Chapter IV

Overcoming of Alienation
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OVERCOMING OF ALIENATION

This chapter proposes to examine how the characters, who are victims of alienation, make an effort to overcome alienation. For this, they adopt certain strategies, and it is intended to examine whether these strategies fall into certain patterns. The strategies are: questioning, retrospecting (recollection), seeking freedom and new connections, taking new resolutions, and communicating their condition through writing which may be considered a therapeutic and self-comprehension exercise.

The spirit of questioning rests on the conviction that there is something that lies behind and beyond the present state of alienated existence. The alienated characters develop the desire, which becomes a dominant urge, to find answers to the questions. The quest after an answer relates to factors which may be mysterious to the protagonist but not mysterious to the other characters. The protagonists
decide to undertake a long journey hoping that the end of the journey will be the beginning of a new perception and life. The journey could be towards a past period in the life of the parents or the ancestors of the protagonists. This may also involve a movement from one place to another. It is believed that the mysterious factor originated in a distant place and time and that the discovery of the mystery requires the protagonists’ journey to that place, and to that particular moment in the past. So, the whole journey can be considered a mission aimed at making a discovery that could facilitate the protagonists to overcome their alienation. The protagonists’ quest may rest upon the conviction that clues relevant to and necessary for the discovery could be gathered in the course of the quest. The hope is that clues gathered from external sources could resolve the mystery by throwing light on the source of alienation, thereby eliminating that source. Sometimes, the protagonist might be very much resourceful in gathering all the necessary facts and may successfully reach the destination which may hold something or some one which / who can answer the questions of the protagonist.

In *Coming Down From Wa* the mystery lies at the centre of William Kwame Mackenzie’s childhood years, and he is determined to retrace
Through internal clues, William infers that something kept as a secret from him by his parents is what makes him feel alienated and what has made his parents feel alienated from each other. He sees evidence of the secrets' phantom-self in the awkward silence that existed between his parents' separate vocations and in their failure to share a bedroom. Until his mother joins him in Wa, William is unable to uncover the family secret though he has reached the place and person who can solve the mystery. Only when his mother reveals the past factor does the power of the mystery dissolve to leave William in peace:

“William”, she had said to him, at the end, “you are not responsible for your parent’s youth. Nothing you do can ‘make-up’ for what we did -we have to live with it, not you. I just want you to know that although you may have felt you grew up in a loveless house, we both loved you. Never doubt that for a minute. (CDW, 268).

In Graven Images, Charlotte, a middle aged woman, is researching into the Carbette family tree in England from the Norman
time to the present-day America. Much of the novel is taken up with
Charlotte's collecting of external clues, peripheral events and incidental
details: "This is my family picture" (199). Charlotte reveals at the end.

A history of the encounters and recollections in mid-life of
Charlotte and Lydia who are in search of their ancestors, contains
letters, poems, fragments dictionary entries, parodies of carols and
many other bits and pieces so that a cogent history does not seem to
be written at all. It looks like a pastiche of items and fragmented shreds
of information collected by Charlotte.

Each has her own personal clues and reasons for undertaking the
journey. Lydia, rescued and evacuated from London as a child from the
rubble of world war-II, is in search of relatives to provide her with the
identity which the war-time trauma and her adoptive American parents
had effectively erased. Charlotte, a travel-writer by occupation, has
both practical and personal reasons for the quest-trip.

Charlotte has to wade through a number of factors like her senile
mother, the past generations' economic thriving at the expense of
Nature, the psychologically disoriented men and women in the family,
the unpleasant memories of her own past, the isolated life and the
drunkenness of the male members in the family, their business ventures,
and the trait of irresponsibility that runs through generations, in her effort to trace the roots of the maternal malaise in her family's history in England.

The spirit of questioning leads the protagonist in *Graven Images* into a journey. But for a few clues, some conjectures and a vision in a church, the protagonists' quest yields no result that can resolve the problem. The quest of William Kwame in *Coming Down From Wa* is similar, though his destination and object are different.

