CHAPTER III

PROVIDENCE

The problem, the only problem, is my mother. And she is the one of course that I am trying to get; it is to reach her that this whole journey has been undertaken. With what purpose? To mark her off, to describe, to illumine, to celebrate, to get rid, of her; and it did not work, for she looms too close, just as she always did.

--SIB (246).

The bond between a mother and daughter is primordial. The mother is reborn with the child and grows along with her. They grow and experience each other and at times, their experience converges but it could diverge also, leading to communication gaps. The mother figure can assume a number of variations—she could be dead and yet hold a strong aura of her self over the child; or she may be dead and therefore a dead/absent mother to the child. Sometimes the child may try to revoke

25It is good to be reminded of Adrienne Rich’s words in this context: “Motherhood—unmentioned in the histories of conquest and serfdom, wars and treaties, exploration and imperialism—has a history, it has an ideology, it is more fundamental than tribalism or nationalism” (1976:34).
the mother. At other times, the mother may be the power figure, namely
the strong dominant mother who may make/break the child; or in some
cases a weak, submissive, powerless mother whom the child may
sympathise with/dislike. She could also be an independent woman
asserting herself and the child may realise that she is different from
other mothers.

In the fiction of contemporary world, however, the mother has been
portrayed as a monster. Such a situation arises because the daughter
begins to see her own self reflected in the mother. Karen Elias-Button in
The Lost Tradition uses the metaphor of the evil mother as the symbol
of the Medusa. She feels that the “Medusa is the dark side of the mother,
the grasping mother, representative of the entanglements mothers and
daughters encounter” but she states that this figure could also become “a
metaphor for powers previously hidden and denigrated, collective
powers that we are finally beginning to reaffirm and claim for
ourselves” (1980:194). Hindu mythology too portrays such an image in
the depiction of the Goddess Kali/Durga. The Hindu Goddess, the
energetic mother can become a symbol of either benevolence or
malevolence26. Mother, especially in Hindu society is acknowledged

26 This division can also be seen in a different way in the perception
of the institution of motherhood by society--women are considered
“impure, corrupt, the site of discharges, bleedings, dangerous to
masculinity, a source of moral and physical contamination” but another
great importance. In fact, the purpose of marriage is procreation which is illustrated by stories such as ‘The First Lady” (Leg), and “The Valley in Shadow” (Dark). The initial reaction, thus, in many stories is a negation of the mother which changes later into a recognition of the mother and a reconciliation with the mother. It is this fluidity existing between them and the centring of the mother as a subject that is the focus of this chapter, which is sectioned as follows:

* The dead/absent mothers.
* The dominant/passive mothers
* The distanced mothers/daughters
* The independent mothers.

The Dead/Absent Mothers

Women are perpetually attempting to establish their identities. Identity can be defined as the “stable, consistent and reliable sense of who one is and what one stands for in the world. It integrates one’s meaning to oneself and one’s meaning to others; it provides a match between what one regards as central to oneself and how one is viewed by significant others in one’s life (Josselson, 1987:10). Deshphande’s aspect that society projects is the image of them as “beneficent, sacred, pure, asexual, nourishing” beings well suited for being benevolent and nurturing mothers (Rich, 1976: 34).
“Lucid Moments” (*Int*) is one such story that discusses the identity crisis experienced by an ailing mother. It portrays the anxiety of the mother to know herself and in her quest for identity she tries to connect her own dead mother with a name. Sujatha, the daughter is able to acknowledge her mother’s struggle to know herself, and she connects her mother’s quest with her own identity.

Sujatha initially identifies herself with her father whom she perceives as the nearest symbol of power and authority. She recollects that “To be admitted to his companionship had been the greatest honour” and she had “pitied Akka her mother and Shilpa her sister for being left outside the magic circle” (*Int* 72). Sujatha’s perception of her father changes when she notices that he is unable to cope with his wife’s illness and instead of being strong and independent he becomes a weak, helpless person. She perceives that he is a self-centred man when she discovers that he does not know anything about his wife, and that she has always been just a wife, and nothing more to him. Sujatha’s conversation during lunch illustrates this apathy of his:

“One of her better days actually”. I tell him, during our lunch when his question comes up. “She’s been talking today...”

‘Of what?’

“Her dead mother. She was asking me for her name. Isn’t it odd? Baba is pushing his food about on his plate; he seems
disinterested not only in his food but in my talk as well.

"Baba, do you know it?"

"What?"

"'Akka's mother's name?"

Irritably he says, "No, how could I?" It sounds as if he is saying-why should I? (Int: 73).

Sujatha as a woman can now understand the need of her mother and she is in empathy with her. Her mother's echoing question makes her aware for the need to know one's self. She, as the daughter, is also to be blamed as she has subverted her mother's image by calling her "Akka" (sister) instead of "Amma" (mother). She knows that her mother is troubled as she wants to know who she is. Her mother is anxious and grieved because she is not able to recollect her mother's name. Added to this misery she is also troubled by her own double identity for she does not know if she is Sumati or Girija--possibly two identities thrust on her--one by her father and another by her husband, thereby erasing her true inner being. This loss of identity is equated with her degenerating body: "Since the metastasis, there seems to be almost nothing of her old self left. The shadows that began under her eyes have captured the whole of her face, the lower portion has caved in, her eyes have sunk into two deep, dark wells" (Int: 72). Yet, there is a point of identification, interestingly enough, the "bindi" that adorns an Indian woman's forehead. This mark of tradition is seen here as foregrounding
Sujatha can now realise her mother's silence and she realises that women are continually erased by society. She remembers the pre-wedding rite when the names of the fore 'fathers' are uttered but not of the mothers or their ancestors who are just forgotten. She thus gains identity experiencing and sharing her mother's pain and suffering. She feels that she shares her mother's death as she had once shared her birth with her. Dale Spender's remarks about the process of naming are valid in this context:

Practically it means that women's family names do not count and that there is one more device for making women invisible. Fathers pass their names on to their sons and the existence of daughters can be denied when in the absence of a male heir it is said that a family 'dies out'. One other direct result of this practice of only taking cognisance of the male line, because it becomes almost impossible to trace the ancestry of women - particularly if they do not come into the male defined categories of importance (1980: 24).

