Feminism in the Native Context

Chapter 2
Feminism in the Native Context

What would become of logocentrism, of the great philosophical systems, of world order in general if the rock upon which they founded their church were to crumble?

If it were to come out in a new day that the logocentric project had always been, undeniably to found (fund) phallocentrism, to insure for masculine order a rationale equal to history itself?

Then all the stories would have to be told differently, the future would be incalculable, the historical forces would, will, change hands, bodies, another thinking, as yet not thinkable, will transform the functioning of all society.

(Cixous, "Sorties" 92-93)

One of the raging issues of feminism which still remains unresolved is the question as to how women should construct their discourse, deconstructing the
phallogocentric thought of patriarchy. Helene Cixous' statement points out that "all the stories would have to be told differently." For women writers to break out of the discourse they despise, they have to engage in a counter discourse in which "the body and mind are both involved in a seductive process... of using language, of learning new ways to use it, [this] is linked to a disrobing, self-exposure" (Scott 95).

This chapter deals with the manner in which the native writers construct their stories along French and Anglo-American Feminist modes of thought. Special emphasis is given to the textual strategies of revisionist myth making, l'ecriture feminine, the female bildungsroman and feminist romance. It is pertinent to note here that none of the authors discussed here -- Joan Crate, Jovette Marchessault or Lee Maracle -- could be seen using similar methods. While Joan Crate excels in her use of the feminist romance, and while Jovette Marchessault gives expression to her version of body writing, Lee Maracle alone writes from the native milieu: She does incorporate ideas of female bonding and the bildungsroman, but racism, in her writings certainly dominates sexism. The concept of race and the subversive marginal strategies employed in the counter discourse of these writers will be discussed in the next chapter.
The positions which women writers are required to embrace regarding the various aspects of feminism are diverse. Should women celebrate a marginal discourse, a woman's language, or should they take over the existing language and make it express their exclusive experience? Should women become adept at playing the male political game in the dominant political arena, or should they work toward the building of a specifically feminine culture? Should they demand separate women's studies departments or should they feminize the general curriculum? Should feminist intellectuals claim a righteous place within the humanist tradition or should they accept post-structuralist critiques of humanism which are more in agreement with the feminist ideas of deconstructing binary opposition? These are but a few of the issues on which a woman writer is expected to take a stance.

The list containing such questions could go on indefinitely, but then again, the questions tend to fall into the general opposition of integration versus separatism which itself rests on the opposition inside/outside. This in turn adds dimension to the phallocentric modes of thought and structures -- which are always in binary opposition -- that feminism so strenuously attempts to destroy. This contradiction is inherent in almost all the debates regarding feminism. On
the one hand women's need to get to the bottom of phallocentric structures can lead to the endless deconstructing/reconstructing strategy that prevents action. On the other hand, patriarchal injustice produces and reproduces itself through the workings of the phallocentric structures, so that the actions women take within socio-political and psychological structures towards making immediate and necessary reforms ultimately strengthen the very structures they need to dismantle.

Constructing the site for struggle thus, has not been an easy task. Yet, armed with the combative tactics of the French and Anglo-American feminisms Maracle, Crate and Marchessault have attempted to create their counter discourse. They have been able to identify themselves with the 'female diaspora' visualized by Adrienne Rich in her introduction to an anthology of international women's poetry:

The idea of a common female culture splintered and diasporized among the male cultures under and within which women have survived -- has been a haunting though tentative theme of feminist thought over the past few years. Divided from each other through our dependencies on men -- domestically, tribally, and in the world of patronage and institutions -- our first need has
been to recognize and reject these divisions, the second to begin exploring all that we share in common as women on this planet (Rich, Voice XVII).

The subversion of the male literary canon required that women create new themes, new literary styles and, of course, a new language to enrich their writings. Helene Cixous celebrates the feminine difference, asserting that woman writes through the femaleness of her body, as the body itself is an ambivalent source of identification for women. She believed that in order to transgress the laws of phallocentric discourse, woman must recover "her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal" (Cixous, "Medusa" 250). In "Toward a Feminist Aesthetic," Julia Penelope Stanley and Susan J. Wolfe proposed that "the unique perceptions and interpretations of women require a literary style that reflects, captures and embodies the quality of our thought", a "discursive, conjunctive style instead of the complex, subordinating, linear style of classification and distinctions" (67). The agenda for an avant-garde feminist aesthetics is laid down by Ann Rosalind Jones who insisted that "such techniques as gaps, breaks, questions, metaphors of excess, double or multiple voices, broken syntax, repetitive or cumulative rather than linear
structure and open endings should be employed" ("Femininity" 88). This chapter will focus on these strategies of inversion suggested by the well-established intellectuals of feminist activity.

The history of female reading and writing is a continuous effort to overcome the anxiety attendant upon the limitations of gender roles and narrative forms, but contemporary women writers are working to alter his-story by redefining her-story. Anxiety, or fear about being considered inadequate or trivial, in the worst, of being reviled, persecuted or even destroyed has been found to be the root cause of women's hesitations while entering the field of discourse.

In her autobiographical novel Mother of the Grass, Jovette Marchessault writes about the extreme anxiety in matters of writing -- the anxiety which could silence, block or kill creativity. She writes:

I did not have the right to sit down and then give myself the pleasure of writing.... In my mind, I had never written more than three pages. I was seeking perfection. Either perfection, perfect inhibition, perfect justification. A crushing proof of the neat virile, male need. Perfection! If only everything were perfect,
rigid, dead, embalmed and stiff! It's pointless to do any work if it won't be perfect.

(Marchessault, *Mother* 152).

One of the major dilemmas faced by a woman writer certainly lies within the system of language. She is likely to be at a loss to know whether she is using her own language or the language ascribed to her by culture. (The feminine writer must necessarily confront the question of whether while speaking the man-made language she is really using her own language, or if it is merely assuming her place in the phallogocentric paradigm). If one uses Bakhtin's definition of dialogism, "another's speech in another's language, serving to express authorial intentions but in a refracted way" (324), one can see that feminine language could be described as a woman speaking man's language, expressing her intentions in a refracted, masculine-defined way.

In assuming her place in the phallogocentric paradigm, then, the woman comes to occupy a fictional position. In writing as other, in using the other's language, she writes and speaks for the man, reinforcing his idea of her. She speaks a fictional language, the language ascribed to her, but not her own language. What she can desire, know and, therefore say is determined
within the system of language by the logic of which she is presumed to be outside. It is her taking up this position "outside" logic that puts her squarely "inside" it. Thus one can assume that the language women use in novels is novelistic or fictional.

The reasons for women writers accepting the novelistic discourse to invert the existing phallic order do not end here. The novelistic discourse defined by Bakhtin is seen to have many similarities with the feminine language as elaborated by many French and American theoreticians of feminist activity. Bakhtin's theory of dialogism seems quite similar to what feminist critics describe as the feminine language. Like the novelistic discourse of Bakhtin, feminine language is also identified as offering multivoiced or polyphonic resistance to hierarchies; both also laugh at authority. Furthermore, in the hierarchies Bakhtin mentions, the novel always takes the woman's structural place as the excluded other: masculine/feminine, epic/novel, poetry/novel.

In The Dialogic Imagination, Bakhtin explains the fundamentals of his theory of novelistic discourse. The novel, he claims, resists the authority of official genres. The epic and poetry are "defined" genres which abide by rules, they are hierarchical, ahistorical and
canonical. They "serve one and the same project of centralizing and unifying the European languages" (271). The novel resists hierarchies, authority and "sacralization" of language, because it is an unstable, undefinable, historical genre. The feminine language, for its part, is a release from an enforced silence and hence is recognizable by its fluency. It is also characterized by "lack of restraint, wordiness, utter absence of feeling for form" (Ruthven 108).

