Chapter II

Unstable Sign: Transgressions in Albertine in Five Times
Interrogation of gender construction is a political project which seeks to explore the female voice in the text, which deviates from prescribed course and “becomes symptoms of a double impasse that of ‘his story’ and of ‘her story’ ” (Smart 1991:17). The play to begin with exemplifies a truth “which has traditionally led male author to assume patriarchal rights of ownership over the female characters they engrave upon the infinite Table of the Words” (Gilbert and Gubar 1979:12) and the paradox of the metaphor of literary paternity that an author both generates and imprisons his fictive creations by silencing them and depriving them of autonomy even as he gives them life. The play which chronicles the life of Albertine begins with the romantic Albertine at 30 in 1942, then to Albertine at 40 in 1952 who is bitter and angry, to Albertine at 50 in 1962 who believes that she has freed herself from patriarchal domesticity to Albertine at 60 who is guilt ridden to the last image of Albertine at 70 in 1982 who has made peace with her male creator and “has just arrived at the home for the elderly” (Tremblay 1986: 7). Albertine at 70 within this paradigm represents the “angel in the house”; while Albertine at 40 comes close to the “monster image”, Gilbert and Gubar have described the “angel in the house” as representing closure, while the monster image represents monstrous autonomy.

In this play Albertine at 30 will initiate the movement towards monstrous autonomy and hence the will to “look for a third choice” (Tremblay 59) although the third choice will remain unrealized. The stable feminine sign, in this elaborate typology constituted by variations in feminine role, is the character of Madeleine. She will inhabit male defined role throughout the play and ironically will be the confidante of
all the Albertines. The construction of Madaleine comes close to the vision of the “magnified image of the mother that inhabits the collective unconscious” (Smart 12) and the image of the “Eternal feminine” (Smart 12). Associated with these images are the attributes of passivity, complete lack of any generative power and being self-less, which is also to be dead. In the play Madeleine is the dead sister, who represents “not just an acquiescence in death by the selfless, but also a secret striving for power by the powerless”(Gilbert & Gubar 25). Her construction defies her portrayal as a victim of patriarchal domesticity and in the narration she will function to reduce the ambivalence in the relation between a male author and his female characters:

Madeleine: --- I don’t --- May be I’m content with very little, may be my happiness is trite and insignificant,

but --- Silence. It’s funny --- I don’t care. I think --- I think I’d rather be happy in my own modest way than spend my life living some grand tragedy ---

(Tremblay 62)

However the play’s dynamic tension results from the contradiction inherent in the construction of the ‘female’ in the play represented in the play through Albertine at different stages.

The first image which presents itself outside the enclosure of logocentric culture and male power is that of Albertine at 40, who represents the ‘hysterical woman’ who challenges the coherence of the text. Her voice is a multi-voiced one, containing enormous, but repressed power suggestive of all the ‘feminine’ power held in thrall by the patriarchal culture and on the verge of exploding:
Albertine at 40: Baloney! You all decided long ago I wasn’t intelligent. Just because I don’t understand things your way doesn’t mean I’m not intelligent. There’s more than one kind of intelligence, you know. The rest of you --- you’re intelligent with your heads but you refuse to accept that someone can be --- I don’t know how to say it, Madeleine --- With me it’s not my head that works, it’s --- it’s my instincts, I guess. I know I do things without thinking, but I’m not always wrong, am I? Even since I was a kid people give me these funny looks whenever I open my mouth because I say what I think ---- You condemn what I say, but you don’t hear yourselves! You ought to use your heads less and your hearts more. And you never listen to me! The minute I open my mouth I get this look of contempt that’s so insulting! You’re so convinced I’m a jerk you don’t even listen to me any more.