Sujatha's final act of hanging up the framed and enlarged photograph of her mother bestows not only an identity on her mother
but also attempts to locate the centrality of all women. This act is fortified by her when she makes her little niece Karuna aware of her grandmother’s name as well as her own. Thus the final linking of the names with oneself decolonizes women and re-frames them; this act can be recognised by the words of Daphne Marlatt:

Like the mother’s body, language is larger than us and carries along with it. it bears us. it births us. insofar as we bear it. if we are poets we spend our lives discovering not just what we have to say but what language is saying as it carries us with it in etymology we discover a history of verbal relations (A family tree, if you will) that has preceded us and given us the world we live in. the given, the immediately presented, as at birth-a given name a given word...here we are truly contained within the body of our mother tongue (1987: 224).

Mothers pass on their sense of guilt, weakness, and helplessness to their daughters. “Peace of Utrecht” (DHS) is an autobiographical story as Munro herself admits in her interview with Geoff Hancock, that the illness of a parent changes the relationship and it gets to become

27Dale Spender states that not only males name their experiences but also insist that those who don’t share that experience use those names. When women are endowed with the power to name then there may arise a more “accurate classification of the world” (1989: 189-99).
significant: “And so her illness and death and the whole tension between us...was very important. The first story I think of as a real story was “Peace of Utrecht”. It’s about the death of a mother” (1987: 215). The daughter’s visit to her mother’s house after her death reminds her of the cry of her mother which had been “shamefully undisguised and raw and supplicating” (DHS: 198). The narrator, Helen and her sister, Maddy had learnt to deal with these cries of helplessness by growing cunning and cold. They took away from her, as Helen narrates, “our anger and impatience and disgust, took all emotion away from our dealings with her, you might take away meat from a prisoner to weaken him, till he died” (DHS: 199). She had demanded love from her daughters but they had not enough reserves to draw from and had increased her sense of isolation and imprisonment. She had, by her illness, changed into a demanding ghoulish mother:

Our Gothic Mother, with the cold appalling mask of the Shaking Palsy laid across her features, shuffling, weeping, devouring attention wherever she can get it, eyes dead and burning, fixed inward on herself; this is not all (DHS: 200).

The mother in this state shifts from normalcy to abnormality. Thus if one day she has behaved like a housewife, taking care of the plants or baking, another day she is demanding the daughters to dress her up and get clothes stitched for her. Helen escapes this picture of the mother by
moving away and distancing herself. Maddy’s letters now no longer produce in her the “once-familiar frenzy and frustration which my mother’s demands could produce” (*DHS*: 200). The ordinariness of life forces her to forget the “Gothic Mother” who had begun to be imaginary to her. By revisiting her she tries to recapture her but she can’t. Finally the paper that she finds with the words “The Peace of Utrecht, 1713, brought an end to the war of the Spanish Succession” creates the necessary vision for her to reconcile not only with her mother’s spirit but also to recognise the fact that Maddy too has a life of her own.

The mother could also act as a spur influencing and enabling the woman to change her lifestyle. Such a change is witnessed in Deshpande’s “It Was The Nightingale” (*Gale*). Jayu, the protagonist, takes a bold step to further her career as she does not want to be like her mother. Initially she feels “dislike and contempt” for her mother because she had “tried to live her life through her husband and daughters”. To Jayu she seems like a woman “who had made her own hell and gloried in it” (*Gale*: 14). Therefore, she battles and finally gets her own self out from such an image. She changes from the self-sacrificing and self-effacing mother into an independent woman.
Dominant/Passive Mothers

The girl-child in Indian society is a marginal figure and it becomes more evident if the child is born out of wedlock or to another man. This differentiation is brought out in “The Awakening” (Mir). Though the story deals not with a mother-daughter conflict it becomes significant to examine it, as the narrative throws open the helplessness of the mother and also reveals her attempts to shield the child. The child is treated in a different manner from the others as she is not her father’s daughter. She is sent to a different school, and the father is distant and does not communicate with her. He punishes the child for the dishonour that he associates with the mother. She is excluded from all the activities that the father and her siblings undertake. She thinks that by scoring good marks in her tests she can please her father, but she finds out that the father cannot be placated that way. She has learnt silently that her birth itself is the cause of all the anger and punishment. Her final outcry, “Whatever they say, I was born. And I am. I am” (Mir: 63) reveals that she cannot be defeated and that she overcomes her alienation. Mukta Atrey in “The Girl Child in the Fiction of Shashi Deshpande” notes:

Deshpande unveils the subtle processes of oppression and gender differentiation at work in the family and in the male-centred Indian society. Her feminism does not uproot the girl
child from her given context, but tries to understand and define her in the framework of the various factors that shape her. These include cultural aspects like myths and legends, rituals and ceremonies as well as social and psychological factors such as the family structure, the woman’s position in it, female sexuality and the traumas of menstruation, childbirth and abortion (1990: 246).

Another story that reveals the helplessness of the mother and displays the mother as the passive onlooker is Deshpande’s “It was Dark” (Dark). The story reveals the ostracization by society that a woman has to undergo. The girl in the story, a fourteen year old is raped and the trauma of the parents is portrayed. The mother is blamed as the father feels that she had not taken the responsibility to educate the child. The mother, on the other hand, had faced so many restrictions and boundaries that she had desired for her daughter’s freedom:

I had been warned enough as a girl. “Don’t, don’t, don’t...you’re a female.” They had taught me to build a wall round myself with negatives from childhood. And then suddenly, when I got married, they told me to break the wall down. To behave as if it had never been. And my husband too--how complete his disregard of that wall had been; I had felt totally vulnerable, wholly defenceless. I won’t let my
daughter live behind walls, I had thought (Dark: 23).

