Chapter Two

The Historicist Negotiation: the Circulation of Feminist Energy

This chapter attempts to read Alice Borchardt’s *Devoted, Beguiled* and *Night of the Wolf* in a new historicist perspective. The researcher has based the works on the contention that a text is a consequence of time and space. And so, the chapter is oriented towards comprehending the select novels in the historical context. The historicity of the texts naturally, evokes the postmodern backdrop. Hence, this chapter aims to pinpoint new historicism as inextricably linked to the postmodernist paradigm. Eventually, the chapter will enable one to apprehend Alice Borchardt’s strategic invocation of history, to proclaim a new feminist vision.

All the three novels, *Devoted, Beguiled* and *Night of the Wolf* slated for scrutiny, submit Alice Borchardt’s philosophy of life. They also establish how women are linked to the humanist paradigm and how they play crucial roles in salvaging an ethical perception of life. The womanly potential, sometimes, even supplements the masculine will to liberate a community.

Metaphorically taken as a shield drawn from history, the werewolf tradition, seeks to release the beast from within, and accomplish a successful quest for survival. Again as a metaphor, the werewolf garb emerges as a tool of mythical subversion which proclaims woman as the actor and man as the acted upon. Once having attained the status of a werewolf, the feminine within begins to deconstruct the cultural, the
psychological and the subconscious. The woman as a shape shifter is one illustration of deconstructing the gender. This is one postmodern epistemology which intersects with history.

Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar observe in *The Mad Woman in the Attic* thus, “The one plot that seems to be concealed in most nineteenth century literature by women. . .  is in some sense a story of the woman writer’s quest for her own story, it is the story in other words, of the woman’s quest for self definition” (76). Significantly, as shape shifters they re-script a new order perpetuated in postmodern feminist paradigm. For instance, crawling through the bushes is a culturally assigned role attached to a male and not to a female. Nevertheless, here as women are physically linked to the werewolf, they generate vast feminist machinery as they seek to stamp out all those cultural claims of male chauvinism. Werewolves never expect any assistance from outside forces. Likewise, the shape shifting protagonists appear most often independent and individual and hence the most dreadful and the most terrible dark ladies.

In certain instances, this assumption of a new persona emits a totemic animal symbolizing cultural feminism. Thus, the role of a shape shifter could be assumed as an effective cultural totem consistently articulating the quintessence of radical feminism. Borchardt holds the view that only a heinous evil-doer has the ability to shift and transform myths. At the same time, the concept of were wolfish thought can be stated as a special feature in which one sees the concept of self and soul that are one with a kind as she cherishes the newly created ethical order bequeathed upon them by history.
Moreover, with the transformation, an animal body generates a new warm and tingling energy, which invokes the surrealist woman represented through her own cerebral, psychological and the subconscious states. This is one side of transformation where the body disobeys the cerebral, psychological and the subconscious of the male. On the other side, the werewolf rejects the dress accorded to her historically and culturally by the super ordinate male normative order.

The novel *Devoted* projects a journey in which one finds the slave girl “stank of unwashed humanity and other smells more disgusting” (*Devoted* 8). The girl is one of the slaves, “loaded like a piece of merchandise into of those ships” (9) Bishop Owen reveals his identity which brings about a sense of belonging between each other. Both of them catch hold of the historical reality in which the hostile warlords rule the coast. Bishop Owen is Genstric’s fifth son who never wants to take up a Bishop’s way of life.

Eventually both of them have been restrained to accept what they never want as the novel proceeds that the reader understands that the Bishop Owen holds Chantalon town which is quite often threatened by the Vikings. The Vikings are historically known as ferocious invaders who never give up easily.

Now it falls on the Bishop Owen to hold the responsibility to saving not only his people but also those communities that are helplessly linked to the Chantalon castle for food and security. Alice Borchardt brings in at the same time the Bishop’s psychic dilemma. He knows that he can never be an example to his flock. His dilemma is intensified by his statement “what was god, was there a god at all” (33).
This is expressive of the Biblical Job like disposition as it carries the emotional intensity of a human being who has lost his faith.

The life strength of the Bishop comes from his new partner Elin who is not just primitive but more vital. Till the end of the book Elin comes out as a woman who protects the women of Chantalon. Borchardt presents Elin as one of “the people of the forest… The people of the old Gods” (*Devoted* 37). Elin’s sole purpose is to preserve some of that goodness from the pagan world and connect it to some of the good available in the Christian world. Metaphorically, while Elin is the representative of paganism, Bishop Owen is a projective of Christianity.