(Tremblay 28-9)

The monologue brings in the female perspective and ushers in a gynocentric point of view to unmask the patriarchal construction of meaning and signals the production of new meaning. This female voice hidden at the unconscious level of the text emerges and contradicts the apparent intention of the author. This voice expresses itself through all the ‘otherness’ that the dominant text needs to control namely the repressed elements in female experience. There is resistance to her construction as the ‘Woman Object’ “to serve as a reflection and a support for masculine subjectivity” (Smart 6) and hence her problematic relationship with the symbolic order. Her monologue lacks the masculine coherence and articulates an alternative vision – that of
a woman aspiring to autonomy which Albertine as 50 will partly fulfill. She speaks and in-spite of the paternal censorship represented in the play by Madeleine and by Albertine a[70]. Her emphasis on ‘instincts and hearts’ can be read as an attempt to move beyond binary mode of thinking. There is a desire to break free of the Law perceived by her as linear and logocentric and an identity that is closed and “distanced from what it perceives as other” (Smart 9). The monologue initiates the movement towards “texture” as opposed to “the Law” Patricia Smart has defined ‘texture’ as writing, the density of which “resists closure within the sign, the gestures, rhythm, and silences that underlie language and that speak in the gaps between the words.” (Smart 9). Luce Irigaray in her essay ‘This Sex Which Is Not One’ describes:

Woman’s desire would not be expected to speak the same language as man’s, woman’s desire has doubtless been submerged by the logic that has dominated the West since the time of Greeks.

(Irigaray 1997:364)

Altertine at 40 is a creation located within the Law of the Father and she tries to break free of what Irigaray has described as ‘phallomorphism’, the construction of the hysterical woman begins, who will challenge the coherence of the text:

Madeleine: What do you expect? You are impossible! We cannot say a word to you, you start swinging, you don’t think.

(Tremblay 29)

She will try to fight back patriarchal socialization which makes woman sick both physically and mentally. As Gilbert & Gubar have observed, “It is debilitating to
be any woman in a society where women are warned that if they do not behave like angels they must be monsters ---, social scientists and social historians --- have begun to study the ways in which patriarchal socialization literally makes woman sick, both physically and mentally --- Such diseases are caused by patriarchal socialization in several ways. Most obviously, of course, any young girl but, especially a lively or imaginative one, is likely to experience her education in docility, submissive, selflessness in some sense sickening. To be trained in renunciation is almost necessarily to be trained in ill health, since the human animals first and strongest urge is to his/her own survival, pleasure, assertion”(Gilbert & Gubar 53-4). Albertine at 40 is alone in the play and her alienation results from the fact that she lacks a ‘context’ since there are no other voices in her milieu that could sustain her in her perception.

The influence of dominant culture and ideology is simultaneously heard in the text and Albertine at 60 will be haunted by the memory of the death of her daughter:

Albertine at 60: One morning the police knocked on the door --- I was getting ready to go to work....... I was singing --- right away I knew something had happened to Therese --- And the world came crashing down on my shoulders --- I asked myself is this where my life was leading? Is this the price I had to pay for a few year of peace? Is this the outcome --- here today? Did I bring her to this --- my daughter --- Who I never knew how to manage? Or is it just to punish me? And for what?

(Tremblay 71)
Albertine at 30 will try to articulate the feminine voice which patriarchy has rendered invisible:

Albertine at 30: I have this huge force inside me, Madeleine I have a power in me that scares me. Silence. To destroy. Silence. I did not ask for it. It’s there. If I had not been so miserable, I might have forgotten it ---.

(Tremblay 36)

Albertine at 30 and Albertine at 40 will claim femininity as a position. Julia Kristeva claims femininity as a position which has been marginalized by the patriarchal symbolic order. Toril Moi in her essay, ‘Feminist, Female, Feminine’ argues:

Kristeva’s emphasis on femininity as a patriarchal construct enables feminists to counter all forms of biologic attack from the defenders of phallocentrism. To posit all woman as necessarily feminine and all men as necessarily masculine is precisely the move which enables the patriarchal power to define not femininity, but all woman as marginal to the symbolic order and to society. If as, Cixous has shown, femininity is defined as lack, negativity, absence of meaning, irrationality, chances, darkness in-short as non being Kristeva’s emphasis on marginality allow us to view this repression of the feminine in terms of positionality rather than of essences. What is perceived as marginal at any given time depends on the position one occupies.