Like *Graven Images*, in *Coming Down from Wa* William tries to resolve the mystery that shrouds the life of his parents. Beneath the stretches of silence between the parents and their treating each other as strangers should be a factor hidden from his knowledge. William is certain that the alienating factor lies in the past his parents had spent in Africa. When the journey is at its end, he thinks he may not find the key to solve the mystery between his parents. The answer is what the mother has to reveal to William.

In *Blown Figures* Isobel, the protagonist, is also on a quest. She renounces her marital relationship and the immediate cultural milieu. She has somehow to get back the unborn baby, which is physically impossible. The aborted baby becomes a symbol of lost happiness, the
William in *Coming Down From Wa* succeeds in his quest only when aided by another character, who was a part of the mystery event. Isobel, in *Blown Figures*, finds herself in a continuous quest till the end of the novel. Efforts taken by Isobel fail to help her to come out of her alienated life and she has none else to guide her to the desired destination.

The second strategy adopted by the characters to overcome alienation is retrospection. Memories of past life, from childhood to adolescence, surface at present moments and exercise a cumulative or clarifying impact on the character at certain times in their lives.

Audrey Thomas uses longing memories of the past as a method of evaluating the individual's relationship with the present and nostalgia becomes a narrative technique. The movement backwards is both a medium of self knowledge and of confrontation with reality. Her protagonists, caught in the problematic present, try to resolve it by directing the nostalgic past towards it. Thus nostalgia is both a backward glance and a forward dynamics.
Memory of the past, in some way or the other, is thus used as an important narrative technique by Audrey Thomas. The characters grow and emerge and define themselves through this process of remembrance.

Memory repeats the incidents that occurred only once in the past in order to define the experience or state of mind of the character at the present moment. This is made obvious in the Isobel trilogy. The incident of Isobel's family driving towards the summer cottage of the grandfather which occurred in *Songs My Mother Taught Me* is recollected in both *Mrs. Blood* and in *Blown Figures*. She had been, as child Isobel, in a state of anxiety because her father was not an excellent driver. Even while they were on a journey they were not happy because of the unpleasant relationship between her parents. Whenever this particular incident returns to her mind later in her life, it is to dramatize the anxiety experienced at home much later as wife and the unpleasant relationship between her and her husband. Quarrels between her parents had created anxiety and a sense of homelessness in Isobel's mind and traces of this continue in the novels *Songs My Mother Taught Me*, *Mrs. Blood* and *Blown Figures*. The retrospective act puts Isobel's whole life against the perspective of early anxiety and it
makes her see her life as a continuum of frustration, uncertainty and rootlessness. But such retrospection does not hold any therapeutic value in the sense that it does not help her get free of the sense of alienation. Retrospection in such a case becomes obsessive repetition. It is not clarificatory or therapeutic.

Many parts of *Intertidal Life* reveal Alice’s imaginative powers, her wit, intellect and her ability to correct images. Her mind continually focusses on the insubstantial Peter and her relationship with him. *Intertidal Life* involves Alice’s plunge into her past in order to exorcize the pain caused by the breakdown of her marriage. Her goal is to reconstruct an identity for herself, which, while ameliorating the pain of the past, may be strong enough to make her face her threatening future.

As she reaches into her past, Alice begins to see how she had been an instrument instead of a free person. Unexamined motives and “unheard” words have been defining her. Both Alice and the diary writer and the third person narrator who hovers so close to Alice, frequently interrupt the narrative in order to ponder the words they have just used to record and describe: Alice does not, and at the given
Island. She had been under the illusion that her present is better than her past. Whereas, in reality, neither has been good.

Alice’s retrospection involves not only a discriminating search into her past, but also an act separating her past from the present, so that she can be freed of some of her pain. Alice contemplates her past while looking out at the dark sea. She examines the past, her failed marriage and lost friends in an attempt to come to terms with the sense of gloom which permeates her present life and darkens her future.

The narrators of the different novels are indeed haunted by similar memories and concerns. Isobel’s obsession centres on having been jolted by the first man she really loved and on a prolonged miscarriage suffered in a Ghana Hospital.

The remembrance of things past serves a double purpose in Audrey Thomas’s fiction. On the one hand, the deliberate memorizing of details first as a childhood habit and then as a writers’ trick of the trade would be a means of triumphing over time and alienation.