Mukta Atrey commenting on the story thinks that stories such as "Why a Robin" (Leg) and "It was Dark" (Dark) reveal the changing attitude of mothers towards their girl children. She thinks that the understanding and sympathy between the daughters and the mothers grow. She adds that "It was Dark" reveals the "young girl's vulnerability which no amount of knowledge of the sexual act can erase. The young girl cannot cope with the crisis and is numbed into a state of indifference and withdrawal" (1990: 251). To the victim the whole trauma is associated with a dark room and there is complete blankness within her. The mother feels as if her daughter has witnessed a solar eclipse with naked eyes and lost her vision. She understands that she is the person who has to bring the daughter out of this darkness and lead her towards light. She finally manages to draw her daughter out and make her aware of the light around her: "Sunlight poured into the room,... And now at last her eyes moved from her spot to a glimmering, moving circle... They rested on that shining light for a moment, then moved to me. She saw me" (Dark: 25).

In the story the moment of the rape is not revealed to us and Rajeshwari Sunder Rajan commenting on the depiction and happening
of rape\textsuperscript{28} thinks that "the fact that the enactment of rape takes place in private and secret places requires the author to conduct his readers into the innermost recesses of physical space" (1993: 76). She further points out in this context that feminist texts of rape counter narrative determinism, in different ways: namely by making the raped woman the subject rather than as a victim of the act; by showing strategies of survival instead of establishing the issue around myths of chastity; by portraying and placing the raped woman in a system of heterosexual love and oppression through rape; by presenting the literal facts of the act rather than weaving a mystifying atmosphere around the whole issue and finally by representing the cost of the act in complex perspectives rather than displaying the extinction of the victim. (1993: 76)

Deshpande's "Can You Hear Silence" (\textit{Dark}) sketches the hustle and bustle of a metropolitan city. It also foregrounds the life that a working mother undergoes. The story exemplifies the danger a girl-child may encounter and the socialisation that the mother has initiated her into. The daughter tries to link herself to the past of the mother and savour the silence that her mother has talked about. The image of silence can assume a number of symbols: "Silence as withheld communication produces mystery and enigma" (Sunder Rajan, 1993: 87); it can also reveal displeasure as noticed in "The Shadow" or it could display

\textsuperscript{28} For a more detailed discussion on the issue of rape see Sunder Rajan's \textit{Real and Imagined Women}. 
secretiveness, (illustrated by “It Was Dark” (Dark) or “Red Dress - 1946” (DHS)). In other instances it could be an index of heroism or can show self-discipline or resistance.

We are once again made aware of the importance of names and the significance of telling stories by Munro’s “Progress of Love” (POL). Unlike the daughter in “Lucid Moments” (Int) the daughter, Fame here has always called her mother, ‘mother’ and to her the personal name that her mother has seems strange. She also develops an identity with the mother by becoming a part of her personality and is constantly reminded of her: “But I had a sense of her all the time, and would be reminded of her by the most unlikely things--an upright piano, or a tall white loaf of bread” (POL: 9). Even though the idea seems a little exaggerated, what is revealed here is the sense of space that the mother occupies in the daughter’s psyche. The mother’s presence becomes a strong one as the mother becomes apart of the daughter which is a feeling not felt by the narrator’s brothers:

I always had a feeling, with my mother’s talk and stories, of something swelling out behind. Like a cloud, a poison, that had touched my mother’s life. And when I grieved my mother, I became part of it...It seemed as if she knew something about me that was worse, far worse, than ordinary lies and tricks and meanness; it was a really sickening shame (POL:13).
The daughter is here aware of the mother and her body and she feels the bond breaks when she herself later on has only two sons and no daughters. The story of the mother’s suicide becomes a link to her mother’s past. Redekop remarks that Munro’s exploration of “maternal ancestry is intimately related to language and to the process of storytelling” (1992: 176). She adds that the naming of the mother and the aunt constructs the subjects of the story and the two versions of the story that Fame hears take up two positions, namely, the mother’s story is a story about the mother herself while the aunt’s story loses the matrilinelineal power and is a “challenge” issued by her (1992: 176).

The mother in “The Moon in the Orange Skating Rink” (POL) is not the true mother yet she assumes a demonic form, for one finds that the adopted daughter, Callie is always slaving away and finally gains the title of slavery Kemaghan. She is a substitute mother about whom there are lot of stories and the two boarders, Sam and Edgar think that the sex act that they have with Callie might have taken place with Miss Kernaghan. But the story that Miss. Kernaghan tells them about Callie’s birth is bizarre and unbelievable. The truth of the story is not what is important, “What mattered was Miss Kernaghan’s cold emphasis as she told this, her veiled and surely unfriendly purpose, her random ferocity” (POL: 151). The story questions the romantic notion of mother, her love, affection and her sacrifice for the daughter. Munro achieves this effect cleverly by positioning a mock mother and thus, makes a mockery
of the conventional notions of motherhood.

The questioning of conventionality and tradition is perceived in "White Dump" (POL). It reveals the intricate story line filled with the perceptions of the grandmother, Sophie; the daughter-in-law, Isabel and Isabel's daughter, Denise. The grandmother, Sophie's naked appearance displays the embarrassing performance of the mother to shame her son. Redekop thinks that such exhibitionism "challenges our notions of innate motherhood and this, at the same time, results in a transgression of the boundaries between stories. Both stunts are necessary for survival" (1992: 177).