(Moi 1989: 127)
Therefore Albertine at 70 occupies the ‘masculine’ position, while Albertine at 30 and 40 occupies the ‘feminine’ position:

Albertine at 30: The sun dropped like a rock behind the mountains --- Just before it disappeared the birds, stopped singing. Completely. It was like everything not just me, was watching the sun go down. In silence.

Albertine at 70: You talk funny ---

(Tremblay 11)

The older Albertine often fails to comprehend her younger self and perceives for her self through patriarchal gaze where there is “repressive systematization” (Felman 1989 : 136) of otherness:

Albertine at 70: You do not have to talk badly, that’s not what I said --- But may be you’re right --- I was brought up to think that everything about be was so ugly I am amazed to hear I said something beautiful.

(Tremblay 13)

Albertine at 30 as mentioned earlier occupies the feminine position also a marginalized centre. The language of feeling, her language can only ally itself with insanity, an insanity which displayed in writing produces imaginative excess where structures are shaken. The margin is suddenly brought into focus and reveal the condition of possibilities which exist within the writing of the text and the play opts for openness:

Albertine at 30: --- but there are time --- times when I feel ..... this rage, yes, rage, Madeleine. I’m crazy with rage. Silence. She lifts her arm a bit, look ---
the size of that sky. That whole sky couldn’t contain my rage. Silence. If I could explode, Madeleine --- but I’ll never explode --- Not after what I did to Therese. I’m too scared.

(Tremblay 36)

Within this monologue, many voices are heard permeated with traces of other viewpoints. Her utterance articulates her resistance to masculine models and the need to explore an inner space of female experience and this need is accompanied with tension, self-doubt and rage against the order which has trapped her. However Therese as a sign has been invoked by the male author to defend existing structures. The third space mentioned by Albertine at 30 as an alternative remains on the periphery.

Bakhtin’s notion of the ‘double voiced’ expressed in the essay ‘Discourse in the Novel’ helps us understand this monologue:

It serves two speakers at the same time and expresses simultaneously two different intentions: the direct intention of the character who is speaking and the refracted intention of the author. In such discourse there are two voices, two meanings and two expressions.

(Allen 2000: 29)

Bakhtin explains the ‘double voiced discourse’ as:

any concrete discourse (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualification, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist – or, on the contrary, by the line of alien words that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled shot
through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents and weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from other, intersects with a third group and all this may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile.

(Allen : 28)

The monologue has both the centre and the margin competing with each other to create a fixed centre.

Albertine at 40, more than Albetine at 30 provides a critique of the construction of the woman located within the ideology of patriarchal domesticity. Shoshana Felman in her essay ‘Woman and Madness : The Critical Phallacy’ brings out the manner in which ‘female psychology’ is conditioned by an oppressive and patriarchal culture. Quoting from Phyllis Chesler’s book Woman and Madness she mentions, “It is clear that for a woman to be healthy she must adjust to and accept the behavioral roles of her sex even though these kinds of behaviour are generally regarded as less socially desirable --- The ethic of mental health is masculine in our culture. The sine qua of ‘feminine’ identity in patriarchal society is the violation of the incest taboo i.e. the initial and continue preference of daddy, followed by the approval falling in love and/or marrying of powerful father figures. From her initial family upbringing throughout her subsequent development the social role assigned to the woman is that of serving an image, authoritative and central, of man: a woman is first and foremost a daughter / a mother/ a wife. What we consider madness --- is acting out of the devalued
female role or the total or partial rejection of one’s sex-role violation” (Felman 1989: 134).