*Songs My Mother Taught Me, Mrs. Blood* and *Blown Figures* are held together by the repetition and expansion of the same moods and themes. In *Songs my Mother Taught Me* Isobel says: “... In school we
learned to conjugate the verb ‘to be’ Be / Is / Are / Was / Am / Being / Been” (100).

In Mrs. Blood, Thomas jumps ahead, perhaps, a decade and a half in Isobel’s life, leaving clues of memory, disappointment, and bitterness to link the anguished unnamed central woman of this novel to the energized Isobel of her earlier years.

Isobel’s attempt to exercise and recall her guilt over the miscarriage suffered in Mrs. Blood ranges from earliest memories of childhood, through sexual awakening, the introduction to hell in the insane ward of the State Hospital, unsatisfactory affairs, unsatisfying marriage and to West Africa and the present. Lying next to Jason, she wants him but feels guilty because she is pregnant. Sexuality has become associated with guilty feelings in her mind. She remembers her earlier relationships with Richard. But they are clouded with sentiment and a sense of guilt.

Richard is the most troublesome element to reconcile in her memory. Mrs. Blood remembers Richard making love to her and “. . . tries to imagine herself in his skin, experiencing her body” (17). Richard, who is at the heart of Mrs. Blood’s memories, is not so much present in
the narrative. Isobel’s memories of him make him a character in her life and in the narrative.

This obsession with Richard may be viewed as having as its source her memories of her childhood days charged with perpetual uncertainty “There are no victims ... life cannot rape” (91)

What she conjures up and fixes in her recollection is the smothering life of an unhappy family in upstate New York with the father unsuccessful as a breadwinner and in sex, and the mother, frustrated in her ambitions to power and wealth, vicariously living them out through her reluctant daughters. These memories seem to have given shape to her later uncertainties and anxiety. The sense of alienation runs through her whole life.

Living in her memories- from the earliest memories of childhood, early sexual desire and curiosity, work in the insane ward of the state hospital to the immediate past of her unsatisfying marriage and the present moment of her life in hospital - Mrs. Blood finds it difficult to overcome her alienation with guilt sitting at her heart. Memories of the aborted baby by Richard and the sense of having betrayed Jason make her remorseful. She resolves: “I will love him again when the
In Latakia, Rachel keeps a dream notebook and recognizes one of her dreams as a warning against her affairs with Michael. Whenever Michael is with Rachel, he treats Rachel as a substitute for his wife Hester. It shows his dishonesty. Rachel tries to analyse her relationship with Michael in her long love letter. She is haunted as much by her longing as by her memories. Her analytic writing is an attempt to overcome her alienation.

The strategy of retrospection may not be successful in all cases. It may help one to achieve integration with others but not with oneself. Retrospection may sometimes act as an agent provoking nostalgia. It may also result in shifting the blame on to others. Retrospection does not always resolve the problem of alienated existence in every character’s life.

In Audrey Thomas’ writing, past and present counterpoint each other. The past feeds the present, as it were, making it more meaningful or more dramatically void. It keeps surging back and forth, causing the character to suffer from a sense of failure and incompleteness. The present, in this case, is a static unrolling of the “posthumous” past. Isobel Cleary in Song My Mother Taught Me, becomes aware, through the psychological and narrative reconstruction of her yearly trips to Harry’s
cottage, of such trips’ deluding nature in contrast to what she later encounters in the asylum. Spatial and temporal distance grants her sight and lucidity. Similarly, the Isobel of Blown Figures recapitulates through her symbolic African journey the sum total of her errors, and the problem of her relationship with Jason. In particular, the narrator points out: “She did not rescue Jason/ kay, she merely joined him” (393). Rachel, in Latakia, puts down onto paper the story of her now terminated love affair and reflects on its meanderings.

The ability to make a resolve which, in cases like Isobel’s and Alice’s, requires retrospection, may help a character comprehend and face the condition of alienation. This ability, which is a mental faculty, springs from a retrospective understanding of the past and the patterns of one’s life in the past. This kind of retrospection has to be distinguished from a sentimental attachment to the past which precludes any therapeutic understanding of the past.