Alice Borchardt is justified in making Bishop Owen and Elin as man and wife. This is one paradox that the novelist advances to project a few significant points though the people of the forest are associated with paganism. They live an isolated life, prefer peace and serenity to war and restlessness. The people of the forest love Nature and are known for sacrifice, for the sake of Nature’s glory and honour. The next point is Christianity which is primarily concerned with sacrifice over the years as it understands that the sceptre not only controls the world but also makes it a huge garden of peace.

*Devoted* further brings in Reynald, his wife Elspeth, and Anna, the housekeeper. One catches hold of Ranulf and Elfwine, who are detailed to carry out the task of protecting the community. The novel sways back to Owen’s past juxtaposed by the evolution of Elin. Elin is the eldest girl of a father who had eighteen wives and nine children (40).
Elin is also seen as a kind girl as one witnesses her in a human relationship with the tavern keeper and helps the stalk dealers’ wives. The community is self-sufficient which can sustain life even during war fought over more than a fortnight. Elin looks more matured and courageous. Her arguments with Owen establish Elin as a representative of womanhood. While Elin is part of paganism whose sole desire is to achieve peace, Bishop Owen is a representative of Christianity, historically fixed on war and comfort, to peace and serenity. While the Bishop is centred, on his sense of duty of honour after a few killings, Elin is centred on her sense of duty and honour after a few constructive gestures in the community. The pagan ambience could also be regarded as a non-human one connected with the animals and Nature. As Lawrence Buell observes:

> The non human environment is present not merely as a framing device but as a presence that begins to suggest that human history is implicated in natural history. The human interest is not understood to be the only legitimate interest. Human accountability to the environment is part of the text’s ethical orientation. Some of the environment is a process rather than as a constant or a given is at least implicit in the text. (7-8)

Bishop Owen has great friends like Godwin, Edger, Gown, Wolf the short and Wolf the tall. They help the Bishop during difficult times. Enar who later joins is identified as the one who has attacked the Bishop, taking sides with the Vikings. One is justified in stating Elin’s unique symbol of paganism as one finds her an expert in the preparation of homemade medicines. Her medicines bring life back into the
terribly wounded soldiers and the pregnant women deliver their babies with ease. Additionally, Elin is a female symbol, of the people of the forest. She also begets the symbolic assumption of sexuality as found in Owen’s treatment of Elin’s body. As the novelist writes, “There is nothing…..few abstracts the marked presence of Elin in the novel calls attention to fertility theme. Elin joins with the women in her treatment for pregnancy, lunatics and war victims. She possesses not only the charm of feminity but also the earthiness of forest people”. (Devoted 92)

One should notice that the life strength of the Bishop evolves out of his relationship with Elin, who is not only primitive but more mysterious and has a greater strength. It is Elin to whom the Bishop entrusts the church treasure. Ultimately, Elin indulges in an act of a forestation in that, she becomes the vegetation woman in the community. This is how one witnesses Elin in her treatment of Godwin.

Alshan is one manifestation of the spirituality of the forest. Owen’s political strength is heightened by Alshan. Alshan posits the methodical preparation in Elin which helps her to reach the forest later in the novel. The novel is punctuated by many a war with the Vikings. Alice Borchardt also captures the bacchanalian revelry of the community which indulges in heavy drinking supplemented by their visits to whore houses. Gurlos is a frequent visitor to Chantalon. He collects many of his men and indulges in looting and plundering. He is the owner of many taverns which supply not only wine but also slave women. The Bishop Owen experiences a tough time with the girls as one finds them heavily wounded quite often by the enemy Gurlos.
The novel gains significance in its proclamation of time and space—in the time 900 BC and the space Circa the French border. The journey begins in a bleak winter which metaphorically suggests death. The journey achieves supremacy during spring as one finds Elin, as a spiritual companion worthy of the people of the forest. The Bishop Owen and Elin are the redeemers of the community. Alice Borchardt’s sense of the ecology takes on what M.F. Lee perceives to be, as he writes:

They advocated bio centric equality, the belief that all species are intrinsically equal and therefore have an equal right to life. Earth first! transplanted these ideas from the realm of philosophical speculation to the realm of political action, adding to them the urgency of a belief in an imminent apocalypse. It is this millenarian transformation that directly motivated Earth First’s actions and determined to development. (124)