The representation of Albertine is one of the contested sites, since at one level the text tries to create a transparent situation where each signifier corresponds adequately and properly with the signified and there is an attempt to do away with difference and establish some design of mastery and sense of control as reflected in the character of Albertine at 60 and Albertine at 70. The constant presence of Madeleine represents a subtle mechanism whereby masculine and feminine polarity gets consolidated. Albertine at 30 and Albertine at 40 are not sites of containment and bring out the construction of gendered identity by repressing desires which are culturally unacceptable. Stephen Heath mentions that it is the inscription of feminist subject in texts that determines the potential radicalness of the text and not the author’s biological sex, since stereotypical codes and patriarchal images are used by male and female authors alike. Albertine at 30 and Albertine at 40 representing the feminist viewpoint also help to understand the discursive production of meaning, to locate the contradictions within them which renders them fundamentally unstable and open to danger. These representations defy fixed meaning resulting in the creation of alternative meaning. However the space thus created within the text is not completely out of control of the main text. The women’s voices are heard and these are the voices of subversion, however there is the simultaneously presence of voice representing the “limiting grid of single critical approach” (Smart 18). The flux has been reflected in the character of Albertine at 50 who through her act of disobedience will resist her
inscription within the world of patriarchal femininity and moves toward another patriarchal space thereby identifying herself with Electra:

That is trying to abstract herself from her female condition in order to find a place for herself in the space reserved for men.

(Smart 22)

Albertine at 50 will not try to break free, but will move from one patriarchal space to another:

Albertine at 50: to Madeleine

I did not stick to my role Madeleine I disobeyed ... if I had not done it, if I were still the prisoner of a madman, a madman who had me in the palm of his hand, who was growing more and more dangerous - - - that’s not a role for anyone. I broke the mould, I stopped being mother hen --- It hurt, but you want to know the truth ? I’ ve never been happier in my life, and neither have they. They are with their own kind, and so am I .... The only park I’ve ever known, the only bit of green, and it is mine. I work in the restaurant at park Lafontaine,... I get paid ! The customers and the other employees love me, and they treat me like a queen because I feed them like they used to get fed at home.

(Tremblay 54-5)

Albertine at 50 will partially fulfill the agendas of Albertine at 30 and Albertine at 40 by moving out of the “mould” She will scorn feminine value that had defined the world of Albertine at 30 and 40. Physical mobility in the text is equated with sexual and ideological movement and the ‘home’ has been presented as restricting both spatial
and ideological movement. Albertine at 50 interrogates the social and sexual boundaries from traditionally allotted female spaces and thus threatens their very separation from the masculine public arena. In the process the sub-text brings out the contradictions in the construction of patriarchal femininity and simultaneously creates space for radical intervention and change:

... dominant discourses themselves are not monolithic uniform or homogenous and therefore contain a potential for divergent readings, the discourse, as Volosinov insists can become an arena of struggle because it is multi-accentual”

(Loomba 1989 : 5-6)

As has been pointed out patriarchal femininity as an ideology contradicts itself by “inviting woman to inhabit identities split by a series of oppositions (for example between man and woman goddess and whore public and private)”(Loomba 94):

But --- such a discourse itself is heterogeneously composed, unevenly imposed and subject to conflicts with the lived reality of the oppressed subject --- the divisions involve a constant shifting, a torturous but dynamic movement between two positions which it is impossible to occupy at the same time. To the extent that women have internalized patriarchal ideology, they live the divisions and contradictions imposed upon them and also the myth of their duplicity. As long as this ideology is not in crisis, the inherent opposition between women’s lived experience and taught roles are kept in check. But when there is an ideological crisis, the various contradictions imposed on women serve to destabilize the supposed fixity of patriarchal notions. No
longer reconciled within a fixed and static whole, these contradictious result in change, alienation and finally resistance. (Loomba 94).