The novel is able to resist hierarchy and achieve carnival laughter because of its "double-voicedness", its dialogism. Meaning is created not through the single voice of the ordinary language, but in the interaction of voices. The eternal conflict in the novel between character's voices or between the narrator's voice and the characters' always leaves the novel speaking more than one language.

The "nativeness" in the voices of Maracle, Marchessault and Crate assures us of dialogism in their works. The native 'I' in Maracle is not always in agreement with the Feminist 'I', so much so that one could almost sense a dialogue between the two. In the preface to her work I Am Woman, Maracle writes:
The tools I pick up are rooted in my body. My body, conservative and cautious though it is, desires liberation. (XI)

and again,

The prohibition of women's right to choose is all-encompassing in North America. It is the most deep-seated bias in the history of class society. Racism is recent; patriarchy is old (21).

Even after assuring us that she writes to represent the native woman and never the native male, the racial memory gets the better of Maracle. She assumed the role of the spokesperson for native youth in "The Rebel".

Fighting the good fight [against Whites] used to be good enough. There is in the spirit of people a truth that lingers in the atmosphere that shrouds our community; the sense that this last fight is the decisive one. If we don't win this one we are a lost people -- a dead people (95).

and again,

To win we must plan in the cellars and attics, lurking in the dark with one eye cast about for the enemy... We know the enemy is ever watchful,
on guard day and night against the potential threat we all pose. To plan, we must learn to sum up our history -- not the history of betrayal but the history of our resistance. We must learn from our mistakes and chart the course for our eventual victory (95).

In her novels, too, one finds that the narrative voice is not monologic. Marianne in Sundogs is an assimilationist to the core and her subjectivity is rigid as far as the discourse is concerned. Yet, the dissenting voice of Maracle is everywhere present through the voices of all the other characters. In Ravensong, the voice of the Raven, Stacey and the visions of Celia go into the making of the narrative voice.

Marchessault's fiction, Mother of the Grass may be autobiographical, but the narrative is essentially dialogic with the voice of the grandmother dominating many of the chapters. Marchessault herself takes up many positions -- as the opponent of Christian religion, as a feminist and again as a lesbian feminist. Joan Crate's heroine, Dione, is a character who is yet to get a grip on her voice. "I want voices", is her desperate cry heard throughout the story. In the repeated stories of the myth of Blue Sky, the son on the sea and the woman who married
the ghost, the native voice is unmistakably audible. The bored, frustrated voice of the modern wife of a Greek hotelier is also heard and one might assume that the two voices are in dialogue.

Eventhough the novel and the woman who attempts to write it share the same paradigmatic place in phallogocentric thought, their relationship is not devoid of tension. Following the ancient's belief that the father supplied the seed and life of the new being but the mother only the vessel, male writers often compare the writing process to male generativity. To "father" a text connotes active creation; to "mother" connotes merely nurturance or maintenance. Women's roles as daughters also influence their writing. Harold Bloom in his, Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry, theorizes that male writers seek an oedipal overthrow of their literary fathers, resulting in triumphant separation and autonomy -- in Lacanian terms, a movement into the symbolic. But the female child faces the father's reduction which threatens to inscribe her further in the patriarchal order. She also experiences a double bind in relation to the mother. Identifying with her maternal aspects places her outside the discourse, but severing the tie with the mother means denying some part of the feminine self.
Recent feminist fiction has deconstructed even the conservative Lacanian theories of the double bind in women writers. In the works of Maracle and Marchessault, the identification with the mother does not essentially mean a position outside the discourse. Rather, the nurturance and maintenance aspects of mother-function are regarded as tropes which rejuvenate feminist writing. This line of thinking which led to the creation of a feminine language, l'ecriture feminine, which believed in a female jouissance will be discussed in detail under the sub-title "A Language of Their Own".

In spite of all the arguments which favour the existence of novel as a feminist genre, patriarchy is not guilty of remaining passive to bring novelistic discourse under its control. That a work of fiction, unstable and undefinable as it is, is expected to conform to the existing order, not just in the matter of language but also in that of subject content, is enough proof to reveal the tentacles of masculinist practice. "Art should not imitate life but reinscribe received ideas about the representation of life in art. To depart from the limits of common sense is to risk exclusion from the canon" (Miller 340). Any attempt to produce a work not like other novels, an original rather than a copy, means paradoxically that its literariness will be sniffed out. This is the reason why Marchessault's Like a Child of the
Earth and White Pebbles in the Dark Forests find it difficult to gain recognition as novels.

Since women's lives, and therefore their narratives, fall outside the realm of male discourse, they write against this tradition. They are expected either to conform to this pattern or they have to violently break away from the existing norms and create a tradition from an unspecified site.

Resisting Phallogocentrism

The women writers under reference share a common opponent -- masculinist thinking, but they envision different modes of resisting and moving beyond it. Their common ground is an analysis of western culture as fundamentally oppressive, as phallogocentric. "I am the unified, self-controlled centre of the universe," man (white, European and ruling class) has claimed. "The rest of the world, which I define as the other, has meaning only in relation to me -- as man/Father, the possessor of the phallus" (Jones, "Writing" 362). To speak and especially to write from such a position is to appropriate the world, to dominate it through verbal mastery.

Arguing for a complete overhauling of ideas in the existing order, Spivak states that only such a move from feminists could be effective. The primacy of the
intellect over emotion, the sense over imagination, according to her, is but a culmination of the public/private dualism which emerged centuries back.

According to the explanations that constitute (as they are the effects of) one culture, the political, social, professional, economic, intellectual arenas belong to the public sector. The emotional, sexual and domestic are the private sector... the sustaining explanation still remains that the public sector is more important, at once more rational and mysterious, and generally more masculine, than the private. (Spivak 103)

In Spivak's opinion, to deconstruct this opposition, there is no need to destroy the public/private hierarchy. In other words, there is no need to deny the private in women's writing.

The feminist, reversing this hierarchy, must insist that sexuality and the emotions are, in fact so much more important and threatening that a masculinist sexual politics is obliged repressively, to sustain all public activity... The shifting limit that prevents this feminist reversal of the public-private hierarchy from
freezing into a dogma or indeed from succeeding fully is the displacement of the opposition itself. (103)

Joan Crate's *Breathing Water* is an attempt to strengthen the private in women. The emotional and the sexual aspects of the heroine are celebrated as the raison d'être of Dione. Her site of discourse, her domestic status is in conformity with the idea that "women writers who explore subjectivity through domestic or familial relations may be just as 'political' as those who analyse issues of war, state control, and foreign policy." (Kaplan 174)

In addition to the valorization of the domestic position, another strategy employed by the women writers is the mobilization of female characters. To conceive of women and mobility in the same space has been difficult in historical as well as literary terms.

If the male authored texts have attempted to represent women as occupying domestic spaces, the new women writers have been explicit in expressing their desire to cease functioning as reflectors of male desire.

