances of tactility or the sense of touch which in turn forms one of the inevitable
experiences in the mother-child bond. One such instance occurs when Eva (the Woman-Mother) recollects her experience of breast-feeding her baby-son, Kevin, for the first time:

... I don’t know what exactly I’d foreseen would happen to me when Kevin was first hoisted to my breast ... Dr. Rhinestein dangled the infant over my breast and rested the tiny creature down with—-I was glad ... Kevin was damp, and blood creased his neck, the crooks of his limbs. I put my hands ... around him ... with his mouth right at my enlarged brown nipple ... Though I’d been warned that I wouldn’t lactate on demand ... I kept trying ... And all the while I was waiting. My breath shallow, I was waiting. And I kept waiting ... “He’s beautiful,” I mumbled ... (Shriver 95-96)

Here, there occurs a reference to the strong sense of touch, an intrinsic experience in the mother-child bond, and the extraordinary joy that accompanies this wonderful moment of tactility. Moreover, this instance also carries a reference to the bodily territories of the Woman-Mother (Eva). At the same time, Eva’s constant desire to lactate or breast-feed her baby-son in turn illustrates how woman’s maternity re-emerges as the core of female sexuality, female desire. Another instance that manifests the sense of touch inevitably running in the
mother-child bond occurs in the context where Eva recollects her memory of Kevin falling sick at the age of ten:

I refer to that . . . weeks when he got so sick. He was ten . . . when I helped him up and lifted him to bed . . . he put his arms around my neck . . . and when I stroked his forehead with a moist washcloth, he hummed . . . When I sat on the edge of his bed, Kevin would nestle his crown against my thigh . . . I pulled his head onto my lap and he clutched my sweater. A couple of times when he threw up he didn’t make it to the toilet; yet when I cleaned up the mess and told him not to worry, he . . . whimpered that he was sorry and seemed, despite my reassurances, ashamed. (Shriver 278-79)

At this instance, again, there is tactility, there is touch, which is characteristic of the mother-child bond. Another similar instance in the novel that carries a manifestation of tactility characteristic of the mother-child bond occurs towards the end of the novel as Eva (the Woman-Mother) recollects her visit to Kevin in the prison:

When I hugged him good-bye, he clung to me childishly, as he never had in childhood proper . . . he muttered it into the upturned collar of my coat, . . . “I’m sorry.”
Taking . . . that I’d heard correctly, I said distinctly . . . ,

“I’m sorry, too, Kevin. I’m sorry, too.” (Shriver 465-66)

Thus, all the instances mentioned above constitute an effective illustration of the sense of touch or tactility, one of the integral elements in the mother-child bond. This in turn marks one of the feminist narrative strategies in the novel that makes the fictional work a distinctly feminine narrative body.

Moreover, the novel We Need to Talk About Kevin also produces a feminine writing in the sense that the fictional narrative is open-ended. The novel ends in the voice of Eva (the Woman-Mother) as follows:

This is all I know. That on the 11th of April, 1983, unto me a son was born, . . . that infant squirmed on my breast, . . . Since that moment we have fought one another . . . But it must be possible to earn a devotion by testing an antagonism to its very limit, to bring people closer through the very act of pushing them away. Because after three days short of eighteen years, I can finally announce that I am too exhausted and too confused and too lonely to keep fighting, and . . . I love my son. He has five grim years left to serve in an adult penitentiary, . . . in the meantime, there is a second bedroom in my serviceable apartment. The bedspread is
Thus, as the novel ends, there is no clear-cut “closure” but only a process of becoming, a process of knowing; there is only a series of expectations. In this way, the novel proves to be an ongoing narrative in process. This is, again, one of the distinct feminist narrative strategies of the feminine writing that the novel involves.

There are also instances in the novel where the repressed female sexual desire, female sexuality gains literary expression. One such instance occurs when Eva recollects that moment when she expressed to her husband, Franklin, her intense desire to get pregnant for the second time:

