Chapter IV

Abstract Masculinity in Edward and Patricia
As a member of the Tish group, Frank Davey as a poet has chosen to leave “open”, which implies that his writing privileges “cultural or literary disunity” (Blodgett 1991: 137) and his writing reflects strategies of disjunction and multiplicity. His poetry identifies itself with such writing, which has not descended from Renaissance but utters the ‘authentic’ and hence no frame of reference can be legitimized. ‘Edward and Patricia’ can be read as ‘auto-referential’ metafiction, where there is no fixed frame of reference and on the surface the text appears to be narcissistic as reflected in the dialogue between the two protagonists in the poem. The poem can also be located within the tradition of poetry, which Eli Mandel in his essay, ‘The Post-Structural Scene’ has described as the “history of resentment” (Mandel 1980: 82) and hence Davey can been described as “an antithetical writer, defining his views in the negative by a kind of dialectical process” (Mandel 163).

Davey’s essay, ‘Surviving the Paraphrase’ (1976) is an attempt to explore the cultural icons and thereby undermine cultural stability which accompanies these icons. Davey’s poetics has influenced his long poem ‘Edward and Patricia’, which can be read as an attempt to “link the reproduction of writing with materiality by constructing a theory of genre-writer/text/reader interaction-out of the criticism of thematic interpretation” (Hunter 1991: 149). It is also an attempt to write within an “economic materialism” (Hunter 149) recognizing the historical conditions which influence the making and distribution of books. The attempt is to “find a story adequate to the construction of the subject and its contingent materiality within ideology” (Hunter 149). Hence the long poem under consideration has no commanding voice and the
protagonists are located within the ideology, which Davey has described as “agents of homogenizing commercialism” (Davey quoted in Blodgett 135) and will challenge the “commodity status of knowledge” (Davey quoted in Blodgett 135). The text then is “that site of conflict-history, class relationships, economy, politics, sexuality-is a text of competing discourses” (Blodgett 134).

Gender in the text has been constructed discursively across a spectrum of multiple realities.

As Teresa de Lauretis has argued:

.... different and heterogeneous and multiple realities, meaning, knowledges, biologies, bodies and subjectivities constitute the technologies of gender and sexuality producing and reproducing constructions, fictions with the potential power of the truth effects of representation. These are socio-cultural practices, the discourses and the institutions, devoted to the production of woman and men, producing in the subject those meaning effects and self-representations which constitute the embodied, lived experience of gender and sexuality.

(Threadgold 1990: 33-34)

The chapter will examine the construction of masculinity and femininity in Frank Davey’s long poem Edward and Patricia (1984) corresponding to dominant practices in the capitalist market driven society. The poem reflects a particular construction of masculinity based on ideals of construction of rationalization of the market:
In a capitalist society, the effective pursuit of profit through increase productivity is only possible, when there is a corresponding increase in consumption. This may be achieved through expansion of the available market. More characteristically, however, it is achieved through an intensification of consumption. Thus, complementary to the pursuit of power for its own sake is the drive towards increased consumption. Just as the former is conceived as insatiable, so too are the consumption needs of the individual. These come to be directed not at specific object of consumption but at the act of consumption itself. Wants of kind are insatiable, and the attempt to satisfy them involves the on unending repetition of acts of consumption.

(Poole 1990: 51)

Edward and Patricia’s repeated sexual behaviour is in consonance with the larger capitalist society, where desires are insatiable. The construction of their desire reflects the larger consumer culture where a sense of distorted manhood prevails. Edward tries to play the Superman and this façade of masculinity has been created as a solace from the public world marked by alienation. As Sheila Rowbotham in her book Woman’s Consciousness Man’s World (1973) argues:

The family as a place of retreat and sexuality as a means of release become increasingly important as compensatory ideals, as capitalism makes both retreat and release impossible within the world of work --- in need of protection from different circumstance --- men combine to secure their sanctuary.