The tendency among authors of the patriarchal tradition to limit the movement of their women characters
could be referred to as "immobilization of women". This tendency resulted in the proliferation of "images of nets, webs, cages, bonds and traps" in fiction (Greene 50). Because, for male writers, mobility and the condition of stasis against which it defines itself, point to process and suggest the ambiguous and hence dangerous powers associated with materiality -- both inside and outside the body -- artistic and literary productions have over time employed a number of fixing strategies -- idealization, abstraction and categorization. In her writings, Luce Irigaray remarks on the tendency of the male subject to valorize volume, to establish fixing and freezing in order to maintain the fiction of his own subjectivity; by creating woman as other, she argues, the male subject is able to fix her through "reduction, division, containment, circumspection and reflection" (Irigaray 170). This desire explains the continuous entrapment of woman-as-Image and also suggests her limited function in conventional plot structures.

These plot structures are often linear in form and revolve around the father, the patriarchal family configuration and its accompanying prohibitions. And the female characters as Teresa de Lauretis has observed serve as "markers of positions - places and topoi - through
which the hero and his story move to their destination and to accomplish meaning" (109).

None of the characters under discussion could be held guilty of immobility. All the female characters are highly mobile. Even Dione, the typical heroine of Feminist Romance, in Breathing Water makes an attempt to break off family ties and lead a life of adventure in the outside world. Her frequent visits to the shopping mall, her sexual adventure with the artist, her trip to the bar to drink in the company of Mayor, Witch and Buzzard, her trip across the border with Buzzard, the visit to the strip-show -- all within the tradition of the Feminist Romance invert our preconceived ideas of a feminine protagonist. Dione's frequent absences could be regarded as an attempt to escape the boredom of marital life. On another level, they could be regarded as an attempt made by the heroine to come into grips with her life, her voice and her self.

Maracle's heroines Stacey and Marianne too make decisive movements within the space the narrative provides them. Marianne might be a "social idiot" (44), but a series of epiphanies on the issue of race draw her out of her protective environment. Her participation in the Peace Run to Okanagan Valley is marked by violence. She finds a moment of peace from the confusion and disunity in

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her own life as she joins the peace run, but, in returning to the beliefs of her ancestry, Marianne comes to chart the course of her life anew.

The run soon becomes a metaphor for self-identification. The harsh realities of racism and the paralyzing truth of white hatred makes Marianne a committed participant of Native Rights Movement. Maracle writes very movingly about the attack on the runners:

It is an angry crowd, a small crowd, a crowd armed with stones. Stones hail from the arms of men whose eyes are filled with hate. Run... carry out the run. We have to make it. Stones drop. Run... carry the feather. We have to make it. Missiles of hate rain all around my frail body. Run... Carry peace. Peace... run... peace, sweat for peace. Rocks lock legs in cages of hate. Hate, acid hate, red hot hate... twisted hate... run, the hate from my legs. Run rage swollen in muscles, inspired by stones, run it for away... Run, run, run for peace. (181)

Jovette Marchessault in her fictional autobiography Mother of the Grass creates an alter ego who is always on the move. The journey from the tranquil banks of the river comes full circle, when she after a period of harsh
travails in the city, returns to Ouareau River. Marchessault's heroines make a metaphorical journey to the world of lesbian love and always to the Utopian World of Mothers and Grandmothers. The protagonists in *Like a Child of the Earth* and *White Pebbles in the Dark Forests* too, are always on the move. In the former, the heroine makes a journey across the American Native Land, following the path of Columbus, in a Greyhound Bus. Her surrealistic journey is anything but passive. In *White Pebbles in the Dark Forests*, the character Jeanne moves from the so-called civilized society to the lesbian community at the Appalachian mountains. This movement, from the arena of conformity to that of unconventional life, is very significant.

The Russian semiologist, Jury Lotman, argues that novels constitute plot spaces that contain the following character types: "Those who are mobile, who enjoy freedom with regard to plot space, who can change their place in the structure of the artistic world and cross the frontier, the basic tropological feature of this space; and those who are immobile, who represent, in fact, a function of this space" (Lotman 167).

This plot typology suggests that it is the male figure who moves and the females who, immobilized, become
obstacles against which the male quester/hero struggles. Lotman continues, "The mobile character is split into a paradigm cluster of different characters on the same plane, and the obstacle (boundary) also multiplying in quantity, gives out a sub-group of personified obstacles" (167). This plot typology offers a dubious legacy to the woman novelist when she attempts to create female characters who can act in plot space as movers, rather than as obstacles.

The highly hysterical protagonist in *Breathing Water* has many obstacles in her path, the foremost being her husband. By inverting the hitherto female-held position of the obstacle, Crate is attempting an overhaul of male/female roles. Quite early in the narrative, Dione offers her reasons for agreeing to marry Jorge: "Jo-Jo will be home soon, Jo-Jo, my husband, the father of my baby. That's why I married him" (9). It is her marriage that initially keeps her from breaking out. But with the passage of time, Jorge becomes the mold on which Dione could test her numerous stories concocted to justify her absences from home. "Where the hell have you been?" (95) becomes an oft-repeated question aired by Jorge. Thus, in Dione's quest for self-discovery, it could be rightly concluded that her husband poses an obstacle -- under the euphemistically drawn excuse of performing wifely duties.
In Lee Maracle's *Sundogs* too, male characters are, constructed within the limits of the term, 'obstacle'. Marianne's sister Rita is unable to complete her university education as a result of her oppressive domestic duties. Her numerous children and her drunkard husband Bill are shown as obstacles in her path of self-development.

Bill always did limp along with both feet planted firmly in mid-air... Drank too much... stayed out long hours with the boys... long hours ?... days is more like it. (34)

Hence, when Rita decides to "dump" Bill, the whole family supports her. Rita's brother Rudy, too, happens to be a formidable character. His violence mars the fragile unity of Marianne's household. "[his family] are all a mess; both kids have bruised faces and Paula is gushing blood" (52).

Most of the minor male characters in Maracle's fiction function as obstacles. In *Ravensong*, the white boy, Steve, could have hindered Stacey's quest for knowledge; her education. The over enthusiastic Steve is, however, discouraged by the timely interference of Ella, a maternal figure.

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In Jovette Marchessault's fiction too, men are rendered the unenviable position of liabilities. All through *Mother of the Grass*, one hears the harsh, violent and delimiting voice of the patriarchs.

This time, it was Lorraine who was being beaten. This time, it was Lise who fell on her knees with an impossible scream. In the cold of winter evenings, in the heat of summer nights, in the beauty of the first spring evenings, in the splendour of the last autumnal nights, it was Carmen, it was Huguette, it was Marie-Paul, each having her turn, don't cry before you are hurt, don't try to hide, don't try to save yourself in the crowded kitchen which echoes with the shock of the blows. Don't go hiding behind your mother's skirts, for they are waiting for you on the landing. (91-92)

The feeling of collective victimization is enhanced by the fact that "they [fathers] did it less often to the boys and more often to the girls because the girls were guiltier. We live in the folds of original sin" (92).

Marchessault's attitude towards the inhuman breed of "fathers" is revealed further in her outcry: "We are in the Land of Permanent Sacrifice and don't you forget it!"
Slap! Hit! your children are guilty... Slap! Hit! Kill! Do it in front of everyone or do it in private, but make an example of them. Beat them! since each punishment should make them more likely to repent" (92).

That these fathers hinder the healthy physical and emotional development of their daughters is hinted at when Marchessault asks "What was going on in the daddies' heads when they took down their daughters' pants? What were they thinking about when they hit them fore and aft? When they hit them between the thighs with the belt of their trousers?" (93).