I closed my eyes, cupping the back of the armchair . . . Honestly, I’d no idea what I was going to say until I said it. “Franklin, I want to have another child.” I opened my eyes and blinked. I had surprised myself. It may have been my first experience of spontaneity in six or seven years . . . “I’d like us to start trying to get me pregnant right away” . . . I felt perfectly certain, . . . I felt self-possessed and simple. This was the very unreserved resolve for which I had prayed . . . I’d never been so sure of anything in my life . . . . (Shriver 244-45)
Here, the female sexual desire, female sexuality, which remains forcefully suppressed in the patriarchal discursive realm, gains expression and manifestation in the feminine narrative space of the novel. Moreover, this instance clearly demonstrates how woman’s maternity re-emerges as the core of female sexuality, the defining source of female sexual desire. Interestingly, there also occurs an instance in the novel where the Woman-Mother (Eva), in one of her letters, addresses her dead husband and recollects the moment when she openly talked about sex to her son Kevin:

Someone had to tell him, and soon . . . So I suggested that we take this opportunity to explain generally about sex. You were reluctant . . . you suggested, . . . He’s only seven. Shouldn’t we preserve his innocence a little longer? It’s a pretty backward definition of innocence, I objected, that equates sexual ignorance with freedom from sin. And underestimating your kid’s sexual intelligence is the oldest mistake in the book. Indeed. I had barely introduced the subject while making dinner when Kevin interrupted impatiently, “Is this about fucking?”

It was true . . . “Better to call it sex, Kevin. That other word is going to offend some people.”
“It’s what everybody else calls it.”

“Do you know what it means?”

Rolling his eyes, Kevin recited, “The boy puts his peepee in the girl’s doodoo.”

I went through the stilted nonsense about “seeds” and “eggs” . . . .

Kevin was no more than tolerant. “I knew all that.”

“What a surprise,” I muttered. “Do you have any questions?”

“No.”

“Not any? Because you can always ask me . . . anything about boys and girls, or sex, or your own body that you don’t understand.” (Shriver 256-57)

At this instance, we come across an open sex-talk between Eva (the Woman-Mother) and her seven-year-old son. This openness in the literary expression of the interactions about sex between the Woman-Mother and her son, in turn, marks one of the distinct feminist narrative strategies of the new female discursive space which the novel produces. So, in brief, Shriver’s novel *We Need to Talk About Kevin* is a brilliant literary attempt that initiates a distinctly new female discursive space with its own feminist narrative strategies.
Like the novels analysed above, Maracle’s collection of short stories *First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style* is another fictional work that involves a feminine writing and consists of stories that generate a new female discourse of maternity. The story “First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style” opens with a reference to the concept of sex in the Salish culture, which the Woman-Mother (the narrator) makes, that challenges all the patriarchal notions about sex. Here, the Woman-Mother (the narrator) not only shares the concept of sex in her Salish culture but also recollects her interactions about sex with her son. The story opens as follows:

There is an old saying: “The older you get, the less sex you have and the more you talk about it.” That makes older people oral experts on sex (pardon the pun) when it is a little late to be considered sexy. Today’s society is focused on imaging sexiness only through youth, but many of our Elders don’t buy into that and, of course, neither do I.

Falling in love and being sexy are not always tied together. But for sure, falling in love inspires us to fall back to the sexy machinations of our youth. As long as sexual desire burns inside, we remain sexy and consequently forever young. I had an opportunity to
I witnessed one of my Elders fall in love in her sixties; it struck me how much romance became her. Sexy seems to have more to do with desire and aliveness than anything else.

Every now and then my son phones to tell me he is reading some article or other about sex. This is a good thing for a young Salish man to be doing, as you will see later on from the story. He called me sometime back to say that sex burns calories and, if the scientists he was quoting were correct, it burns calories at the rate of 3,500 a romp. He added that it was purported to clear the skin of unsightly blemishes and, to some degree, clear the mind. As such, I am wondering why more of us don’t just give up our treadmills, track shoes, skin potions and brain vitamins to opt for a daily romp. On another occasion, he called to tell me that sex is a powerful source of energy, that it is a source of energy that can only be replenished by consuming it.

I replied, “Too bad.”

“Too bad?” he asked.
“Yeah,” I answered. “I just can’t picture anyone giving an engineer the permission to figure out a way to harness that energy---which is too bad, such a waste.”