In Mrs. Blood, whenever Mrs. Blood reaches back to the moment in her life when she was rejected by Richard, she has a feeling towards Richard that is not the desperate love she had for him. However much she tries to avoid her memories of Richard and her painful experience
with him, she finds her mind reverting to Richard and his rejection of her.

In order to be free of this destabilizing retrospective journey, she resolves not to have the same experience again in her life and she tries her best to avoid the remembrance of her bad experience. But she is unable to master it because of her weakness. Her fatal flaw can be seen as the inability to control her dreams in the face of the reality around her. The dreams eventually possess her. The dreams of Mrs. Blood / Mrs. Thing distort the relationship. Her role with Jason is only as the mother of Jason and not as his wife. Mrs. Thing / Mrs. Blood do not make a whole, since, in either state, the central woman is reduced to a condition in which what she is trying to have but is lacking, is always the most prominent feature of her life.

In *Blown Figures* Isobel’s resolution to go on a journey is intuitively prompted by her resolution to regain the past which has taken so much of her with it. Africa can revitalize her and restore peace to her spirit, but Africa can do this only after Isobel prepares herself for her rebirth.

Isobel fails in her trial to overcome her alienation because, as a fretful traveller, she dislikes her fellow voyagers and is unable to move
with them freely. Though she seems to be free in her movement spatially, she does not succeed in liberating herself from her obsessive egocentric preoccupation and in reaching out to others. While the journey itself shows her resolve to quest after a dealienated existence, the process of the journey only shows how she has been irrevocably embedded in her bitter past.

In Munchmeyer and Prospero on the Island, Munchmeyer desires to be a writer but is aware of the fact he lacks the spark that alone can make one a writer. Yet he does not up writing. He later realizes that he is responsible for his own failure as artist (writer). Yet he blames his wife, deserts her and the children and wallows in self-pity despite the resolution he has taken. Unable to keep his resolution, he takes refuge, not like Mrs. Blood in the past, but in fantasy. He realises that even in fantasy he is unable to overcome or come out of his alienation. It is an evidence of his inability to maintain his resolution:

And so he settled into the upstairs suite, coffee with Maria in the mornings and the ...He got a student loan and a part-time job at a junior college down town and assured his thesis advisor that he was working
very hard and would have something too show
for it by Christmas. Meanwhile the pile of manuscript
grew tall like some exotic houseplant. He had
begun writing to Martha again, as well, because
the pain of their separation and the anguished
thought of Matt and the twins growing up and may
be someday not remembering him at all seemed
justified now that he was really a writer, . . .
and he told himself he was just lonely for a woman . . .
to hope he might see the Miracle Girl just one
more . . . (67 – 68).

In their effort to seek freedom, the characters may attempt to
terminate their existing relationships and this can be considered
another strategy adopted by the characters to overcome their alienation. The breaking down of existing relationships, separation, and the refusal to own responsibility for their family are components of the strategy by adopting which they hope to overcome their alienation.

In *Coming Down from Wa* William finds that there is no meaning in maintaining his formal and superficial relationship with his parents and
grandparents. When he says he is going to Africa on a research project, they suspect that his journey may have some other hidden reason. When he decides to go on his investigative mission he breaks his relationships with his ladylove (Chantal) temporarily. This suspension of togetherness, temporary though it is opted for in order to facilitate William’s single-minded focus on his mission and to make him progress unfettered towards the end of his quest. It is significant that Chantal agrees to suffer the temporary separation from William if that would help William in his quest.

Chantal did not believe in dwelling on the past: why spend All that energy looking backwards? And this wasn’t even his past.

"Part of it is".

"Well, Okey. Maybe a few months. But as for the rest..."

“All the more reason for us to be apart for a while”.

(CDW,27-28)

In *Intertidal Life*, Alice finds it hard to come out of the condition of despondence. Though she makes a resolution to free herself from the illusory hope that Peter might come back to her, she could not whole heartedly believe in her resolution. Far from freedom, it is the
monomanic preoccupation with thoughts about Peter that enslaves her to her past with Peter and makes it almost impossible for her to face and accept the present reality. As Wayne Grady (1985) points out that: "... surfeit of freedom may be said to be the most toxic carcinogen of the 20th century" (33).