(Rowbotham 1973: 53)
The poem reflects the separation of male/female roles in materialistic and ideological terms necessary for capitalist made of production:

Men and women are brought up for a different position in the labour force: the man for the world of work, the woman for the family. This difference in the sexual division of labour in society means that the relationship of man as a group to production is different from that of women. For a man the social relations and values of commodity production predominate and home is a retreat into intimacy.

(Rowbotham 61)

The section titled ‘Edward and Patricia Live Happily’ is a reflection of family as a site of containment:

Now Edward reads stories of shipwrecks and drownings. Patricia organizes her collection of McCall’s patterns. Edward look for bronze bookend at antique shops.

.....Edward buys a Taleriz prayer rug,

a Lebanese hookah at the auction,

& decorates, he says,

the spare room.

(Davey 1984: 16)
The home as a site of alternative human relations has been invaded by culture of market as the poem reflects and hence the relationship between the two protagonist assumes a “mawkish guise”:

The family is a place of sanctuary for all hunted, jaded, exhausted sentiments out of place in commodity production. Chased out of the dominant mode of production where there is no room for emotion, such characteristics as love, tenderness and compassion assume mawkish guise from confinement. The family is thus in one sense the dummy ideal, the repository of ghostly substitutes, emotional fictious which dissolve into cloying sentimentalism.

(Rowbotham 59)

The section titled ‘Patricia’s Bottom’ illustrates Patricia’s guilt for having failed to live up to her ideological role in the family:

“He just threw the chair,
I’d been out late, she said
‘It makes me feel so bad.’ She said
I’d like to do something for him. May be surprise him.
On his birthday some year with a white Thunder bird’
she said

(Davey 31)

The sections titled ‘Edward plays Santa’ reflects the construction of family as an ideological smokescreen to preserve masculine cultural hegemony and the construction of sexuality reflect the contradictions:
sexual love has assumed immense significance in containing many aspects of social relation incompatible with the work discipline of commodity production. Here lurk affection, tenderness passion, violence, satisfaction, fulfillment, excitement, imagination, religion, madness, fantasy, beauty, sensation, cruelty, transcendence, communion, escape, weighed down with such an intolerable state of affairs else where, sexuality has been incapable as the family of providing a genuine alternative to the wasteland --- Not surprisingly it has assumed bizarre and distorted forms under the prevailing production for private profit.

(Rowbotham 111)

The construction of masculinity and femininity is within the “heterosexual matrix” (that grid of cultural intelligibility through which bodies, genders, and desires are naturalized) and retains its dominance” (McRobbie 2005: 70):

Edward for reciting from memory

Toward the Last Spike and Patricia

for growing the longest legs

in the history of grade 8

‘Gee what a brain’, they said as he walked
to his locker. ‘Hey Legs,’ they called

as she sauntered by in her just fabulous Burnt Ember nylons.

(Davey 1)
The poem brings out the political economy culture of new capitalism, which as Fredic Jameson has pointed out is clean, shiny and post industrial and it convinces the First World citizens that class society is a thing of the past. Connected with this is construction of the female body mimicking this cultural ideal of commodification embedded within a history of male gaze. In the text Patricia is watching herself and is also being looked at by Edward desiring to be queen of hearts. As John Berger argues:

Men look at women, women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves.

(Wykes & Gunter 2005:30)

Women not only see themselves in terms of male gaze but also participate in the images created about her. Patricia will always remain “Eddie’s Skinny Little Princess”:

I can’t help who I am

I try hard’, she said Edward nodded

‘You are sweetie. I like you the way you are.

You’re Edde’s skinny little princess.

(Davey 12)

The act of looking is central to understanding the gendered representations offered to create meaning for the gendered representation to be meaningful it has to be located within the discourse shared by the subject/viewer’s ‘meaning experiences’.
In gendered terms, the historiography of these meaning experiences is embedded within a history of male power to define and to objectify, and a history of female subjugation and objectification. Woman has been represented as ‘Other’ than man, but also represented by man for man and represented for herself through his eyes.