The narrator in "Moons of Jupiter" (MOJ) is linked to the birth of her daughters and the life she had with them when she comes to visit her father who is in hospital. She knows that her daughters, Nichola and Judith would have discussed her and tried to establish their connections to her: "They would have talked about me. Judith and Nichola comparing notes, relating anecdotes; analysing, regretting, blaming, forgiving" (MOJ: 222). She thinks that daughters being women are closely tied up with the mother and know all about the mother. She is reminded that at Judith's age she had been in college discussing issues with her friends and at Nichola's age she had been a mother. She remembers the talks she would have with her neighbourhood friend, Ruth Boudreau:
We talked about our parents, our childhood’s, though for some time we kept clear of our marriages. How thoroughly we dealt with our fathers and mothers, deplored their marriages, their mistaken ambitions or fear of ambition, how competently we filed them away, defined them beyond any possibility of change (*MOJ*: 222).

She had felt offended by her father when he had told her that he could not remember the days when she grew up. She realises that the same is true when she becomes the mother. All that she can remember are “hanging out diapers, bringing in and folding diapers...I was sleepy all the time then;...wives yawning, napping, visiting, drinking coffee and folding diapers; ...” (*MOJ*: 223). She realises that they had become like cartoons and had aged by the responsibilities. The story once again points out the need for detachment and distancing oneself in order to survive. The mother remembers that Nichola had been tested for leukaemia and frightened that she may lose her, she had tried to attain a distance: “There was a care--not a withdrawal exactly but a care--not to feel anything much. I saw how the forms of love might be maintained with a condemned person but with the love in fact measured and disciplined, because you have to survive” (*MOJ*: 230). The whole issue is always a secret to the person who is sentenced to death. The fact of Nichola’s life had stayed with her and by this secret the mother is
empowered as she gains a wider vision of what life and death means. This mental picture that she sees is a “releasing one” (Redekop, 1992:171) as she is able to reconcile to her father’s death. Carrington’s conclusions about the story are valid:

Thus, the experience of withdrawal that Janet’s father reads about and that Janet actively seeks unifies the story both thematically and psychologically by shaping the characterisation of the narrator whose experience embodies the theme. Her split into two personae, the observer and the participant, defines her double roles as her father’s daughter and as her daughter’s mother. In participating in her own life, Janet has been only the observer on the periphery of both her father’s life and her daughters’ lives, and they have been observers of hers (204).

The Parkinson’s disease that we find is the cause of the mother’s death in “Peace of Utrecht” (DHS) is in “The Ottawa Valley” (SIB) here in its initial stages. The story begins with a return home to the mother’s place, the Ottawa valley. The story reflects on the instance when the mother sacrifices the safety pin to hold the daughter’s panties. This very feminine act reveals the mother’s ability to uphold her daughter’s secrets forgetting her own troubles. Yet, the daughter is unable to tend and care for her mother as already witnessed in “The Peace of Utrecht”.
To illustrate this fact she remarks “I was very much relieved that she had decided against strokes, and that I would not have to be the mother, and wash and wipe and feed her lying in bed, as aunt Dodie had had to do with mother” (SIB: 244).

The sense of power and dominance is depicted by the mother figure Flo in the sequence stories WDY. Flo in “Royal Beatings” and the other connected stories of WDY assumes the role of the story teller. Flo liked to imagine and she liked “the details of a death: the things people said, the way they protested or tried to get out of bed or swore or laughed...” (WDY: 4). Even the way she tells Rose about the death of Rose’s mother is quite ridiculous.

There is from the beginning a dislike and a mongering for power between Rose and Flo. As Rose points out: “There was a long truce between Flo and Rose in the beginning. Rose’s nature was growing like a prickly pineapple, but slowly, and secretly, hard pride and scepticism” developed in her. To Rose in the beginning her vision of Flo is one of extraordinary softness and hardness; “The soft hair, the long, soft, pale cheeks, soft almost invisible fuzz in front of her ears and above her mouth. The sharpness of her knees, hardness of her lap, flatness of her front” (WDY: 11). These images of hardness, flatness and sharpness finally lead to the image being put into action. Flo uses her power and authority, thus leading to the royal beatings that Rose receives from her
father. Even before the beatings the power of Flo is displayed by the body image: “Her legs are long, white and muscular, marked all over with blue veins as if somebody had been drawing rivers on them with an indelible pencil”. Flo’s scrubbing is seen by Rose as endowed with “an abnormal energy, a violent disgust...” (WDY: 15). All these images flow finally into the question of who do you think you are:

Flo speaks of Rose’s smart-aleck behaviour, rudeness and sloppiness and conceit. Her willingness to make work for others, her lack of gratitude...Oh, don’t you think you’re somebody, says Flo, and a moment later, Who do you think you are? (WDY: 15).

Flo in the story not only exhibits theatricality and power but also assumes the role of a martyr. She finally manages to rouse Rose’s father’s ire and Rose is vanquished by the royal beatings her father resorts to. Rose in her new state of the injured victim feels that “She has passed into a state of calm, in which outrage is perceived as complete and final”. In such a state she finds that her choices are clear--“She will never speak to them, she will never look at them with anything but loathing, she will never forgive them. She will punish them; she will finish them” (WDY: 20). These thoughts make her forget herself and her
responsibility. This drama of hatred and violence\(^{29}\) is then followed by Flo’s bid to appease Rose. Flo, now sure of her power, tries to woo Rose by getting her a jar of cold cream for her wounds and a tray of appetising food—a large glass of chocolate milk, little sandwiches, canned salmon, butter tarts, chocolate biscuits. Rose “will turn away, refuse to look, but left alone with these eatables will be miserably tempted, roused and troubled and drawn back from thoughts of suicide or flight...” (WDY: 26) She finally decides to eat one for strength but, unable to resist, finishes everything thus losing her advantage.