Albertine in the play does not occupy a fixed subject position, hence Albertine at 30 brings out the schizophrenia women suffer, Albertine at 40 will partially come close to the resisting agent with some agency of her own, Albertine at 50 the contradictions of dominant feminine identity, Albertine at 60 loses her centre of gravity and emerges as an insignificant creation of a male signator. All former traces of struggle have disappeared and she becomes an inoffensive female character. And finally Albertine at 70 will attempt to restore and vindicate patriarchal femininity and resolve the contradiction which operates in the play:

The final one is of course between the male author and the female creation.

Whose voice do we hear?

(Loomba, 16)

Albertine at 70 embodies andocentric closure and her utterances unlike that of the younger Albertines are not double voiced and she does not experience any ideological contradictions. Therefore the interrogation of the feminine position and its separation from the public/masculine space comes to an abrupt end. Albertine at 30 & 40 articulates the search for a conscious political protagonist to carry the burden of an anti patriarchal text and hence they experience ‘latent schizophrenia’ but with Albertine at 70 there is ideological closure:
Alberline at 70: Mind you... there's no point in asking people to change... When you're young you think you're right.... When you get older you realize you were wrong ...... what's the point of it all?

(Tremblay 51)

Sigrid Weigel in an interesting essay, 'Double focus' argues, "the talent schizophrenia of women consists in the fact that those elements of the model of femininity which earn her moral respect (for example motherliness, understanding, sociability) are also the basis for her social subordination" (Loomba 104). Albertine at 40 is unable to come out of this impasse in the play. Albertine at 50 tries to, while Albertine at 70 embraces her patriarchal ideological closure. Albertine at 70's dialogues are brief and proceeds along the lines of andocentric assumptions and she will seek her identity within paradigms which are masculine in nature. Albertine at 60 is not impatient with the constraints and pieties of patriarchal femininity nor does she nurture fantasies of gender freedom or gender transgression or ever temporal liberation:

Albertine at 60: Exactly. That's why I'm resigned to it, You can never get away, never!

(Tremblay 42)

The mother-daughter relationship in the play does not evoke the figure of the mythical mother that inhabits the cultural memory of Quebec literature rather it is the mother who is the "icon of maternal negativism" (Smart 170). The mother-daughter relationship is a complex one exhibiting ambivalence. Feminine role defined by patriarchal role separates women from each other. Albertine’s relation with her mother
and later with her daughter depicts a situation of failed communication resulting from their common female condition:

Albertine at 60: Yeah, that’s right something was missing — I was going round the house in circles — Looking for it — And one day I realized that what I was missing was her insults. She always — fed me — with her insults — I missed them —'cause she no longer released what was inside me, like before — But I filled the hole. I just took mother’s place and passed the insults on to Therese.

(Tremblay 26 – 7)

Nancy Chodorow in her book *The Reproduction of Mothering* (1978) mentions the “establishment of an unambiguous and unquestioned gender identity” (Quoted in Jacobus 1997: 1032) and in the play the ‘female position’ represented by Albertine at 40 challenges “unquestioned gender identity” by raising questions, which Joseph A Boone in his essay ‘Creation by the Father’s Fiat’ has described as:

- - - might there be ways in which even paternal fictions deauthorize their proclaimed originary power? And how absolute is the assertion that the female position in such plots can never serve as their motive desire or shaping force but only as a marker of their limits?

(Boone 1997: 1069)

Mother-daughter relationship in this male centered play has been problematized and the play challenges the construction of motherhood and causes rupture and become signifiers of otherness and as Joseph A. Boone mentions, “despite efforts at containment, these subversive elements does escape the father’s plotting, threatening to
wreck its transcendent designs” (Boone 1070). The other episode in the play where the ‘female position’ takes over the main text is the moment when all the Albertines merge to warn Thresa about her violent end:

ALL FIVE ALBERTINES : in alternation Pierrette asked Therese if she’d seen her “gent” lately and she said he disappeared the beginning of June. I assumed it was some neighbourhood kid, and I figured: “Here we go, boy problems. Already”. Them I realized it wasn’t that at all. They were talking about him like he was an actor, for God’s sake. Comparing him to those movie stars in the magazines... They even said he was better looking! I lay there, horrified.... They had no idea ... of the danger .... The danger of men, Madeleine -- -

(Tremblay 48)

Central to the play is the figure of woman, who as Christine Gledhill in her essay, ‘Pleasurable Negotiations’ mentions has “long served as a powerful and ambivalent patriarchal symbol, heavily over-determined as expression of the male psyche” (Gledhill 1995 : 201). However the sign woman in the play some times resists patriarchal domination and the conflict in the play remain unresolved. The unresolved conflict is symptomatic of the state of gender ideology which results in the emergence of the counter-text and allows space for textual negotiation:

The process of negotiation allows space for multiple subjectivities, identities and make way for play of fluidity and contradiction.

(Gledhill 199)
Albertine at 30, 40 and 50 represent this process of negotiation and try to forge different identities by negotiating with the contradictions of their lives. They try to move out of dominant feminine positions which are seen as oppressive, but in the absence of any powerful visualized alternative in the text, the escape from the influence of patriarchal femininity is difficult:

The process of looking at [their] own reflections in the mirror is some indication of this, it is at some level uncomfortable. Gaining a sense of self worth and autonomy against these dominant images and the values they represent can be difficult, so the image in the mirror is shadowed by these other images – ‘ideals’ of Woman, of desirability – and by the gaze of others

(Edholm 156 – 7)

In the play, we come across the ‘feminine’ ‘female’ and the masculine’ positions. Albertine at 30 & 40 begin their journey from the ‘female’ position, where there is a rejection of the feminine symbolized through their resistance to the masculine laws and move in the direction of cultural transformation. However it is important to point out that none of the positions mentioned are pure and essentialist. Rather there is dialectical relationship and appropriation. As Toril Moi in her essay ‘Feminist. Female, Feminine’ mentions:

A key word here is appropriation in the sense of creative transformation. Given the feminist insistence on the dominant and all pervasive nature of patriarchal power so far in history, feminists have to be pluralists: there is no pure feminist
or female space from which we can speak. All ideas including feminist ones, are in this sense ‘contaminated’ by patriarchal ideology. 

(Moi 1989: 118.)

The cultural transformation in the text has partly been hinted at in the symbolical ending:

ALL FIVE ALBERTINES : as if they had made physical contact Ahhhhh

......... The moon, solitary and blood red, rises

(Tremblay 76)

The ‘rage’ mentioned by Albertine at 30 & 40 is heard several times in the text and can be read as the female protest against phallocentric discourse and an advocacy for minority rights and values. The rage also represents the female voice which is rendered invisible in men’s writing:

In men’s writing it is almost always hidden deep down in the unconscious level of the text, but from those depths it speaks, often contradicting the apparent intention of the author merging with the voice of nature, imprinting itself in the gestures of the idealized or scorned ... female characters in the text, expressing itself through all the ‘otherness’ that male writers seen to feel the need to dominate in order to assure themselves of their identity within writing.

(Smart 5)

The ‘rage’ symbolizes the interrogation of gender identity based on the construction of woman as object to support masculine subjectivity:
Albertine at 40: ... She’s right, men are all the same they get us every time. They’re in control what do you expect? As long as we let them, they take advantage. ‘Cause they’re not idiots. It’s their world, they made it

(Tremblay 60)

The play offers critique of masculinity, which is defined in terms of heroic endeavor in war and silencing of the female for the House of the Father to remain intact:

Albertine at 40: Madeleine, I’ve got a son who’s not normal and my daughter’s a wildcat but that doesn’t mean they get it from me! My husband was also there when I made those kids! Sure, none of you talk about him, he disappeared long ago, he was a war hero who did us proud, how could he be anything but perfect! But you all forget one thing: he was a moron! He was the idiot, Madeleine, not me. Who else but an idiot would go and get himself killed for nothing on the other side of the ocean? I bet you anything he ran right out in front of them playing the hot shot, and there’s no way he died a hero, he died, a buffoon. A buffoon! He was a buffoon, Madeleine! But it’s me who’s here, me, so it’s easy to judge me!