(Wykes & Gunter 39)

Patricia’s femininity has often been presented as infantalized femininity. This representation emphasizes one of the many profound contradictions in the category of ‘Woman’:

For ‘womanhood’ is an ostensibly adult status, and yet the heterosexually attractive woman is frequently childlike dependent and passive. Cultural representation of this perversely infantilised femininity, of this diminutive child-woman --- add to the discursive production of woman as inferior.

(Wykes & Gunter 46-47)

The presentation of a desirable self – image is a part of this configuration as reflected in the section titled ’Edward Turns Left’:

All women modify, some morph and some mutilate in the effort to define themselves- all --- are subjects to the same pressures and so to some extent --- women suffer as subjects of social construction.

(Wykes & Gunter 52)

The body emerges as the site of the construction of ideology of femininity and this ideology demands that woman be sexual, independent and careerist as Patricia has
been presented and still be childlike, docile maternal and be always young, thin and beautiful. As Warner has described:

The female form metamorphoses from one sign into another, and this flux of signs, each succeeding generation variations on the ancient topic, is accepted as a sequence of statements of the truth. The body is still the map on which we mark our meanings, it is chief among metaphors used to see and present ourselves, and in the contemporary profusion of imagery, from news, photography to advertising to fanzines to pornography, the female body recurs more frequently than any other: men often appear as themselves, as individuals but woman attest the identity and value of someone or something else, and the beholders reaction is necessary to complete their meaning, to find the pin-up sexy, to desire the product the housewife poses to vaunt. Meanings of all kinds flow through the figures of women and they often do not include who she is herself.

(Wykes & Gunter 62)

The fetishization of the body is "not just a legacy of vertical history of depicting femininity that pre-empts reading and acceptance but the cumulative impact of horizontal intertextuality. Each representation is placed in conjunction with others to form a feminine syntagm, composite, complaint woman, who when meeting the cultural ideal is then placed in a situation of tutelage very often involving buying a better version of herself" (Wykes & Gunter 207-8).
The construction of Patricia is in accordance with the shift brought about in women’s position in advanced capitalist societies whereby women are not mere housewives but have entered the job market and this in turn sets into play contradictory discourses:

Woman have the right to work and to be sexual , but ultimately in order to construct themselves as desirable to men --- the model of woman featured and the manner of her featuring is consistent with quite conservative masculine ideals of feminine desirability. So women’s sexuality and earning power are extolled, satisfying the liberated sensibilities of the female audience, but they are harnessed to the twin interests of patriarchy and capital.

(Wykes & Gunter 211)

The text illustrates this paradigm:

Edward leaves for work at the library
Patricia leaves for work at the Hydro.
Edward marks book d catalogs;
Patricia makes file cards
for electric recipes, some nights they go out.

(Davey 16)

Male sexuality in the poem is linked to the socialization process where “boys learn that having sex with a woman is a central aspect of being masculine. It is an important means of proving themselves as ‘real men’ with all the privileges, status and
rewards that implies. In this sense, power and domination are central to the current construction of male sexuality” (Richardson 1993:84-5):

Edward look at her knee
on the counter and knew at once
that he wanted something from Patricia
but wasn’t sure what it
was and so offered her a
ride back to the city. Patricia
thought she knew what he wanted
but wondered how he would try to get it.

(Davey 1)

The text brings the association of sexuality with power and violence. Sexuality has been defined as a social and historical consciousness and the text brings out the manner in which contemporary Western culture has shaped sexuality. As Nancy C. M. Hartsock in her book Money Sex and Power (1983) argues:

There is a surprising degree of consensus that hostility and domination, as opposed to intimacy and physical pleasure are central to sexual excitement.