My son says he heard that, despite all of the above, the average person in Canada has sex only once a week (not quite sure how this estimate was arrived at). I imagine Canadians using billions of tons of skin products annually, to little avail, and then swallowing a bunch of vitamins before they run off to public and private gyms, spas, fat farms, etc., all of which are becoming more numerous year to year as the baby boomers acquire that old middle-age spread . . . and I sigh. Makes you wonder. (Maracle 1-2)

Here, we find that the narrative space of the story bears an incredible openness in giving literary expression to the sex-talk between the Woman-Mother (the narrator) and her son. Such an openness in talking about sex is, in fact, a distinct feminist narrative strategy characteristic of the new female discursive space which the story constitutes. Moreover, at this instance, the repressed female sexual desire, female sexuality, gains expression in the narrative space of the story too.
Likewise, there are also other instances in the story where the female sexual desire, female sexuality, gains expression. One such instance occurs as the Woman-Mother (the narrator) describes:

When sexual desire is sparked, no matter how old we are, our movements become elegant and smooth, determined, nearly urgent and sure. Our voices acquire that husky, come-hither musicality that is so sweet. We feel our curves; our . . . breasts push themselves out almost with a will of their own. Our hips sway and our nipples perk up and become sensitive. We can feel the desire rising from our loins. Our skin tingles. Whatever stress and worries we have on our minds slip away for the moment. We . . . soften our voices, twirl our fingers in our hair, bat our eyes . . . lips swelling, thighs quivering . . . very near to orgasm . . . In the original Salish cultures, it was the women who chose the partners and our women Elders who negotiated the marriage---if there was even going to be one. If a woman desired a man and no marriage was in the offing for her, there was going to be an affair of the heart, because women were free to indulge in sexual activity if and when they pleased. (Maracle 3-4)
Here, therefore, the female sexual desire, female sexuality, gains expression and manifestation. Moreover, this instance also carries a reference to the immense bodily territories of the Woman-Mother. The female body, thus, gains voice and expression in the narrative space of the story as it is entirely narrated in the voice of the Woman-Mother. All these, again, constitute the distinct feminist narrative strategies of the new female discursive space which the story generates. Another instance where the female sexual desire, female sexuality, gains expression in the narrative space of the story occurs as the Woman-Mother’s narration of the Salish flood narrative nears its end:

. . . they retreated one at a time to the lean-to with him. He managed to satisfy the first two but was exhausted by the time the last woman entered the lean-to. He could not arouse himself. He felt so guilty, but the last woman cooed, “That’s okay: you have good hands, long thick fingers.” He wasn’t sure what to do, but the woman seemed to know, and soon she, too, was satisfied. She wasn’t worried; he wasn’t going anywhere for a while and she would have her chance to become pregnant. (Maracle 12)

Thus, here, the female sexual desire gains expression and manifestation in the narrative space of the story. This instance also suggests how
woman’s maternity re-emerges as the core of female sexuality, female desire.

The story “First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style” also illustrates a feminine writing, generating a new female discursive space, in the sense that the fictional narrative is open-ended. As the story ends, there is no clear-cut closure but only endlessness, a process of becoming. The story ends in the voice of the Woman-Mother (the narrator) as follows:

He saw the new babies and again asked where they got them. The women giggled, touched his thigh, his chest and his chest and his arms and said, “You don’t know?” They all purred.

To this day, no Salish woman has ever broken the promise they made to each other. I know, because every time I told my Salish husband I was pregnant he responded with shock: “How did that happen?” And like all good Salish women before me, I just said, “You don’t know?” And I traced my fingers along his arms, his chest and his thighs---and just smiled. (Maracle 12)

This open-endedness makes the story an ongoing narrative in process without ending. This is also one of the distinct feminist narrative strategies that makes the story a typically feminine narrative body.
The story “Blessing Song” bears an instance of tactility or the sense of touch, one of the integral elements in the mother-child bond, that illustrates the fictional narrative as an excellent manifestation of a new female discursive space. This instance of tactility occurs in the story as the Woman-Mother (the narrator) describes her experience of enjoying a boat-trip along with her daughter and granddaughter on a holiday:

... my daughter ... slips her thin arm in mine, looks across at me, eyes brimming with tears of joy. We stay like that ... We look at one another and chuckle, our grip on one another’s arm tightens ... We stand pressed up against one another. The biggest of the whales swims within six feet of the boat, stands straight up and murmurs at us ... The song emerges from my daughter and me as we stand there before this mammoth ... We remain quiet and just stand there, arms still locked together. (Maracle 29-31)

This instance, therefore, carries a reference to the sense of touch, an inevitable experience in the mother-child bond, and the extraordinary joy that runs along this wonderful moment of tactility. The sense of touch or tactility, which we come across here, also forms one of the distinct feminist narrative strategies characteristic of the feminine writing which
the story constitutes. In the story, the Woman-Mother gains voice and expression as the fictional narrative is entirely narrated in the voice of the Woman-Mother. Moreover, the story “Blessing Song” is also open-ended. The story ends in the voice of the Woman-Mother (the narrator) as follows:

The people on board the boat are excited about what happened and curious about the song. “It’s just a song,” we tell them. Neither of us is prepared to break the spell that this moment has created for us. This whale managed to close all the spaces between us. The song forced from us by the whale reminds us that our lineage stretches back forever. It isn’t the song that matters though. What matters is the closing of the gap between us; the creation of oneness between three generations of . . . women doing what every generation before us has done . . . . (Maracle 29-31)

Thus, as the story ends, there is no “closure” but only a process of becoming, a process of knowing. In other words, the story emerges as an ongoing, endless feminine narrative in process.

The story “Laundry Basket” contains an interesting instance that demonstrates woman’s “writing” as a mode of “living her body.” In the story, this instance occurs in the context that makes a reference to
Marla’s (the Woman-Mother’s) realization of the real reason behind her husband’s rage at his discovery of her writings. The context is described as follows:

It dawned on her, maybe he had figured it out. Maybe he had become so incensed because he associated her dwindling sensuousness with her increased writing. It felt creepy, sexually perverse, for him to sense something about her sensuality and its relationship to writing before she had come to realize it. She felt as though she had just been told that someone was watching her undress every night without her knowing it. (Maracle 53)

Though this instance seems to make a reference to Marla’s (the Woman-Mother’s) contemplation on the reason for her husband’s anger at her writing, the instance actually hints at how the Woman-Mother’s sexuality, her body, finds expression in her writing. In other words, we may argue that Marla (the Woman-Mother), in the story, is an aspiring writer for whom “writing” is a mode of “living” her body, her sexuality. This in turn illustrates a feminine writing in which “sexuality is discursively constructed” and thereby replicates the new female discursive space that the story generates. Moreover, the story “Laundry Basket” is also an excellent illustration of the feminine writing
in the sense that the fictional narrative is open-ended. The story ends as follows:

She thinks of her sons . . . She smiles . . . gratefully and carries on. At the house she has to wait until her boys return. Between the three of them, . . . a whole lot of grunting effort, planning, re-planning and making judicious use of muscle and leverage smarts, the three of them manage to get the two machines into the apartment . . . Now she decides to order pizza . . . While waiting for the pizza man, the two boys load the little Hoover and turn it on. Another milestone. She hadn’t thought of that. It never occurred to her that for the boys, laundry is not looked upon as “woman’s work, wifely drudgery, not fit for male consumption.” It is new and they want to be a part of it . . . She leans against the bathroom doorway. The hum of the typewriter distracts her. She hadn’t turned it off when she left . . . she . . . shuts it off . . . . (Maracle 55-56)

Thus, as the story ends, there is no “closure” but only a process of becoming, a process of knowing. The story, therefore, ends up as an ongoing feminine narrative in process that is marked by endlessness or open-endedness. So, in brief, Maracle’s collection First Wives Club:
Coast Salish Style serves as an effective manifestation of the feminine writing that produces a new female discursive space with its own distinct feminist narrative strategies.

Thus, the five select works of fiction by women writers, Mama, Room, The Things We Do for Love, We Need to Talk About Kevin and First Wives Club: Coast Salish Style, constitute a new female discursive space with its distinct feminist narrative strategies. Reading Cixous’s concept of *écriture féminine* along with Cameron’s notion of language and sexuality explores the possibility of such a distinctly new female discursive space. The women’s fictions selected for the study trace the distinct feminist narrative strategies characteristic of the new female discursive space mentioned above. The five fictional works, therefore, generate a new female discourse of maternity, a new feminine writing in which the Woman-Mother reinvents herself and re-emerges as an autonomous subject, an independent entity, posing a threatening challenge to the patriarchal discourse that positions her as an object in relation to men/fathers. These fictional works celebrate female body as a malleable text, open-ended and endless. They articulate the female sexual desire and try to convey, despite the deficiency of language, the inexpressible joy of mothering in terms of tactile imagery. They discuss female sexuality from female point of view without inhibitions and restrictions. They discursively construct sexuality and maternity and
treat them as experiences within language. These fictional works by women writers are, thus, effective literary attempts that initiate a new female discursive space with distinct feminist narrative strategies that deconstruct and transgress the norms of the phallocentric discourse.