(Tremblay 28)

The text demystifies the ideological construct of Father and spells out the cultural consequences of patriarchal culture which objectifies women to consolidate itself. The war in the passage spills over in the private realm and the boundary between public and the private reason and emotion breaks down and the abstract technological culture represented through war treads upon the bruised bodies of women. It is in this
context that Albertine at 70 presents a muted voice who has been de-feminized inscribing herself within patriarchal structures and moves away from the desire of Albertine at 30, 40 & 50 to identify with centre of warmth and female values.

Interrogating the construction of femininity in the play besides reading the presence of different femininities also involves deconstructing the stereotypical feminine who has been imprisoned in the category of ‘Feminine’ dictated by the old binary hierarchy passed off as the universal. As Luce Irigaray argues:

The denial of subjectivity to women is without a doubt the foundation underlying every irreducible constitution of an object: whether in representation, discourse, or desire ...

(Irigaray quoted in Smart XV)

Albertine at 70 represents the restrictive feminine role in the otherness which has been frozen into a strait jacket. Feminist criticisms to interrogate gender construction opens up political possibilities, whereby femininity and female positions represent another alternative as Teresa de Lauretis describes:

... not in femininity as a privileged nearness to nature, the body, or the unconscious, an essence which inheres in women but to which males too how lay a claim, not in a female tradition simply understood as private, marginal and yet impact, outside of history, but fully there to be discovered; not, finally in the chinks and cracks of masculinity, the fissures of male identity or the repressed of phallic discourse, but rather in that political, theoretical, self/analyzing
practice by which the relation of the subject in social reality can be rearticulated
from the historical experience of women.

(Quoted in Smart 8)

Albertine at 70, 60 & 50 who move towards closure bring out the manner in which
literature that represents:

imaginary version of social relationships which constitute ideology ..., ‘intepellates’ the reader, addresses itself to him or her directly, offering the
reader as the position from which the text is most obviously intelligible, the
position of the subject in (and of) ideology. Ideology obscures the real condition
of existence by presenting partial truths. It is a set of omissions, gaps rather than
lies smoothing over contradictions, appearing to provide answers to questions
which in reality it evades, and masquerading a coherence in the interest of the
social relation generated by and necessary to the reproduction of the existing
made of production.

(Belsey 1985:45-6).

Patriarchal ideology tries to constitute fixed subject position silencing contradiction in
the process.

Albertine at 30 & 40 represents the point of contradiction within the text, “the
point at which it transgresses the limits within which it is constructed, breaks free of
the constraints imposed by its ... form. Composed of contradictions the text is no
longer restricted to a single, harmonious and authoritative reading. Instead it becomes
plural open to re-reading no longer an object for passive consumption but an object of
work by the reader to produce meaning” (Belsey 54). Reading the play in terms of “its dialectical movement defies essentialism and prompts us to locate in the same situation the forces of oppression and the seeds of resistance” (Newton & Rosenfelt 1985: XXII). Albertine at no point in the play is viewed neither as a victim nor in a position of supremacy. The play presents not a simple polarity but a complex and contradictory web of relationships between different positions.

The chapter has tried to explore the range of feminine positions and therefore the play will “participate both in the liberal humanist disclosure of freedom, self-determination and rationality and at the same time in the specifically feminine disclosure offered by society of submission, relative inadequacy and irrational institution” (Newton & Rosenfelt xxviii). Elaine Showalter in her book Speaking of Gender (1989) has “not only a question of difference, which assumes that the sexes are separate and equal but of power, since in looking at the history of gender relations, we find sexual asymmetry, inequality and male dominance in every known society” (Showalter 1989: 4).