One of the most painful aspects of Alice’s life is the gradual loss of supportive friendship, as each woman in turn is drawn into Peter’s orbit: “Peter was the sun, the hub around which first Alice, then Anna – Marie, then Penny, now Stella and Trudl, revolved. ‘Moon ladies’ (239). Later Alice suspects that she herself is added to Peter’s attraction when she glorifies him in her own mind and then to others. It is clear that for Alice woman’s friendship and love will never be a satisfying alternative to her love for and marital relationship with Peter. When Alice faces her uncertainty about the future, she wishes: “I wish he would come back” (80).

In Latakia, when Michael tries to break his relationship with Michael, Rachel argues for the differences in priorities between a man and a woman “A man’s first love is never his woman, but his work that is what he has been taught that is how he defines himself. ‘A wife’ was not supposed to be like that” (85). When the relationship between
those two writers, ceases, Rachel feels forlorn. Living together made impossible and separation being so painful, they are in a strange condition. Separation may spell freedom, but that freedom results in a painful reflective examination of their love and past togetherness. They resolve to separate and act on the resolution, though it is emotionally harder for Rachel to get free of her thoughts of Michael.

Termination of or feeling free from an existing relationship is seen as a major strategy adopted by the characters in their search for freedom. Curiously, freedom may take the form of escapism. The characters seem to feel that the spirit of alienation is too strong for them to negotiate. They just flee or wander about apparently with a purpose. Fleeing from their alienated lot and driven by anger, fear or anxiety, the characters resort to seeking an immediate, not ultimate, end to their present condition. The effort to escape the given condition may appear to be easy. But, escape is only a short-lived suspension of painful consciousness. A little later, pain returns with redoubled keenness and the character continues to be a victim of alienation.

In *Songs My Mother Taught Me*, the protagonist, who is almost a child, tries to devise her life in a new way to overcome the alienated condition of her life. She is not completely able to analyse her condition,
though she is aware of the factors that could be the causal factors. Hence, her efforts to overcome alienation do not seem to evolve into an effective strategy. Therefore, the means available to her is an escape from what she considers to be the cause of her anxiety. She eagerly awaits the regular journey to her grandfather’s, house. A little later, she willingly accepts a job in the asylum for people afflicted with psychological disorders. It is curious and ironic that in her effort to escape from the disintegrating home of her parents, she has voluntarily taken up a job in the insane ward, where each one she finds has a disintegrated psyche. Her devised escape is only an escape into another disintegrated world whose members, despite their extreme psychological condition, may be considered a reflection of her own parents:

I worked seven to three-thirty six days a week with the seventh off, so there was never any two-day stretch of the nothingness at home to cope with. When I did have a day off I slept late, read and sunbathed the rest of the day or went down to Joseph’s to try on smart, expensive clothes for all.
Nobody suggested I should contribute a penny
to the household. (SMTM, 146)

Isobel first tells the story of her nightmarish childhood and adolescence crippled by neurotic and incompetent parents then of her professional world in a real mad house and then of her adulthood sexual initiation and psychological freedom. It seems as if Isobel triumphs over her own alienation in the final scenes of the novel set in the asylum where she works. There she learns something of compassion and something of freedom which have been tormentingly absent from her and from her family.

In Blown Figures Isobel wanders in Africa. It is almost impossible for her to recover from her mourning over the lost baby. Though beyond recovery, the child is very much alive in the protagonist’s mind. The journey to Africa is just a temporary escape. Through and during her travel, she tries to build-up friendly relationships with other women and with new people. But they are only diversions and in her perpetual travel, they are only fleeting moments of escape from the haunting torment of alienation. The momentary escape may be considered more as a short-lived forgetting than as a victory in the struggle against alienation.
*Intertidal Life* is a novel about getting free from bonds and bounds. Some of Audrey Thomas’s characters are born free, some achieve freedom and some, like Alice, have freedom thrust upon them and, at that, a surfeit of freedom. Peter has left Alice and this means that she has actually been set free. The new world into which Alice and Flora, the third daughter of Alice, are moving is one in which women will be not only more independent in one sense but also emotionally bonded together in the strength of sympathy so that they could comfort one another in their journey through life:

"That’s not what I meant. You still have so much. Your writing, your children, this place, this property. And I would very much like to be your friend. May be we can be real friends now, in a way we haven’t been before". . . . “New beginnings are always hard. Please Alice, can’t we be friends?” (IL, 22).