Marchessault is so vitriolic in her attack on men that she constructs the two identifiable men in her fiction as mute subjects. Their almost silent language is contrasted to the living language of her mother's and grandmother's:

Their [Mothers'] language was filled to the brim with images and predictions. Theirs was a living language, full of significance, and it rolled and rolled in a sinuous tide or in a straight line, crossing landscapes and certainties.

Things were different with my father and my grandmother's second husband. They talked very little, engaged as they were in getting to the
peak of their day, death in their hands.... Now and then, despite themselves, one or two words escaped from their mouths. (22)

In *Like a Child of Earth*, Columbus, Joe Beef and Buffalo Bill are portrayed as villains who attempted to retard the progress of human beings.

Thus, both in rebellion and accommodation, the women's fictions discussed above take up strategic positions. By inverting "masculinity" and "femininity", they indicate apatriarchal alternatives. Again, through treating gender roles in the institution of marriage as abnormal (Dione and Jorges in *Breathing Water*, Rudy and Paula, Rita and Bill in *Sundogs*, all the couples in *Mother of the Grass*), Crate, Maracle and Marchessault attempt a counter discourse.

As has been revealed in the discussion above, one subtle bind for contemporary women writers involves the tendency of both writers and critics to align women writers with the realist tradition, with the result that their subject matter is tagged domestic. It can also be judged as trivial, narrow in focus, circumscribed in its range of action and not the stuff of high art.
The narratives discussed above are in sharp contrast to the story line hitherto adopted, "the figure of Rip Van Winkle... the flight of the dreamer from the shrew" (Fiedler XX). Mieke Bal's statement, "Women can only function in certain fabulas, in which the object is a characteristic of the subject (happiness, wisdom) and not a concrete object that would necessitate a long journey or physically taxing ordeal" (83-84) is proved wrong in the novels of Crate and Maracle.

Inversion of Romance, Myth and Stories of Quest

In her book, Feminist Fiction, while discussing modern Romances, Anne Cranny Francis writes:

In the modern Romance, the male hero is usually an established professional man, often from a wealthy family and occasionally from an aristocratic background. He is often some ten to fifteen years older than the heroine, with the added experience -- personal and professional -- this entails. The assumptions are that he is white, middle or upper class and heterosexual. The heroine is correspondingly younger, less experienced, less established, less wealthy, and often from a poorer and less socially elevated background. The plot usually traces the subjugation of the heroine to the hero whom she
initially dislikes because of his arrogance.

(181)

Or, in other words, the resolution of the narrative comes with the heroine's marriage to the hero. Modern Romances fetishize the erotic relationship which often becomes the focus of the narrative. These tales also teach patriarchal gender roles to women, that sexual exploits are a prerogative of the 'experienced' male and that "women must deny their own sexuality in order to achieve a satisfactory marriage. They must not wander off the narrow path of patriarchy into the wild woods peopled by wolfish men with uncontrollable sexual appetites" (183).

Reworking the Romance genre on feminist terms is not an easy job. The reason for this lies with its elision of the ideologies of gender, race and class, its representation of a particular negotiation of these ideologies purely in terms of gender, which obscures or mystifies the formation of a strong subjectivity in a patriarchal society.

An exemplary example of the inversion of the Romance occurs in Joan Crate's Breathing Water. Dione, the waitress, one understands was attracted to her boss -- a rich hotelier, Jorges. But it is also clear that "love"
is nowhere mentioned as the reason for their marriage. Dione marries Jorges only because she is pregnant. Her sister advises her, "Marry him, he is the baby's father. He can support you; he has lots of money" (9). It is not that Jorges was not a typical hero of Romantic fiction. Dione, even in their first encounters, plays the part of the shy, evasive girl. "He was someone I avoided as much as possible. His confident smile and knowing wink embarrassed me. Besides he was younger than bosses are supposed to be" (42).

There is also ample proof to show that Jorges pursued Dione and that he made advances to her: "Jo-Jo began paying a lot of attention to me then and he stopped coming around the lounge when Linda was there. At first I thought he was just being friendly, but after a few weeks he always seemed to be at the back door when I got off work, waiting to ask if he could drive me home. It saved me a five-dollar cab fare" (43).

But all similarities to the conventional Romance end here. Their relationship does not have a fairy-tale ending, nor does the romance last. Dione feels the suffocation of the dishwasher, the laundry and the meaningless television channels and her search for a more exciting life begins. Erotic sexual exploits abound in
the novel. But it is not Jorges who participates in them, rather, it is Dione who is permanently in search of sexual partners. The one-night stand with the artist, her first sexual adventure, leaves in her, a hunger for more such exploits. Each time she returns home, it is only when she reaches the doorstep that she remembers her husband:

I turn to look at his [the artist's] white-clothed white body, his pale eyes cataracted in the buzzing light, and I wonder who he is, what he means, his art, his words, what meaning he has for me. I drive home with the window open, the darkening sky wet on my face. Turning off Lynnwood, I drive into our driveway, I see Jo-Jo's stingray, flame red with strips of chrome shooting up the sides. He's home. (28)

The second adventure with Buzzard when Dione with her child Elijah crossed the border too is not without such encounters. "His mouth is on mine. His arms pull me close. He kisses over and over, pushes my head into the hollow of his neck... It's late: it's much too late" (95). It is however, during the relationship with the stripper that the vamp in Dione stands exposed. Forgetting even her child, Dione goes out with him for a motorbike ride and eventual sex.
Dione leaves all the limitations accorded to women in patriarchal discourse and goes in search of the "wolfish men with uncontrollable sexual appetites" (Francis 183).

While Joan Crate constructs her protagonist in relation to men, sex, marriage and babies, one should also comprehend the subversive potential of her writings. In her romantic fiction, she objectifies male characters, and since this objectification is in an erotic mode, it could be read as an experience of female desire.

In Maracle's novels too, the element of Romance exists, but it is on a much subtler level. In other words, the male partners of the heroine are not integral to her understanding of life. For example, Marianne in Sundogs has a relationship with an idealized hero Mark, but he is not the person behind her conversion from a "social idiot" (44) to a responsible community worker. In fact, in Marianne's eyes, Mark, when he informs her about his broken marriage, is yet another native traitor who has insulted native womanhood. She tells him:

'But [first wife] is Indian', and pain registers on his face. 'You never courted her and I know why you beat her... You don't see worthy women when you look at us. Everytime some white man or woman looks ugly on your face you come home and
wait for us to screw up and then you let us have that ugliness. (165)

Mark's silent acceptance of his guilt destroys the image of the know-all, experienced subject of Romance.

Jovette Marchessault's inversion takes place on a much more extremist plane. Her fictional alter ego has a relationship with a man, Jean-Luc. They rapidly became intimate, spiritually though not physically. Eventhough *Mother of the Grass* does not conform to the Romance genre, it is worthwhile to note the asexual relationship the heroine has with the hero who is a homosexual. See the following passage:

Through him, I discovered men on the 'wrong' side -- the other side of the coin. As far as men on the 'right' side went, I already knew quite enough. It was altogether another matter with Jean-Luc Quickstep. We got along well. It was enough. That hadn't happened to me very often... We looked at each other through and through. I saw myself through him and he through me. Contaci! light in the centre of a vibratory current. To most people, these contacts, probably appear sexual in nature, but to us, all that was secondary. (136)
Through employing a homosexual as a partner for the protagonist and by building their relationship on Platonic levels, Marchessault subtly inverts ideas of sexual attraction between men and women.

Mythology is indeed a hostile terrain for women, for, it is because of the myths that one believes, women must be either angels or monsters. And when Muriel Rukeyes exclaimed "No more masks! No more mythologies" (435), she was voicing the feminist rejection of the traditional division of myth from a woman's subjectivity.