This whole picture changes and in “Spelling” (WDY) Rose is the woman in control while Flo loses all her power. The story is a reversal of “Royal Beatings” (WDY) and here Rose does not have to resort to violence as Flo is already a victim because of her age. Her senility makes her a child and there is one moment where mother and daughter are reconciled. After Flo has been admitted into the aged home, Rose cleans up their place only to discover a wig of Flo’s. She takes the wig and offers it to Flo, thus bridging the gap between them: “‘A wig’, said Rose, ‘and Flo began to laugh. Rose laughed too’”. Rose then assumes the role of the entertainer, sticks the wig on her head and continues the

\(^{29}\) The power relations that one notices in some of the stories are a reflection of the physical power that women notice in men and which they internalise in their selves. This could explain the show of violence and power by Flo in “Royal Beatings” (WDY).
comedy making Flo laugh so that “she rocked back and forth in her crib” (*WDY*: 191). Flo is once again able to tell her stories and she tells Rose about the removal of gall stones from her body. This bond that is established between Rose and Flo makes Rose think later in life of telling her what she had heard about Hat Nettleton. But, Flo has lost her power of speech which had given her the power of exhibitor and now “She had removed herself, and spent most of her time sitting in a corner of her crib, looking crafty and disagreeable, not answering anybody, though she occasionally showed her feelings by biting a nurse” (*WDY*: 24). Redekop remarks that “the dialogue of stories that move back and forth between Flo and Rose is a structural acting out of this strange face to face experience of fool and nonfool, infant and mother (1992: 121).

This reconciliation between Rose and Flo helps Rose later to understand the power of mothering in the story “Providence” (*WDY*). Rose’s relationship with Anna, her daughter, is one of love but for the first time Rose realises the responsibilities of being a single parent. She also understands that to the child, the parents are the most important people. Anna’s life revolves around her parents, as Rose remarks in her narrative: “Yet for Anna this bloody fabric her parents had made, of mistakes and mismatches, that anybody could see ought to be torn up and thrown away, was still the true web of life, of father and mother, of beginning and shelter” (*WDY*: 138). Being with Anna she realises that “For the first time in her life she understood domesticity, knew the
meaning of shelter, and laboured to manage it” (WDY: 145). She finally gives up Anna because she learns that her independence cannot provide the stability that a child needs:

She wanted to take Anna with her, set them up again in some temporary shelter. It was just as Patrick said. She wanted to come home to Anna, to fill her life with Anna. She didn’t think Anna would choose that life. Poor, picturesque, gypsing childhoods are not much favoured by children, though they will claim to value them, for all sorts of reasons, later on (WDY: 155).

Anna therefore is sent to live with her father, Patrick and his wife, Elizabeth. Rose finally sees a photo of Anna where she looks demure and satisfied.

The mother moves from the distance to become a friend in “Friend of My Youth” (FOY). The story recaptures the mother figure, and her power of entertaining the daughter. At the beginning of the story it is made clear that the mother died in her fifties. The story begins with a dream: “I used to dream about my mother, and though the details in the dream varied, the surprise in it was always the same” (FOY: 3). The daughter is reminded of the mother’s debilitating body which had been afflicted by Parkinson’s disease. The mother portrayed in the initial
stages of the disease in the story “The Ottawa Valley” (SIB) and the mother who is dead due to the affliction in “The Peace of Utrecht” (DHS) is once again revived here. The daughter is able to capture the qualities of the mother that she had forgotten. She remembers the “liveliness of face and voice”, “the casual humour she had, not ironic but merry, the lightness and impatience and confidence?” and her “matter-of-fact reply” (FOY: 4). The mother in the dream is not afflicted by the disease and the daughter feels relieved and happy to see her like that. She finally realises from the dream that her mother had exhibited “options and powers “ that she had not known she had possessed. The mother thus turns into a ghost figure: “She changes the bitter lump of love I have carried all this time into a phantom---something useless and uncalled for, like a phantom pregnancy” (FOY: 26). The story brings out the idea of failure and the inability of the daughter’s to know the mother completely. This guilt of the daughter to represent the mother becomes

Magdalene Redekop’s discussion of this story is very enlightening. She feels that “Munro’s exploration of the daughter’s guilt moves through levels of self-interrogation that are potentially paralyzing” She adds that the title is “listed as one of several salutations written by the mother”. She further remarks that the continuing self-interrogation employed by Munro is an “exploration of the workings of our traditional notions about writing as they relate to lives of our mothers”. The reference to the mother is Munro’s way of “insisting on the fact of referentiality”. Thus, the mother’s narrative in the story and the failure of the character Flora in theher’s storycan be a reference for the failure of the daughter’s vision ofthe mother. Therefore Redekop argues that “The thread of referentiality is deliberately blurred towards
a "phantom pregnancy" where the daughter is fated to carry the past of the mother and is unable to give birth to it.

“Circle of Prayer” (POL) is a story told from the mother, Trudy’s point of view. The story begins by a violent act, namely Trudy hurling a jug at her daughter, Robin. The violence begins when Trudy discovers that the bead necklace given to her by her mother-in-law and which she had forbidden Robin to wear, had been given by Robin to a friend. Her questions directed at Robin are answered by silence, and in a fit of rage she hurls the jug. But fortunately the jug falls on the rug. Robin had given the necklace to her friend and though Robin displays a frightened look she is according to Trudy, “stubborn, calculating, disdainful” (POL: 255). The story is interspersed by the death of a young girl in an accident. When Trudy hears this she is concerned and is afraid to hear that a girl might have been “dragged off a country road, raped in the woods, strangled, beaten, left there” (POL: 256). Her concern is mainly because she knows that her daughter goes running and her beauty may cause her harm. Trudy begins to find love and wishes to reconcile with her daughter. When she hears about the circle of prayer that her friend, Janet believes in, she agrees to join them. What finally alters her view of her daughter and bridges the gap between her and Robin is a vision she has which portrays to her the importance of detachment. This helps her

the end of the story, it becomes difficult to tell Flora and the mother apart” (1992: 211).
to be reconciled to the loss of the necklace. The vision she has also reveals to her the importance of furthering oneself and placing oneself in the role of a spectator:

She sees her young self looking in the window at the old woman playing the piano. The dim room, with its oversize beams and fireplace and the lonely leather chairs. The clattering, faltering, persistent piano music. Trudy remembers that so clearly and it seems she stood outside her own body, which ached then from the punishing pleasures of love. She stood outside her own happiness in a tide of sadness. And the opposite thing happened the morning Dan left. Then she stood outside her own unhappiness in a tide of what seemed unreasonably like love. But it was the same thing, really, when you got outside. What are those times that stand out, clear patches in your life—what do they have to do with it? They aren’t exactly promises. Breathing spaces (POL: 273).