Alice’s strong love for Peter makes it hard for her to accept the reality of her desertion by Peter. Alice and Peter had often felt trapped inside the family. Peter imposes separation on Alice and forces her to have freedom. Alice notes that she has failed to learn the act of utilizing
the freedom that has been thrust upon her by Peter. She decides to focus more on bringing up her daughters with love and on writing as an effort to understand and utilize the new situation in which she is free. Yet, she finds the situation and the process excruciatingly unwelcome because of her continuing bond of love for Peter. She finds herself caught in an indeterminate zone of existence despite all her resolution and efforts.

*Latakia* also presents a female protagonist who moves towards freedom and independence. It is about Rachel and her love affair with a man who has now left her. Written out of anger, resentment and longing, Rachel’s work is also a celebration of independence, which is not her absolute choice though.

Michael needs his wife, whereas Rachel experiences a double need - her independence and her maternal role. When it all goes wrong, Michael leaves Rachel and goes back to his wife who is teaching Art in Africa:

> . . . She has chosen you over the pursuit. Of her art. For me (Rachel), that is no longer a possibility. I want both (love and art), but I can’t give up the
second for the first. What is that thing by Byron?

'Love to man it is but a thing apart. 'Tis woman's whole existence' . . .(LK, 73)

All the protagonists seek independence positively, Isobel from her Parents and from her poor economic condition in Songs My Mother Taught Me, and Mrs. Blood from her husband in Mrs. Blood. Alice and Isobel establish themselves as individuals emerging from the condition of dependence to the state of independence in Intertidal Life and in Blown Figures. Rachel is somewhat similar to Alice and Isobel in this.

One of the major efforts made by the characters to overcome their alienation is that of writing. Unable to achieve a direct expression of their thought, they choose the way of indirect communication. But communication also breaks down as the writer's consciousness of the text itself shows an anxious growth. The character-narrator becomes highly conscious of the language in the novel and of the reader's perception of the language of fiction. Communication which might have had a therapeutic impact on the psyche of the protagonist-authors, turns into a consciousness of the text's potential to disturb their consciousness and to read in them the destabilising sense of authorial
inadequacy. As Joan Coldwell (1982) has remarked on Audrey Thomas’ view of writing as a therapy:

Audrey Thomas has acknowledged that writing about her own suffering is a form of therapy and that this very fact contributes to the strength of her work: “Goding back over my own works, I reread my first ‘real’ story, real because it had to be written, it seemed to be the only way I could organize the horror and utter futility.” (46)

The narrator, whether unnamed or named such as Isabel, Miranda, Mrs. Thing, Mrs. Blood, Rachel or Alice, may be considered as speaking in the authors’ own voice. Audrey has acknowledged that writing about her own experience / suffering is a form of therapy and that this very fact contributes to the strength of her works.

The remembrance of things’ past serves another thing in Audrey Thomas’s fiction writing. She tries to show that alienation, by itself, can never be a positive term, but must be complementary in combination with the self / the other, the inside / the outside, reality / illusion, isolation / community, the impersonal / the personal etc.
In *Mrs. Blood*, the narrator says, "I have memories, intact, like men in peat, to be found by a later me . . ." (33). The past is apprehended from Isobel’s present perspective. The focus shifts between the recent past of her marital relationship with Jason and her early student past with its troubling memories of Richard, her ex lover.

In *Latakia*, Rachel circles backward and forward. Her thoughts and feelings are recorded in a veritable labyrinth. These are notes towards a novel rather than the finished object itself. The threads of explanation and overcoming of alienation are left united:

The book I am working on now is about you and me
(of course) – or it started out that way . . . But there’s Crete and this village and this street and all that seems much more interesting than the story of how I fell in love with you and all the complications of the affair ... And so, I put my pen down and lay a big rock on the pages I have written so far (not many) and join the ladies . . . *(LK, 30)*.