Elin restructures the desolate Nature with her paganist innocence. She is the feminine counterpart to Bishop Owen. She represents the destruction of evil, which is the indication of generation and birth. Elin desires peace and is against the commoditization of women. If one has to look beyond the Devoted, the characters bring in their appearance, not only rationally but also emotionally. The characters associated with the Bishop Owen are caught up in the war theme of the novel, the perennial struggle for life. Also, the novel constructs an extraordinary world of self contained reality. It contains many things besides the fairies, the tree, the mythological birds and animals and the enchanted men and women. As Robert Cowley writes:
History is properly the literature of what did happen, but that should not diminish the importance of the counter factual that it can lead us to question long held assumptions. They can show that small accidents or split second decisions are as likely to have major representations as large ones. (1)

The novel gains significance by providing the splendid moment of the tenth century’s frustrated hopes of the Christians and the evolution of paganism. The 10th century is a time of bitter struggle and also it is an age of re-mythologization. While Bishop Owen is part of the struggle of betrayal, Elin engages her time in an agonized search for new meanings of life. She makes use of the elements of the people of the forest before forging a new world. Bishop Owen is betrayed by his uncle Reynald. He is taken a captive by Hakon and Gerlos. He manages to escape only to fall in companionship with the people of the forest, who deliver him to ultimate safety. When Owen is chased by Hakon, his boat rips off, “its bottom grinding against the submerged roots of the trees and was screened for a second from the ship behind” (Devoted 290). The next moment, Bishop Owen and Enar are caught off the willows and the steady streams, the boulders and thick clamps of bushes slow down the movement of the enemy as the horse take them “between two sucking pools along the safe path” (291). As the novelist writes:

They plunged over a small island, overgrown with willows, then down into and through masses of reeds taller than a man’s head, following stream that ran, clear open spaces of water, between hummocks of
muddy ground pushing their way past big clumps of cress and water lilies (Devoted 241).

The pursuit of Hakon and his men slows down as they are exposed to the wild beauty of the land. Sybilla, who appears with the flushed cheeks and eyes bright with anger is the deputy of the forest people. She rises in rebellion against those destructive Romans who “carried swords everywhere they went and used them” (344). This is how Sybilla makes of the plight of the forest people as they resist the Romans:

“I don’t think I would have liked it so much or you either,” Sybilla remarked, her cheeks flushed and her eyes bright with anger, “the rivers ran red with the blood of the slain. For those house men were not as we free, skimming over the earth as birds or the clouds in the sky but bound to the soil of their gardens and the tomb of their ancestors. They defended their homes against those beautiful warriors, to the death. We fled from them as men flee fire and hid in the deep woods we do not. (345)

Sybilla parades Bishop Owen into safety. As the novelist observes:

Rocks like two strong arms, stretched out on either side, and the thunder of the surf roared in Owen’s ears. The stallion flew straight for the ocean. It leaped the first wave with the agility of a deer. Then breasted the second, the jade-green water foaming while around its body the third wave caught all three of them in the face and Owen and the child were thrown into the sea (348).
The stallion is a fairy tale characterization which metaphorically stands as the pioneer of redemption. The stallion takes Bishop Owen over the mountain waves, “lifting him high, then pitching him down the green glassy surface of the trough, then up again, at the wild churning beauty of the stormy sky” (Devoted 350). Owen, a representative of Christianity, is slowly being paraded by “the light of Sybilla’s torch along the corridor” (352).

At any rate, the most striking feature of Borchardt’s depiction is what she forges as a new energy. This is one fact of the cultural consequence of the postmodern realism. Sybilla, enunciates the immense emotional energy of the virginal Nature, out of which the ecclesiastical community can continuously draw sustenance. This is one subliminal speculation of Alice Borchardt, which devices a historicist perception of the literary imagination. This is one supremely valuable contribution of Borchardt to literature. Indeed, one is consciously aware of the feminine working towards a reunion. This is one of the reasons why the novelist provides a clear picture of Sybilla’s world backed by her heroic behaviour. This creates the reopening of ideas about a historic past where one witnesses a not-so-good Christendom. There is always the hope and that liberation is possible with the accommodation of the paganist notions of humanity. While Hakon and his men are Christians, Sybilla is not. This is one overmastering pride exhibited by Elin when she gets on redeem the Christian humanity. She has endured the Christians when they force themselves upon her one after the other. Yet, she redeems the Christian Owen, by exhibiting Christian loyalty till the very end.
Coming to the people of forest, Alice Borchardt brings one to another postmodern cultural act -- the eco-recreation. This is what Alice Borchardt makes of the worth of the people of the forest, as she writes:

His women, the choosers of the stain armed the men, steadied their stirrup as they mounted, and handed them the cup, the cup with the mead of the immortal. They rode out across the clouds against, the night and the cold. Against the darkness that enveloped the world.

Their battle was a cloud of fire among the stars (Devoted 427).

In the journey over the vast heathen land, Bishop Owen is exposed to the intruding culturalities of the people of the forest like “the first waves of the returning tide” (425). The element that justifies Elin is the role she plays as the saviour to her husband, and this comes as a Christian paradox, as evidenced in Owen’s contemplation of his wife… “Your life for my people” (425). The sacrificial Nature of Elin makes one conscious of the primeval Nature of Christianity. Over the years, Christianity is markedly designated by men who had ruled through war and the women prided themselves on humility at home. By making Elin, the saviour of the community, Alice Borchardt categorizes two essential facts. Firstly, at a more general level, Elin is part of the first humanity since the first humans did not possess any religion and secondly at a more specific level, Elin progresses into redefining the gender itself. In this regard, Emmanuel Levinas quote warrants mention as he writes:

Life is a body, not only lived body who its well sufficiency emerges, but a cross road of physical forces, body effect. In its deep seated fear life attests this ever possible inversion of the body master into body-
slave of health into sickness. To be a body is on the one hand to stand, to be master of oneself, and on the other hand, to stand on the earth, to be in the other, and thus to be encumbered (164).

For instance, Elin trespasses the passive subjectivity in order to forge a new masculine subjectivity through sacrifice. Alice Borchardt maintains that the wholesome spiritual venture of Elin depends upon her feminine Nature being concerned with life rather than sheer living of a life. At the same time, she enforces the necessity of an infrastructure. As Jon Simons writes, “Thus we need law, institutions and the state, to render justice, and thus no doubt an entire political determinism become inevitable” (44). One can begin by stating that Elin also manifests the universality of gender. Elin can also be perceived as a performative woman, who is not afraid of the dark, of the sacrifice she is going to make, As Alice Borchardt writes:

Elin completed her preparations by dark. She walked down the stairs into the hall alone. The fire was the only light. None of the women had bothered to light the customary torches. Her skin felt clean and fragrant, still glowing from the sweet bath. She was dizzy form the fast and everything around her stood out with unnatural clarity. She wore a plain linen gown and was barefoot. A chaplet of rue was around her brow. Her hair hung unconfined down her back. From the knight’s quarters came the sound of Rosamund squealing and rough masculine laughter (Devoted 245).
Elin, much to the surprise of Godwin, descends into spirituality “eyes unseeing, as though her feet knew the way” (Devoted 246). Here, she clinches a new meaning of life. As already stated Mother Nature is not possessive of any religion as Elin asserts, “one thing I do know, it is not Christ” (246). She begins to speak to her people, the people of the forest. This she does for the sake of her husband. Elin could be equated with the Biblical Eve. Biblically, Eve is the first woman designated by God, to have control over the world. Now, Elin spiritualises herself into the first woman. This is one Greek idea of history as punctuated by Aristotle’s Poetics. He writes:

The difference between the historian and the poet is not that one writes in prose and the other in verse. . . The difference is that one tells of what has happened, and the other things that might happen. For this reason, poetry is something more philosophical and more worthy of serious attention than history, for while poetry is concerned with universal truths, history treats of particular facts. (43)

Elin will not yield; a stone woman she is; shares the torment of suffering along with Elfwine. This is what the novelist makes of the situation:

So she sat a stone woman, not feeling the heat of the fire burning on the hearth, powerless to warm her in thought on deed. For that was the heart of cured and its read malice, that she be tethered to her victim then enter hell, counting her own anguish cheap if he but shared her torment. He did, she was sure of that .Nothing else mattered for the time being. Her disciplined will would have left nothing else matter.
So she trembled, but was sure of herself, remembering the crown of rose and thorns pressed into her forehead by Abreka. I am Abreka’s daughter, she told herself and will not yield (Devoted 295).