(Hartsock 1983: 157)

The work of Robert Stroller outlines the “mechanisms that construct sexual excitement rest .... most fundamentally on fetishization and on the dehumanization and objectification of the sexual object. And these are associated with debasement of the object and the construction of mystery, risk illusion and a search for revenge”
Robert Stoller notes that despite our dismay at formulations “these practices are so ubiquitous that they have been enshrined in ordinary language” (Hartsock 157) and in each case human reality is reduced to the most mechanical dimension. The section in the poem titled’ Edward Has Too Much’ bring out the fetishization of human body and bring out the manner in which people are treated as “though they were only organs or function” (Hartsock 157) Sexuality described in the poem is masculine sexuality that does not describe or express the lives of women. Historically the place of Eros in the western civilization is not in public but in the private arena. According to Freud civilization depends on pleasure taking pathological forms and then sublimation is possible. Freud argues for repressed sublimation through work. He argues:

Work is no less valuable for the opportunity it provides, and the human relations connected with it provide for a very considerable discharge of libidinal component impulses, narcissistic, aggressive and even erotic then because it is indispensable for subsistence and justifies existence in a society ---.

(Hartsock 167)

The alterative has been suggested by Herbert Marcuse, where the possibility of non-repressive sexuality has been proposed, which in turn implies a re-working of masculine sexuality associated with work in a liberatory direction. He argues:

Sexuality would not be blocked or deflected from its object, but rather, in attaining its object, transcends it to others, under these conditions --- sexuality could tend to grow into a cross in a broader sense through what he terms as the
re-sexualizing of work --- this may become a real possibility thus eroticizing the body as a whole.

(Hartsock 167-8)

However in a capitalist economy each aspect of Eros takes a repressive rather than liberatory form and the “desire for fusion with another can take the form of domination of the other. Sensuality and bodily pleasures can be denied and the third aspect of eros, creativity and generation, can also take forms of domination both in the world of work, where creative activity becomes alienated labour or in reproduction in which the creation of new life becomes either disembodied or recast as death” (Hartsock 168). The poem in the form of parody brings out the manner in which the dearth of any creative activity in the lives of the protagonists results in their entrapment is a sterile situation. Sections titled ‘Queen of Hearts’ and ‘Edward Has Too Much’ brings out the spiritual poverty in their lives, and their location within a masculine culture.

Fetishing the body which is important to this masculine ideology operates here in even more harmful and direct ways than in fetishism of commodities:

--- life and movement are attributed to things, these living beings are made into things --- in the community constructed by a masculine eros, the will of the other must be conquered and destroyed over and over again.

(Hartsock 177)

The masculine world view initiated with the boy’s construction of self in opposition to unity with the mother sets a “hostile and combative realism at the heart
of both the community men construct and the masculinist world view by means of
which they understand their lives” (Hartsock 240). And hence masculine and not
feminine experience and activity is replicated in the functioning of institutions of the
society. The institutions are hierarchical and dualist in nature and has influenced the
construction of sexuality in Western societies. The masculinist world which
constructed the self in opposition to other reverberates throughout the society and the
masculinist world view is privileged over the feminine view point:

First the man’s experience is characterized by the duality of concrete versus
abstract. Material reality as experienced by the boy in the family provides no
model and is unimportant in the attainment of masculinity. Nothing of value to
the boy occurs within the family, and masculinity becomes an abstract ideal to
be achieved over the opposition of daily life. Masculinity must be attained by
means of opposition to the concrete world of daily life, by escaping from
contact with the female world of the household into the masculine world of
politics or public life. This experience of two worlds, one valuable, if abstract
and deeply unattainable, the other useless and demeaning, if concrete and
necessary lies at the heart of a series of dualisms--- abstract/concrete mind/body,
culture/nature, ideal /real, statis/change. And these dualisms are overlaid by
gender, only the first of each pair is associated with the male. Dualism, along
with the dominant of one side of the dichotomy over the other, marks
phallocentric society and social theory.

(Hartsock 241)
Women too have to participate and seek their identities by participating in the social structures which are based on abstract masculinity and the destructiveness brought on account of this abstract masculinity is concealed in ideology, which in turn creates gendered subject positions which are static. Both Edward and Patricia reflect the social relations based on these networks of power and gender and the repetitive nature of the poem is also the translation of the distress in the lives of the protagonists.