Revisionist myth making is a subversive tactic by which a previously well-defined and accepted myth is appropriated for altered ends. Feminist myths often assume the high literary status that myth confers -- something that women writers have often been denied because they write personally or confessionally. In these reworked myths, the old stories are changed utterly, by female knowledge of female experience, so that they can no longer stand as foundations of collective male fantasy.

Since the core of revisionist myth making for women writers lies in the challenge to and correction of gender stereotypes embodied in myth, revisionism in its simplest form consists of hit-and-run attacks on familiar images and the social and literary conventions supporting them.
Revisionist myth making is on very subtle lines in Joan Crate's *Breathing Water*. Dione who is perpetually on the run with her child strapped to her chest could be an inversion of the Virgin Mother and the Child. There are many passages in the narrative that remind us of the Christian image:

When I unstrap Elijah from my chest, I find him staring at me, his blue eyes reflecting my brown eyes, and I'm confused, wondering who's watching whom, and which one I am.

'Born again!' Crow shouted. A Sunday morning evangelist glowed on the tv screen... 'Money for Jeezus. Jeezus loves ya. Oh yes he does'. Her hands rose toward the ceiling. Jeezus who gave up his life, nailed to the cross, the flies buzzing round his head, an the hot sun aburnin, burnin down on him. (21)

Here, immediately after observing her son Elijah, Dione is reminded of her sister Crow's imitation of a Born-again evangelist. The mother-child inversion is carried to the extreme when Dione during the first sexual escapade meets an artist. The artist drawing the picture of nude Dione is in sharp contrast to Leonarde da Vinci's portrayal of the Madonna. Dione later remembers the
incident as "a story I fell into, a story about me and my boy and an artist" (32).

Marchessault's *Mother of the Grass* is replete with inverted myths. Her text is essentially a woman's text which centred on the world of women. She attempts a work of feminist myth making as a means to return to origins making it possible for the whole community to be renewed through this representation of myths. In her assessment of *Mother of the Grass*, Gloria Orenstein writes:

> For the Feminist, [the fall from Paradise] is equivalent to the fall out of a matriarchal space-time of ecstasy into a patriarchal history characterised by endless massacre and repression. It is the Judaeo-Christian patriarchal creation myth and all of its subsequent history that the feminist Shaman must exercise so that the natural world order, symbolized by the figure of 'La Mere des herbes', Plant Mother, or the great goddess of vegetation may be resurrected and life upon the planet may enter into a cycle of renewal and regeneration in the Promised Land of Female desire sought by all the heroines of Marchessault's works. (181)
In this novel, the author introduces the female protagonist who is engaged in a passionate search for the lost world of female divinity. In the portrayal of her Grandmother, Marchessault subverts the western myth of patriarchal creation and domination. Everywhere in the text, Marchessault inserts mythical references to the Mother [Not the 'all-powerful' Father]. The grand children, who accompany the Grandmother in her search for herbs, discover caves in the forest. She writes:

Upon entering the cave, we altered our identities along the way, like a crystal which becomes a diamond. Who were we? Who were we really? Were we emeralds in their rocky wombs or explorers or gold prospectors cast out from the hard, sharp matter of a great American city? Or were we children of the earth in search of a universal Mother, a Mother hidden in these subterranean galleries, a mother long since forgotten because her black, acid, gleaming eyes were like those of insects or of fish with beautiful spotted bellies and fins sharpened and polished by the wear, the tear and beating of the water of the deeps?. (49)

Another method employed by Marchessault is the satirization of the Judaeo-Christian ideologies:
When Grandmother talked about the devil or the angels, you felt that she had tried them both out and could make the comparison.... Grandmother's devil was always struggling with the great forces of the father. In her story, what varied was the devil's position - now he was in full flight towards the heights, the thunder clouds, the solar system, full of spirit, nerve, and courage, standing upto the all-powerful Father who held a scale in his mouth to weigh us in advance. (121)

At times, the picture of the Satan and the Father is carried to comic heights:

Grandmother's devil had the role of leader, of a scout on patrol in the mists of the catholic religion.... I could easily imagine Satan -- a simple heavenly angel -- getting a spanking with a flaming strap under the approving eyes of the prophets... He deliberated, did Lucifer! He sighed, he lost his temper, he snickered at the paternal beard and was not fearful -- he was too angry, too nauseated to take the time to be afraid. (121-22)

Even as Marchessault is engaged in the creation of a new Edenic world of feminine existence, she powerfully subverts the myth of Adam and Eve in Eden:
The beautiful, precious serpent has always been there. He made the first rebellion. He fomented the first, devastating, lucid revolution. He dared! He dared! And he was alone against the wrath of the Father. He risked everything because of friendship and tenderness for a woman and a man who lived once upon a time in a garden and because the beautiful serpent had an exalted imagination, one which remarked that a garden is perhaps not nearly enough for a woman, too little for a man, that it is good to take a look somewhere else, further off in the vast world, munching fruit and sauntering up to the gates of a larger, more circular vision, a vision which overflows the night of its own genesis. (54)

*Mother of the Grass* is revisionist both in its subversive readings of traditional plots, characters and morals and in its portrayal of a female character, the Grandmother, the Mother of the Grass, who exists beyond plots, the female as creator.

All the novels which follow the revisionist pattern are enactments of feminist anti-authoritarianism opposed to the patriarchal praxis of reifying texts. Most of these novels involve revaluation of social, political,
philosophical and religious values, particularly those enshrined in occidental literature.

Perhaps, the genre which is most clearly identified with contemporary feminist writing is the narrative of female self-discovery. Thematizing gender as the central problem for women attempting to reconcile individual and social demands, the contemporary narrative of female development exemplifies an appropriation and reworking of established literary genres like the Bildungsroman.

The editors of The Voyage In point out that the quest narrative is not an easy option for women, as, "While male protagonists struggle to find a hospitable context in which to realize their aspirations, female protagonists must frequently struggle to voice any aspirations whatsoever... Even the broadest definition of the Bildungsroman presupposes a range of social options available only to men" (Abel, Hirsch and Langland IX).

The male novel of development usually ends when the hero reaches adult self-awareness after having tested his inner sense of self against reality by a series of adventures in the world. Mary Anne Ferguson observes:

There is a mythical prototype of this form in the journeys of both father and son in the Odyssey:
the young man sets out to find his father, to learn his patronymic, as a means of finding his own identity. Both he and his father, whose journey affirms his roles of father and husband, return home: the individual's success in discovering his own identity brings about his re-integration into society and the healing of the wounds society has incurred through losing him. Thus male development is essentially comic, the circular journey is spiral, the ending a new beginning on a higher plane. (228)

The pattern for the female novel of development has been largely circular, rather than spiral: women in fiction, till recently remained at home. Most of the protagonists in the novels under discussion test their self image through adventures in the outside world. They are also initiated at home through learning the rituals of human relations.

Rita Felski discusses the female protagonists of the historical self-discovery novels in Beyond Feminist Aesthetics: "[T]he female-centred plot is characterized by a choice of two plots: the 'euphoric' in which the heroine moves in her negotiation with the world of men and money from 'nothing' to all and the 'dysphoric' which ends with the heroine's death in the flower of youth" (123).
This kind of a dichotomy of either marriage or death is transcended in the contemporary self-discovery narrative. It is an essentially optimistic genre, bearing witness to women's self-identification as an oppressed group, and hence as a potential challenge to existing social values.