The mother in “Oh, What Avails” (POL) is a lively woman who is not only independent but also exhibits a certain amount of eccentricity. She is also pictured by the daughter as a proud woman and though she does not have money, she does not think of herself as poor. This is illustrated by the fact that she does not get a doctor’s advice for her son’ Morris’ eye accident. She treats Morris as a grown up and allows him to
smoke, drink and drive a car by the time he is twelve. The mother here has a name for everyone in town. She also knows a lot of poetry and at times “She looks out the window and says a bit of poetry and they know who has gone by” (POL: 183). Joan, the daughter narrator later in life realises that one needs to act in order to hide the things one sees “in their temporary separateness, all connected underneath in such a troubling, satisfying, necessary, indescribable way” (POL: 208). Finally Joan realises that their mother had taught them to have a “delicate, special regard for themselves” and because of this gift of hers she and her brother, Morris had been able to get what they wanted. Joan quotes the lines that her mother often used to say:

‘Ah, what avails the sceptred race,
Ah, what the form divine!
What every virtue, every grace,
Rose Aylmer--Rose Matilda--all
were thine!’ (POL: 215).

These lines indicate to Joan that power and beauty are all of no use and every thing one day finds its place. This global vision is what a daughter can learn from the mother.
The Distanced Mothers/Daughters

The distancing and reconciliation of the mother and daughter is apparent in “Why a Robin” (Leg). The mother here feels that her daughter is sophisticated and graceful compared to her. This feeling of hers is also partially nurtured by the distance that has erupted between her husband and herself. The other factor for her feeling of inferiority is the difference in status between their two families. She is enamoured by the beauty of her daughter but cannot reach out to her. She is afraid of being repulsed and remarks: “I don’t have the key to open up this beautiful child, though she is mine. I don’t have the key to her father, either. It is as if I am, in my own house, confronted with two closed rooms. I am condemned to sit outside and gaze helplessly at the closed doors” (Leg: 51). In spite of the distance between the mother and daughter, in this story there is reconciliation when the daughter finally recognises the mother as another woman. She needs her mother’s assurance when she matures from a girl into a woman. Thus, the distance is bridged by the recognition of the female body\(^{31}\) and the bond

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\(^{31}\) It is relevant to note the words of Rich here:

The nurture of daughters in patriarchy calls for a strong sense of self-nurture in the mother. The psychic interplay between mother and daughter can be destructive, but there is no reason why it is doomed to be. A woman who has respect and affection for her own body, who does not view it as unclean or as a sex-object, will wordlessly transmit to her daughter that a
that exists between women.

Munro in some of her stories depicts the gender divisions that society and the family inflict on the girl. This is illustrated by stories like “Walker Brothers Cowboy” (*DHS*) and “Boys and Girls”. The tasks that the parents perform are illustrations of these gender patterns. The mother in “Walker Brothers Cowboy” (*DHS*) is busy sewing, cutting and matching cleverly bits of cloth to stitch a dress for the daughter, while the father takes the daughter out for a walk. The story reveals the daughter’s distance\(^{32}\) and dislike of the mother while she is drawn towards her father. The mother tries to regain her gentility but the daughter realises that trying to be a lady is enough. To be accepted one has to possess status too. This realisation makes her hate her mother:

This is entirely different from going out for a walk with my

woman’s body is a good and healthy place to live. A woman who feels pride in being female will not visit her self-depreciation upon her female child (1976:245).

\(^{32}\)Munro herself has had this experience being a daughter and also being a mother, she observes:

I think they go through a stage when they don’t want a mother who is not shocked by four-letter words; they don’t want a mother who reads the underground newspaper they bring home; they want a mother bending over the ironing board saying, “I don’t know what this world is coming to”, because that’s something to define themselves against.
father. We have not walked past two houses before I feel we have become objects of universal ridicule. Even the dirty words chalked on the side-walk are laughing at us. My mother does not seem to notice. She walks serenely like a lady shopping, past the housewives in loose beltless dresses torn under the arms. With me her creation, wretched curls and flaunting hair bow, scrubbed knees and white socks—all I do not want to be. I loathe even my name when she says it in public, in a voice so high, proud and ringing, deliberately different from the voice of any other mother on the street (DHS: 5).

Magdalene Redekop in her study of the image of mothers feels that in the story “Walker Brothers Cowboy” (DHS) the maternal action to be self-sufficient needs the body of the daughter. She thinks that the father and mother both give something to the daughter and the only “difference is that while the mother sews a dress for her, the father shows her, by example, how to construct a mask. Both parents ensure, however, that the daughter’s idea of reproduction will be one based on thrift” (1992:38). What is apparent is that the daughter learns from observing and is aware of the double life that the father leads. The daughter thus, realises the reality and the illusion that can exist together in life.
This observation and the awareness of truth is once again continued in “Images” (DHS). The daughter feels that the nurse, Mary McQuade has taken over their mother and has “let her power loose in the house” (DHS: 32). Mary is no goddess but takes the role of the goddess by making the daughter feel wicked and sinful: “every time she said Mother I felt chilled, and a kind of wretchedness and shame spread through me as it did at the name of Jesus” (DHS: 33). The daughter is aware that “This Mother that my own real, warm-necked, irascible and comforting human mother set up between us was an everlastingly wounded phantom, sorrowing like Him over all the wickedness I did not yet know I would commit” (DHS: 33). The daughter finds that the mother has changed from a story teller and an entertainer into a child whimpering and crying for Mary’s attention. The father once again dons the role of a quester and a hunter, (who has changed from a roving salesman in “Walker Brothers Cowboy” (DHS) into a trapper in this story). Another similarity is that once again the daughter is allowed into the father’s circle and is empowered by his secrets. Thus the daughter at the conclusion of the story is made aware that:

Like the children in fairy stories who have seen their parents make pacts with terrifying strangers, who have discovered that our fears are based on nothing but the truth, but who come back fresh from marvellous escapes and take up their knives and forks, with humility and good manners, prepared to live
happily ever after—like them, dazed and powerful with secrets,
I never said a word (DHS: 43).