The construction of ideology of abstract masculinity is also related to Max Weber’s theory of ‘rationalization’, which implies that “individuals in carrying out their daily lives must subordinate their activities to the logic of the institutional frame work within which they exist.” (Poole 55)

The construction of abstract masculine subject brought into existence through the resolution of Oedipal situation is a vulnerable one. Not only the masculine self reassures himself by operating in the public sphere but it also tries to evoke a world to engulf the self and then consumption is the way out:

It is an activity which both affirms the self and which negates otherness. But it is a form of consumption which is literally infinite in scope, since it must take everything which is not the self as a potential object. A complementary strategy involves bringing the externality under control: it involves the quest, not for consumption, but for power.

(Poole 56)

The other threat to the masculine subject is the attraction to the feminine:
If it was the repudiation of the mother which allowed entry into masculine subjectivity, this repudiation is never in practice complete. --- This emerges most clearly in the domain of erotic love, and encapsulates in the problem of heterosexuality.

(Pool e 56)

Therefore within the ideology of the abstract masculinity, femininity has been constructed “as exclusion from the ideals of reason. It is constructed, not through abstraction and separation, but through relationships. To be a woman is to exist within specific activities with respect to those others’ It is to be wife, mother, nurturer and so on” (Poole 54). The construction of infantile femininity as mentioned earlier is also an extension of this ideology.

Fetishism which as mentioned earlier is central to the relationship between Edward & Patricia, whereby intimacy has been replaced with objectification and converges with the repudiation of femininity:

--- fetishism avoids confronting the will by fantasizing the other as a thing rather than a human being, treating a body part as a substitute for the person, or even dispensing with the human being together. Woman’s “thing ness can also be created through her reduction to an image

(Hartsock 170)

The dynamics of abstract masculinity based on control and fetishization are both well illustrated in the closing scene of the poem, where Patricia has been controlled, mastered and humiliated. The dynamic of conquest and the thrill of overcoming
resistant will have been epitomized in the chaos which greets Patricia, who looks forward to intimacy and fusion with each other:

Towels,
broken glass, their Pencrest sheets, her
porcelain dogs,
hers cosmetics, pieces of their water color
portrait
covered the floor
‘Your ARE a whore’ said the lipstick scrawl
on the dresser mirror.

(Davey 39)

The symbolic murder of Patricia highlights the dualism which is at the heart of logocentric structure, where the masculine self maintains itself by annihilating the feminine other. Activity of this nature, “which form the basis of abstract masculinity, exposes this ideology as fundamentally perverse. The perverseness is reflected not only in reversal of human relationship but also in the substitution of death for life” (Hartsock 243). Woman is the ‘Other’ who has to be vanished and conquered since she is perceived as a threat to the masculine order.

Body / bodies emerges as a site of psychic inscription of the prevailing ideology and the body is regimented, confined, constrained, supervised through cultural norms and commitments and the process entails “voluntary inscriptions by lifestyle, habits and behaviours” (Grosz 65):
There is nothing natural or a priori about these modes of corporeal inscriptions: through them, bodies are marked so as to make them amenable to the prevailing exigencies of power. They make the body into a particular kind of body — pagan, primitive, medieval, capitalist, Italian, American, Australia

(Grosz 65)

The messages coded on the body can be read within a particular social system of organisation and meaning. In the poem Patricia’s body is the bearer of collective sign of abstract masculinity and hence emerges as a ‘mediated body’ reflecting the functioning of grids of power and regulations.

‘Hey Legs,’ they called
as she sauntered by in her Just
Fabulous Burnt Ember nylons.

(Davey 1)

The poem presents the construction of masculinity and femininity within the ideological matrix of capitalism and abstract masculinity. Edward and Patricia’s negotiations as they conspire with each other to inscribe themselves with the existing hegemonic ideological structures reflect the functioning of ideological apparatus like family, marriage and market. The ending of the poem does not resolve the ideological contradictions and the stalemate reflects the ensnarement and tyranny of prevailing ideology.