Yet the narrative of the quest for self are not without problems. When women do construct a bildungsroman, that is, when a female character is constructed as a mover within plot structure, she, like her male counterpart, appears to be confronted with female as obstacle, viz, the maternal presence.

In Breathing Water, at the very outset one perceives that Romance has stopped functioning as a genre. At this very point, Dione's narrative of self-discovery begins. Dione's story begins at the stage when the traditional plot of women's lives breaks off, with the attainment of a male sexual partner. The status of marriage as the goal and end point of female development is called into question by the emergence of a new plot which seeks to expose the insufficiencies of the old. As a feminist text, Breathing Water could be regarded as possessing a recognition and rejection of the ideological basis of the traditional scripts of heterosexual romance characterized
by female passivity, dependence and subordination, and one could easily discern an attempt on the part of the author to develop an alternative narrative and symbolic framework within which female identity could be located.

The beginning of the novel introduces a negative model, an image of female alienation. Dione is a housewife whose entire horizon is circumscribed by the daily drudgery of catering to her domestic duties. Her confinement to the private sphere denies her the possibility of an independent self-fulfilment and locks her in a relationship of psychological and economic dependence upon a husband who is unable to acknowledge her spiritual needs. Dione is all the time aware that she has to break the walls of her private sphere if she is to come to terms with herself. "I want to go my own way. I need to. Something waits for me outside the house. I have to find it" (83).

A sense of estrangement and unreality is expressed in recurring metaphors in which the protagonist perceives herself to be dreaming or describes herself as functioning like a puppet. After spending a night with the artist near the mall, Dione does not quite remember it, "Perhaps I dreamed the whole incident in that basement room" (32). Even the child whom she carries with her during all her escapades becomes a nonentity at times. Standing in front
of a glass door, Dione catches her reflection with the child around her waist. She thinks, "Something is attached to my waist, a little frog kicking blue legs" (85).

The sense of remoteness from a preformed destiny which the protagonist feels helpless to alter is typically described as a splitting of inner and outer self, the heroine experiencing a powerful estrangement from the external appearance by which her social status as a woman in a patriarchal culture is largely determined.

The key transformation of the novel takes the protagonist from the stage of alienation, of a sense of lack, to a conscious affirmation of gendered identity. Rather than offering a negative critique of society by depicting the destruction of the female character, Crate delineates a form of opposition through the resistance and survival of the heroine. Dione's inward recognition and rejection of the ideological basis of existing gender roles is expressed externally in the narrative through Dione's act of leaving her husband. For, "Some form of at least temporary separation from traditional heterosexual relations is a necessary precondition for any gain in self-knowledge" (Felski 131).
The life of the recluse in her sister's house does not last long. Still the shift in physical space offers her new insights into marriage and life. Dione's return to Jo-Jo marks a period of psychological transformation. She is more in control of her life, more committed and certainly more responsible as a parent. In Breathing Water, ironically, the resolution of the feminist narrative also functions as a beginning; Dione's new self-knowledge creates a basis for future negotiation between the subject and society, the outcome of which is projected beyond the bounds of the text. In this novel, external exploration both parallels and contributes to the discovery of the inner self. Individual development requires some kind of recognition of the contingency and uncertainty of experience; this form of knowledge is counterposed to the deceptive mythology of the Romance, the ideological fiction of the idyllic married bliss which provides an already written script without space for the articulation of dissent. Dione's move into society functions as an entry into an existence defined by contingency and change, which is contrasted to the static, dream-like atemporality of an existence structured by repetitive domestic tasks within the private sphere of the familial home.

Marianne in Sundogs too is on a quest for self-identity. In the beginning, she passes off as a shallow
native girl. All her standards are set against white values. Her sense of dressing, her aversion to the large family, her embarrassment at her mother's outspoken habits and dressing -- all force us to believe that Marianne is an assimilationist. Her mother often complains, "You sound just like them [the Whites]" (9).

Marianne slowly grows in stature as she comes to accept the violence, the outrage and the splits that occur in her family. Surrounded by a huge family with its full share of problems, led by a mother who talks back to the television, Marianne slowly wakes up, politically and emotionally, and joins the run for peace that sets out across the country in support of those behind the barricades in Okanagan.

In Crate's and Maracle's work, one sees protagonists who are sexually mature females but who lack emotional coherence. They often profit from their own painful encounters with reality to become self-confident adults in control of their own destinies. Both Dione and Marianne have difficulty in differentiating between sex and love; they lose love when they attempt to grow emotionally and intellectually and both discover self through experience in the world.
Seduction by the Father is an important feature in Dione's life. Her attempts to overcome the seduction of her Father's voice and to find her own voice is charted all through the story. Her obsession with voices explains this: "The voices have started to layer themselves one over the other, and it's becoming difficult to tell them apart, to make sense of what's being said" (5). While in the outside world, she finds herself in the midst of voices, her boring life at home places her in a vacuum, "I don't know what to do here so I turn on the dish washer, the washer and dryer, the vacuflo, the garburator, stereo, radio and tv. I want noise. I want voices" (33).

The seduction by the Father (his memory) demands a denial of the mother. Dione's relationship to her mother prior to the period of self discovery is marked with coarseness. Commenting on her mother's reaction to her father telling them children's stories, Dione writes, 'Filling their heads with dreams!' she'd huff, or 'welcome to the real world,' when Father finished. That was it, always anger" (63). That her mother was an obstacle in the path of her loving relationship with her father is revealed elsewhere too. She is often qualified as a "witch" (133) or a "bitch" (148).

Yet, it is only when she comes to terms with her powerful, sympathetic mother that Dione finds peace in
life. This is again characterized by the erasure of her father's voice.

In *Sundogs* and *Ravensong* one sees the presence of a powerful mother figure who provides a positive impetus and guidance for the journey of development. The mother as obstacle pattern is discernible in *Sundogs* too. Marianne, who had led a protected, rather pampered life finds her mother embarrassing. "It must be six o'clock. It's my mother arguing with the six o'clock news again. It's embarrassing. Some little piece of me wants to give her a break... No. Don't bother going to look. I try to sit still and get back to my essay. I squirm, tense up" (2).

Even her mother's appearance disturbs her:

I always want to chuckle when she jumps into her coat like she is on some dangerous mission... She shops at second hand stores and buys only the cheapest things there. She never bothers matching what she buys. She ends up with the loudest checks, plaids, and flowered designs in the store. Dressed, she looks like a wild array of colour and patterns. She is wearing her houndstooth car-coat overplaid pants and a flowered shirt as though she were a fashion model who just stepped off the cover of *Vogue* magazine. (7)
Still, during the course of her self-discovery, there are instances which tell us about reconciliation with her mother whose role she had rejected.

The distance between us closes us little: The difference remains, but it doesn't look ominous. She looks afraid, afraid I will choose her language and afraid I won't choose either... My mother, the all powerful, becomes ordinary; weakness backdropped against her great strength brings her character closer to how I see mine. I understand Momma, I understand. I realize I am desperate for this understanding, have always been desperate for it and I am surprised how easy it came, how little effort it took to achieve this moment of understanding. (148)

Marianne develops physically, emotionally, intellectually, socially; but all the experiences in the world have not brought her to a sense of integrated selfhood. She must encounter violence and death before she can accept herself. The death of her niece, Dorry and the connected native ceremonies reveal a new world to Marianne. This and the violence meted out to the peace runners by the whites force her to come to terms with her native self. Her self realization is well echoed in her words, "I hear you Momma, and the crock of youth is not
listening to our relatives. We fill our crock with the sound of everyone's lies without stopping to listen to our own truth... I could hear my Momma's language coming through my mouth and it felt damned good" (206). The experiences undergone by the heroine, while often difficult and painful, are presented as the necessary steps to maturation; her encounters with the outside world help to shape and define the parameters of her subjectivity.