Munro’s story, “Boys and Girls” (DHS) also depicts the theme of
gender differences, the identification with the father and the final shift
of the daughter from the father to mother. The mother as depicted by
many of Munro’s stories is a story teller. The daughter is however
drawn to the father even though he hardly shares his thoughts with her.
She works for him willingly and is proud to be a part of his world as she
feels his authority. She is aware of the number of duties and chores that
her mother handles hanging out the wash, cooking, making jams and
jellies, etc., but the daughter feels that “work in house was endless,
dreary, and peculiarly depressing; work done out of doors and in my
father’s service was ritualistically important” (DHS: 117). Though the
daughter knows that her mother loves her, she feels she cannot trust her.
She knows that she loved her yet she was also her enemy. She thought
that she was always plotting against her: “She was plotting now to get
me to stay in the house more, although she knew I hated it (because she
knew I hated it) and keep me from working for my father. It seemed to
me she would do this simply out of perversity, and to try her power”
(DHS: 118). She never thinks that her mother may have been lonely or
jealous of her. Slowly as she grows up it dawns on her that there is a
change in the perception of what a girl is:
The word girl had formerly seemed to me innocent and unburdened, like the word child; now it appeared that there was no such thing. A girl was not, as I had supposed, simply what I was; it was what I had to become. It was a definition, always touched with emphasis, with reproach and disappointment. Also it was a joke on me (DHS: 119).

She learns that “girls don’t slam doors”, that “girls keep their knees together when they sit down” (DHS: 118) and that girls can’t ask some questions. Finally when she allows a horse to escape and her father dismisses her gesture by the words, “She’s only a girl”, she cannot protest as she thinks maybe that it is the truth. This action of hers bridges the gap between the mother and daughter as it does in Deshpande’s “Why a Robin” (Leg).

Munro’s “Time of Death” (DHS) portrays a reversal in the role of the mother and daughter. Patricia has caused the death of her brother accidentally but she behaves like a mature adult by not becoming hysterical like her mother, Leona. Leona develops a hatred for her daughter and tells everyone she does not want to see her again. She does finally reconcile to her because for her the daughter is the means of her livelihood. Patricia is not upset by these remarks of her mother or by her role as the earner but her composure is finally broken down by the sight of the ‘scissors man’ whom her brother had loved to watch. The daily
facts of existence and how they can affect relationships are very well illustrated by this story.

The mother in the “Red Dress --1946” (DHS) is portrayed as a mother sewing dresses for the daughter (just as the mother in “Walker Brothers Cowboy” (DHS) does). The daughter is aware of her body and loathes the need to stand for fittings feeling “like a great raw lump, clumsy and goose-pimpled” (DHS: 148). The daughter has begun to distance herself from the mother and all her stories “which had once interested me had begun to seem melodramatic, irrelevant, and tiresome” (DHS: 149). She is like all adolescents insecure and doubtful about her self, she doubts if she will be happy at the dance she has to attend later. Her fears soon slip away when she goes to the dance, as she finds a partner, and things work out well. While returning home she finds that she had not only been to the dance, but walked home with a boy had also been kissed by her. She realises that “life is once again possible” (DHS: 160). Close to her home she sees her mother tiredly waiting for her return and she realises how much the whole event had meant to her mother. She herself may never, in her own life, have a chance like the one the daughter has and to her this may have been a dream, that the daughter had fulfilled:

She was just sitting and waiting for me to come home and tell her everything that had happened. And I would not do it, I
never would. But when I saw the waiting kitchen, and my mother in her faded, fuzzy Paisley kimono, with her sleepy but doggedly expectant face, I understood what a mysterious and oppressive obligation I had, to be happy, and how I had almost failed it, and would be likely to fail it, every time, and she would not know (DHS: 160).

Deshpande’s “The Awakening” (Mir) portrays the daughter, Alka despising her mother. The hatred is partly nurtured by the fact that the mother is prejudiced and shows more affection towards her brother, Shirish. Alka is angered also by their economic instability and by the noisy, squalid lives that they live. When her mother admonishes her she has thoughts that are very similar to Del’s in “Princess Ida’ (LGW) and the daughter’s in “Walker Brother’s Cowboy” (DHS). She thinks that her mother is a “woman with a heavy sullen face and a tongue like a serrated knife”. (Mir: 20). Though she equates her father with a saint, she feels that he is a fool who does not wish to change his life. Her mind is also embittered by the difference in status that she notes in the lifestyle of her maternal grandfather and that of their own. Deep inside she can’t understand how her mother could have given up all that to marry her father. She learns that in spite of status differences, love had brought them together and that her father’s position had not changed even after the birth of three children. She dreams and weaves fantasies of existing in luxury which end when her father dies. Her first thoughts are that he
is a failure as he could not even struggle with death. He had left behind him incomplete duties, responsibilities and empty tears. Therefore she remarks:

There was no pity in me for him. Only contempt. God, let me not live like that. Let me not die like that, having achieved nothing, been nothing. Not once that I could say...My Baba said this. He said nothing that was not trivial, did nothing that had any meaning. I searched and searched the whole of his life for a meaning and didn’t find it (Mir: 25).

Her perceptions of her father change when she notices the letters in his briefcase and learns of the help he had tried to activate to help her. This reconciles her to him. The story illuminates the distance between daughter and mother but the focus shifts to the father and the reaction of the daughter to the father’s image.