Rachel struggles with her alienation, all the time hoping that literary writing may touch the reality of her divided existence.
Rachel incorporates material from her journal and the dreambook she has been keeping and she meanders through several narrative tenses, sketching in detail the history of her relationship from its beginning in a writing seminar. Rachel has been writing about herself and Michael from a specific perspective, which is also the self-defined unity at the end of the romance.

**Intertidal Life** involves Alice’s plunge into her past in order to exorcise the pain of the breakdown of her marriage:

... she tried talking about it in the third person. “Alice and Peter Hoyle were a happy married couple. A happy family just like the happy families in the card game except that there were three Misses Canada and no Master. But ever so happy. Everybody said so and everybody ought to know. When Alice’s friend Anne-Marie correction Alice and Peter’s friend Anne-Marie came to their house to visit she usually called up after she got home. In tears, “You are such a happy family...” (JL, 26).
Her aim is to reconstruct for herself a new identity that will wrest her from the hold of alienation. Her painful experience in the past gives her the strength to face the failure in her life. Alice can articulate both her emotions and this kind of analysis in her writing. She writes about marriage disintegration, human relations and how woman copes with her alienation. This is also a part of the artist as mother who experiences different difficult relationships with her creation.

Alice’s thoughts and writing try to retell what is in her mind. The burden of the heart will be healed when and if the proposed novel unburdens the complexities of her mind. To understand herself better, she has to release the burden of her mind in writing. Thus writing has the potential to liberate her from her own condition of alienation.

Trying to put life in a new perspective, both Rachel and Alice appear burdened throughout the text. This points to the violent breakdown of relationship in their life. Rachel and Alice are writers who try to come to terms through their books with the fact that they have been rejected by men who had loved and failed them. The process of writing becomes a means of auto-therapy.

In *Graven Images*, Charlotte, a travel writer turned novelist, travels around in her past to overcome her alienation. She delights in the
dexterity of her mind and pen. A travel writer who is beginning to tire of travel, Charlotte hopes to write a novel with her gift as a travel writer. She writes quite well to set the scenes through which she tries make her way out of her alienation. In Blown Figures Isobel keeps a journal. Some of her journal entries are directly recorded in the book. The journey to Africa itself is an existential and psychological exercise to freshen up the protagonist and it is thought that this exercise will help the protagonist reach out of her alienated condition.

In Munchmeyer and Prospero on the Island, Munchmeyer, a modern technical writer, is pretending to write a novel in the first part but is in fact writing his diary "as though it were a novel" (5). He also feels uncomfortable and frustrated about keeping a diary which he considers a "female tendency" (8).

A victim of alienation, Munchmeyer waits impatiently to become a novelist. "I confessed to myself, in shame, that I would never be a poet. Fame had been my mistress not truth"(8). He knows that he is responsible for his own failure as artist. Yet he shifts the cause of his failure on to his wife, and deserts her. He also blames his children, and, perhaps, luxuriates in self-pity. Unable to confront his circumstances, he takes refuge in his fantasy. And this, ironically, strongly underlines how
own existence has been removed from what is around him and what is within him.

In *Prospero on the Island*, Miranda is writing a novel about Munchmeyer. She has the resources to complete it. She responds to changes of weather as well as to variations in the appearance of the sea and the landscape. All these qualities are signs of her control and self-possession which make her capable of creation. At the same time, she realizes that the present may be futile: "So we must starve and paint or starve and write or starve and sculpt, and when we’re dead, you’ll call us ‘artist?’" (148). But this awareness does not make her become sentimental or bitter-hearted.

Munchmeyer’s narrative is chronological throughout the three parts. Miranda is also intending to write a novel. The novel in the novel, the narrator seeing herself in her creation, is a process for revealing the hidden treatment for her alienation. But Will is unable to maintain the separation of life and art. His failure to circumscribe and fix life is revelatory of the truth of his failure to overcome his alienation through writing.

Thus, this chapter has examined the attempts made by the characters to overcome the disruptive force of alienation in their lives. In
order to triumph over alienation and counter its ruinous impact, they adopt certain modes of response. Such response like questioning, retrospection (recollection), quest for freedom and new connection, new resolutions and communication with oneself and others through writing have been discussed in the chapter. These strategies responses have been examined in relation to the success or failure of the characters in overcoming the alienated condition of their life.