In Ravensong, the maturation and the growing rebellion of Stacey are portrayed. The novel tells the story of a crucial period of change in the history of one West Coast Native Community. Caught between her disparagement of white ways and her awareness of white disdain of native ways, seventeen year old Stacey watches as a flu epidemic kills the most learned Elders in the community and with them much of the traditional wisdom and knowledge that had survived all the previous epidemics. As Stacey develops into a mature native woman, her resistance for the white ways of living and education too builds up. Once when she served a detention for turning up late for her classes, she challenges the Principal to expel her, "You have power to cut my dreams short and expel me, she said simply, but I will not serve any detentions for lateness." (68)
The epilogue informs us that Stacey's dreams of starting a school in the reservation did not materialize, but one cannot help but notice the pragmatism behind Stacey's advice to her son,

Don't worry son. You'll know the answer when you need to. (199)

In the novels discussed above, the female self-discovery is depicted as a process of confrontation and dialogue with a social environment. Although the texts often emphasize internal growth and self-understanding rather than public self-realization, only by moving out into the world can the protagonists become critically aware of the limitations of their previously secluded existence and their unquestioning acceptance of the circumscribed nature of women's social roles.

A Language of their Own

When women do write subversive texts, when they do manage to escape from imprisonment within stereotypes, male-identified models and genres, their discourses often have as a central concern the problem of movement. Helene Cixous has remarked that "cultural containment translates into linguistic imprisonment and that women had to first escape the discourse of men" ("Castration" 42). That escape has been mapped within the discussions that
constituted l'écriture féminine. L'écriture féminine makes important statements relative to female mobility, statements that can direct our understanding of what is different in women's writing.

Helene Cixous celebrates feminine difference, asserting that woman writes through the femaleness of her body: woman must recover "her organs, her immense bodily territories which have been kept under seal" to experience the textual and erotic pleasures which transgress the laws of phallocentric discourse ("Medusa" 250). She further writes, "a woman's body, with its thousand and one thresholds of ardor... will make the old single-grooved mother tongue reverberate with more than one language" (246).

When Cixous speaks about body-writing and about how male and female writing are different, it would appear that she is taking sexual dimorphism -- the structural difference between male and female genitals -- as the source of language and style. But what she has in mind is the psychological feminity which will come to the fore when a woman writes with her body so that "the immense resources of [her] unconscious will spring forth and the inexhaustible feminine imaginary will unfold" ("Medusa" 251).
Lacanian psychoanalysis played an important role in effecting the transition from the concrete and political orientation of the French feminist movement to the more abstract theorizing of the "Feminine" that has dominated the past decade. Women's oppression, women's history, women's texts paled in significance beside the problems of language, fantasy and desire generated by Lacanian analysis and by Derridean deconstructive philosophy. Jacques Lacan's distinction between the Imaginary (where the child experiences unity with its mother) and the symbolic (which is paternal) has been regarded as a starting point by Julia Kristeva in her linguistic theories. By treating Lacan's distinction between the Imaginary and the Symbolic as a difference between the maternal and the paternal, Kristeva claims that the Lacanian model has a masculine bias to it, since it conceives of language as a unitary phenomenon confined to a symbolic order whose characteristics are undeniably masculine. That other language, ridiculed as baby talk which we are expected to grow out of when women enter the symbolic, is the non-dualistic and native language of the maternal imaginary and this might well be considered the matrix of a suppressed women's language.

Jovette Marchessault is in perfect agreement with the French feminists who affirm that resistance does take place
in the form of jouissance, that is, in the direct re-experience of the physical pleasures of infancy and of later sexuality, repressed but not obliterated by the law of the Father. Like Luce Irigaray and Cixous, she emphasizes that women, historically limited to being sexual objects for men (virgins or prostitutes, wives or mothers), have been prevented from expressing their sexuality in itself or for themselves. Marchessault's modes of writing are also in keeping with Ann Rosalind Jones' findings in psychoanalysis--"that bodily drives that survive cultural pressures toward sublimation surface" in what she calls "semiotic discourse: the gestural, rhythmic pre-referential language" (qtd. in Marks and Courtivran 362). Her language resists the giving up of the blissful infantile fusion with the mother, re-experiences the jouissance subconsciously and sets them into play by constructing the texts against the rules and regularities of conventional language. Marchessault's "semiotic discourse" is an incestuous challenge to the symbolic order, asserting as it does the writer's return to the pleasures of her preverbal identification with the mother and her refusal to identify with the father and the logic of paternal discourse.

Jovette Marchessault presents us with a good instance of body writing in Mother of the Grass where she discusses Christian faith:
The same Jesus Christ Our Lord didn't want anything to do with the sac (sic) of spirits in a woman's uterus. The same Jesus Christ our Lord didn't want to know about the mother's water. A flood changed the world! And it still smells of water, sea water, of the lumpy poisoned water of the female serpent, salt water, foamy water, and the vaginal water in the womb's crucible. It smells of water! Iodized water, sweaty water, the redolent odour of the tides of blood. It smells of water! It will always smell of mother-water... It smells of the water-of-life imported from women's wombs of the water of the starry world, of the waters from the depths of heaven and of earth. It smells of the water pocket which bursts and spills of its own accord to free a living child. (92-93)

Joan Crate seems to be more in agreement with Kristeva than with Cixous or Irigaray. Her emphasis on "feminity, colour, music, body" (Rose 137) and the metaphorization of the semiotic as "maternal territory" has opened the way to fantasies of "a centripetal, becalmed and softened feminine sexuality" (Kristeva 37).
Kristeva claims that maternity is a special culturally approved instance of "psychosis" that "reenters the secret, guarded territory of the archaic mother in order to produce the baby, signifier of the mother's desire for the phallic" (Kristeva 238, 241).

The mother in Dione is frequently referred to in images of nursing: "Elijah pulls his mouth from my nipple, whimpers, then returns, sucks and whimpers again" (91).

Kristeva associates motherhood with the attribute of maternal jouissance and the potential for disruption which it possesses. This jouissance, she points out is "feared and devalued by a phallocentric culture which recognizes the threat it constitutes to the status quo" (Kristeva 167-8).

The identification of femininity with an experimentally fluid form of writing which subverts the reader's expectations of linear, rational discourse, merging identities and ego boundaries in a manner similar to that which occurs in the pre-oedipal mother-infant bond, is a feature in Breathning Water and Mother of the Grass.

Women's words which fill up the aqueducts of your ears and the blood channels of your body from
head to toe during the nine months when every human being, ... is aquatic within the tender surfaces of the womb.