**The Independent Mothers**

The mother in “Connection” (MOJ) is the link between the daughter and her maternal ancestors. One confronts the mother who is proud and thinks highly of herself as witnessed later in “Princess Ida”. The Mother in “Connection” (MOJ) thinks very highly of her family:
"people who thought so highly of themselves in Dalgleish would be laughable to the leading families of Fork Mill" (MOJ: 6). The mother and aunts of the narrator try to picture the grandfather and tell stories of him. Her mother believed that "the grandfather had been a student at Oxford and had lost all his money" (MOJ: 7). This mother who is taken up by her being from gentility is not the only picture presented to the reader. The mother is also a businesswoman, a trader and dealer as revealed in the subsequent story, "The Stone in The Field" (MOJ). The mother here pities her husband’s sisters and thinks that they could change their lives. To her life is full of possibility and change. It is the image of this mother that is portrayed to us more fully in the story "Princess Ida" (LGW).

The eccentric mother who is at the same time also an independent mother (whom one notices in glimpses in "Connection" and the following story "The Stone in The Field" - MOJ) is encountered in "Princess Ida" (LGW). The introductory sentence that introduces her is the sentence "Now my mother was selling encyclopaedias" (LGW: 54). Though Del finds her mother an eccentric, she still feels the need to shield her mother from the remarks made by her aunts. Del’s mother is a far-sighted woman. She sells encyclopaedias but she believes in selling them as she thinks that knowledge is "warm and lovely" (LGW: 55). To Del’s aunts the knowledge of the mother is an oddity. Del’s mother knowing about the gathering of information by Del turns her into an
exhibit in order to promote her sales. She also takes courses such as "Great Thinkers of History" (LGW: 62) and writes letters to newspapers. Though Del is distanced from her mother, she finds that her mother has lot of stories to tell her—stories of the past. She knew that her mother had not left anything behind: "Inside that self we knew, which might at times appear blurred a bit, or side-tracked, she kept her younger selves...; scenes from the past were liable to pop up any time,...against the cluttered fabric of the present" (LGW: 62). On the day, she visits Del’s school, Del is ashamed because: "She was so different, that was all, so brisk and hopeful and guileless in her maroon hat, making little jokes, thinking herself a success". Del thinks that others pity and sympathise with her because she has such a strange mother. Del could not bear “the tone of her voice, the reckless, hurrying way she moved, her lively absurd gestures..., and most of all her innocence, her way of not knowing when people were laughing, of thinking she could get away with this”. This had caused her to hate. She, however, knows the fact that she herself is not very different from her mother but tries to conceal it (LGW: 68).

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33 Lorna Irvine in her study “A Psychological Journey: Mothers and Daughters in English-Canadian Fiction” notes:

The psychological journey that appears in so much of this fiction reveals the ambivalence that characterizes the daughter’s feelings about her mother (1980: 243).
Del’s mother remarks “There is a change coming I think in the lives of girls and women. Yes. But it is up to us to make it come. All women have had up till now has been their connection with men. All we have had. No more lives of our own, really, than domestic animals” (LGW: 146). She had learned from her mother the need for self-respect. Initially she had rejected her mother’s views but later in life she takes her advice. Her own self-reflective words illustrate this point:

I would have had to resist anything she told me with such earnestness, such stubborn hopefulness. Her concern about my life, which I needed and took for granted, I could not bear to have expressed. Also I felt that it was not so different from all the advice handed out to women, to girls, advice that assumed of carefulness and solemn fuss and self-protection were called for, whereas men were supposed to be able to go out and take on all kinds of experiences and shuck off what they didn’t want and come back proud. Without even thinking about it, I had decided to do the same (LGW: 147).

The stories discussed reveal a conflict existing between the mothers and daughters. The daughter has to be distanced as noticed in Munro’s “Boys and Girls” (DHS), “Why a Robin” (Mir), and “Providence” (WDY) because she has to find a role model to imitate and the father’s image is a more powerful one. This distancing changes
when the daughter passes through the phases of becoming a woman, namely passing through the phases of adolescence and puberty and thus, she recognises the body of the mother and the meaning of femininity. This recognition makes the daughter accept the mother as perceived in stories such as “The Ottawa Valley”, “The Peace of Utrecht” (DHS), “Friend of My Youth” (FOY), and “Red Dress” (DHS). The daughter in spite of having a dominant/passive mother recognises that there is a knowledge flowing between them that is “subliminal, subversive” and “preverbal” (Rich, 1976: 220). This leads her to get reconciled with the mother as depicted in stories such as “Royal Beatings”, “Spelling” (WDY). Writing about the experience of mothering Adrienne Rich states:

It is hard to write about my own mother. Whatever I do write, it is my story I am telling, my version of the past. If she were to tell her own story other landscapes would be revealed. But in my landscape or hers, there would be old, smouldering patches of deep-burning anger (1977: 221).

It is this vision that one notices when the daughter becomes the observer and the story teller but the past can also help to overcome guilt, and achieve a wider view of the society and the connection between things as witnessed in stories such as “Oh, What Avails” (POL) and “It Was The Nightingale” (Gale). This recognition and relevance of life
finally leads to mothers who are able to move from being mothers into whole women as illustrated by the growth of the characters--Rose (WDY), Del (LGW), Jayu (Gale), and Alka (Leg). To sum up, it is significant to recall words from Rich's *Of Woman Born*:

> We are, none of us, "either" mothers or daughters: to our amazement, confusion, and greater complexity, we are both. Women, mothers or not, who feel committed to other women, are increasingly giving each other a quality of caring filled with the diffuse kinds of identification that exist between mothers and daughters. Into the mere notion of "mothering" we may carry, as daughters, negative echoes of our own mothers' martyrdom, the burden of their valiant, necessarily limited efforts on our behalf, the confusion of their double messages (1976:253).

To achieve wholeness and reshape oneself it is necessary for mothers and daughters to accept not only one another but also the different selves that exist within them.