Words of continuance! Sybil's words! Words which ever find their centre in a cavern, a grotto, an abyss, or a uterus flooded with the waters of tears. Siren's words in the continuous flood of the waters of time. Siren's words which move and dive into the matter of words, caressing it so that it gushes forth all those words which are encountered in a woman's speaking. (Mother of the Grass 19)

The intensity is missing in Crate's work. But in her work, one can perceive an evocation of fluidity, softness, movement and life, especially in the passage where Dione is seen as one with her element,

Air Bubbles vibrate through blue, I dive down, listen to the cold whispers at my ears, pull my arms through the chlorinated water, glide weightless. The son of the sea loved the chief's daughter. Bubbles scattering from my mouth ease the pressure on my eardrum. And the chief's daughter loved the son of the sea. It was clear and strong, their love eternal. I touch the hard blue bottom... Bubbles rise from my nostrils,
chains of tiny bubbles anchor themselves to my thighs. Barnacles lodge at the corners of my mouth... I will stay here until my lungs turn to gills, my hair to seaweed, I will guide fish to the shores. (Breathing Water 67)

In Mother of the Grass, one sees an additional tactic, the valorization of the maternal. This marks a decisive break away from the existentialism of The Second Sex wherein Beauvoir stressed the oppressiveness of motherhood as an institution and rejected maternity as a solution to the problem of female transcendence. Marchessault goes one step further when, in her writings, she echoes the extreme feminist views that enforced matrophobia was "a new form of repression, the denial of the passionate, delicious experiences of women's bodies" (Cixous, "Jeune" 166).

In her verbal rhapsody of traditional feminine symbols, Jovette Marchessault valorizes the 'materrenelle,' woman as Mother Earth or Earth Mother. "[The Mother of the Grass] was giving birth to herbs which aid the birthing of complete babies or of fetuses. To affectional herbs, for every affection, respiratory, cardiac, and intestinal as well as the other kinds" (92).
Hegel in *The Philosophy of Right* while discussing the opposition between men and women writes, "The difference between men and women is like that between animals and plants. Men correspond to animals, while women correspond to plants because their development is more placid and the principle that underlies it is the rather vague unity of feeling... [Women are educated] as it were by breathing on ideas, by living rather than by acquiring knowledge" (263-4).

It is uncanny how like Hegel's myth of Plant-women are certain feminist theories of feminine knowledge, particularly the notion that the transmission of ideas between women occurs in the ostensibly unmediated manner of communication between a mother and infant daughter. Food, air, knowledge mingle between them and defy separation; experience is so intra-personal that individual identity and power are severely threatened and Mother and daughter mutually absorb each other. This vision of psychic osmosis between the maternal (or Grandmother) and the daughter is present in Marchessault's *Mother of the Grass*:

Grandmother was made to live in a four-dimensional space, the fourth dimension being precisely that visceral need she had to speak to me about her desires, her hopes, her irrational
self. She had the gift of being able wholly to involve herself in her words, to incarnate herself in flesh and blood in her subject matter... Her words were my food and drink. No matter what or whom she spoke about, her speech sparked an immediate pleasure throughout my entire body. (18)

The same strain is there in the following:

Grandmother's words, the words of a woman, were born quite quietly under the soles of your feet and came up and grew with an irresistible force inside you in an utterly gentle way. With her words, my Grandmother led me to the great widening of the river where suddenly there are no markers and where you do not need a telescope or a microscope. Even less do you need proliferating exaggerations and clarifications, when everything is already there in the delta of words. (18-19)

The Revisionist works under reference do not necessarily confine to defiance and reversal strategies. A more central set of preoccupation concerns female-female relationships in fiction. The founding position of "matriarchal feminisms" (qtd. in Armstrong 52) is that
there is something essentially positive in the pre-oedipal attachment between mother and daughter, in terms of which the unique flows and influences between women can be explained: "Mothers and daughters have always exchanged with each other - beyond the verbally transmitted lore of female survival - a knowledge that is subliminal, subversive, preverbal" (Rich, Born 23).

According to Nancy Chodorow, there is an enormous difference between male and female bonding in fiction. While the former often involves learning how to be a man, "a girl is not trying to figure out how to be feminine, but how not to be her mother. Gender role identification is not so uninvolved, whereas it is the central issue in the masculine case" (137).

Hence, in Maracle's fiction, one finds that the relationship between mothers and daughters, or between sisters is not always an easy one. As has been pointed out earlier, Marianne in Sundogs treats her mother as an obstacle. Her relationship to her sisters, especially Lacey, is a strained one. But her gradual politicization and acceptance of social role is accompanied by a recognition of her own previous blindness to her family's structure. The power Marianne derives after the reconciliation with her mother and sisters is exceptionally sound.
Mother-daughter relations and their ambiguous pains and pleasures are a focus of immense interest to Lee Maracle. Her heroines are girls entering the world of womanhood discovering the strong ties of blood which they so often ridiculed. Marchessault's heroines, identify themselves as lesbian feminists, and discover the values of women's community and ideals of collectivity.

If in *Mother of the Grass* it is violence of the patriarchal order that brought the daughters together, it is maternal identification of femininity that brings together the mothers and the daughter. In a brilliant piece of expression of love for her mother and grand mother, the heroine says: "I love you, my mothers. I love you to death. I love you to life. Love worked in me! Hatred was strangling me! Solitude has taken possession of everything, but I felt myself almost ready to live. I love you my mothers" (102).

In her unusual use of the plural "my mothers", Marchessault tries to illuminate the original interpretation of the meaning of mothers in her work. This concept of plurality "refers to her entire biological matrilineage as well as to all her spiritual, natural and mythic mothers" (Orenstein 187-88).
The creative bonding between the protagonist and Francine in *Like a Child of the Earth* and the community of women who have gathered on the Appalachian Mountains to find a means to save humanity -- all prove the positive strength of female bonding.

In addition to the use of subversive gynocentric writing, feminist writers also attempt a vigorous invasion of the sanctuaries of existing language. They employ "traditional images from the female body -- flower, water, earth -- retaining the gender identification of these images but transforming their attributes so that flower means force instead of frailty, water means safety instead of death, and earth means creative imagination instead of passive generativeness" (Ostriker 315-16).

Joan Crate's *Breathing Water* offers the identification with the flower image, "I am a flower choked with pollen" (7) -- pollen which has the potential force to procreate. Again Dione's query about the wife of the son of the sea, "But could she breathe?" (180) -- a metaphor for her own suffocating life -- leads to self realization she finds the answer in her own life -- she learns "how to hold her breath" (255) in water and also to find safety under it.
In *Mother of the Grass* too, one finds numerous images of water. Water, considered to be a treasure house of knowledge and life, is equated with life in paradise. "This river was a feast for the eyes, the ears, and the heart. Living beside a river... quickly teaches you the habits of eternity, you have the feeling that someone has personally handed you a flawless diamond, a secret, a gift... living besides a river teaches you one thing at least -- to withstand" (8).

The image of earth as a means of creative imagination is abundantly seen in Jovette Marchessault's work which has been aptly termed *Mother of the Grass* and which celebrates among other things, the ever changing nature of Mother Earth:

The Mother of Grass meditates in the midst of her mists. In the hollows of the earth, she caresses her seedlings, her beloved daughters. The earth on which we set our feet and backsides retains the long shudder of the first mother in childbirth.... Its amazing what may be heard when the Mother of the Grass... begins to give birth to the luminous beauty of growing things - balsom, resin, flowering heads, silken skins, hempen threads, cherry stones, grape juice, immortal seeds. Oh, what recent happiness, what
granted joy!... Whirlpool! Birth! The great renewal! A thunder-clap between the eyes. Magic in action. (110-11)

Women writers are forced to confront the inadequacies of contemporary literary theory and practice and to formulate practices capable of expressing their own marginalized experiences, their desires and their visions. Maracle, Marchessault and Crate have succeeded in seizing the site of discourse both outside and within male discourse. They have done so by reworking the narrative, reconstructing it on the basis of another pattern of coherence, not on the temporal logic of traditional narrative.