Elin is sure of the fact that her spiritual alienation assures liberty and identity. This is why she subjects herself to suffering by fire and heat. The beginning of life, as connected to the people of the forest is restricted to Elin’s subjectivity, because it constitutes only the component of new humanism. She is one human agency at work, which exploits myth to uncover truth. This is one function of myth in a postmodern text. As Roland Barthes writes:

Myth does not deny, things, on the contrary, its function is to talk about them. It simply purifies them. It makes them innocent. It gives them a natural and eternal justification, it gives them a clarity which is not that often an explanation but that of a statement of fact.......In passing from history to Nature, myth acts economically it abolished the complexity of human acts, it gives them a simplicity of essences. It does away with all dialectics, with any going beyond what is immediately visible, it organises a world which is without contradictions because it is without depth, a world wide open and wallowing in the evident. It establishes a blissful clarity; things appear to man something by themselves (72).

While Alice Borchardt, describes Elin, returns to reconstruct myth which involves a postmodern politics as Roland Barthes registers, “The unveiling which it carries out is therefore a political act. Founded on a responsible idea of language
mythology, it thereby postulates the freedom of the latter. It is certain that in this sense mythology harmonises with the world, not as it is but as it wants to create itself” (Devoted 72). The text seems to release the voice of the novelist as enunciating a new meaning. Elin’s venture to save her husband is projective of, not only a new meaning to humanity, but also the multidimensional phase on which humanity rests. Through Elin, Borchardt attempts to retell a new story or rather a new history. According to Helene Cixous:

So all the history, all the stories would be there to retell differently.
The future could be incalculable, the historic forces would and will change hands and change body – and thought which is yet unthinkable - will transform the functioning of all society. We are living in an age where the conceptual foundation of an ancient culture is in the process of being undermined by millions of a species of mole (Topoi, ground mines) never known before. (64-5)

Helene maintains further that the text seeks to project subjectivity which is connected to the postmodern feminist politics. She writes of a woman writer thus:

She must write herself, because when the time comes for her liberation, it is the invention of a new insurgent writing that will allow her to put the breaks and indispensable changes into effect in her history. At first individually, on two first inseparable leave woman, writing itself, will go back to this body that has been worse than confiscated a body replaced with a disturbing stranger, sick or dead, who so often is a bad influence, the cause and place of inhibitions. By
censuring the body, breath and speech are censored at the same time.

(126)

For instance, the male elements become the backdrop. Bishop Owen’s use of strategies to escape Hakon arises out of tormented spirituality, burdened by Christianity. He reaches the point of disaster when he is made the Bishop of Chantalon by his uncle against his wishes Alice Borchardt writes:

Then on the other hand, he was a bishop. The life of a bishop should be an example of his flock. So Bertrand told him……… with a whip in his hand”. From those to whom much has been given, much will be required. So said Lord Abbot Bertrand, into whose hands had been given the task of training the future bishop of Chantalon (Devoted 32).

So, even in the beginning of the novel, one witnesses Bishop Owen, as a helpless individual. Primarily, Owen is granted the power to rule. When he marries Elin, who is connected to the first world of Nature, the latter is all set to gain the vision of comprehending the world and make Chantalon the splendorous residence of humanity. Together, Owen and Elin experience the power of the first root of life. Alice Borchardt projects an event in which one finds Owen recuperating from injury after a bloody encounter with Gerlos, the notorious Count. Elin takes care of Owen and after a few seconds, he feels that he is “refreshed and alert” (148). The scene offers the couple an opportunity to fuse Christianity and the most cherished ancient paganist notions. Naturally, paganism is one word which is misapprehended over centuries, since it has been perceived through the Christian idea of justice. Elin becomes a symbol of her gender which is centered on the life strength of humanism.
The life strength of Bishop Owen comes from his love of Nature and his relation to the ancient soil. The people of the forest, with whom he becomes friendly, are expressive of the vitality which replaces the Christian notions of humanism. No wonder, Godwin, Gowen and Enar, the very personifications of masculinity are negated by Elin’s feminist endeavours. Godwin and Gowen, and Wolf the tall and Wolf the short act according to what Elin decides. Elin’s role is crucially important. The strategic position of Elin is expressive of the feminist determination, inextricably linked to Nature. As R.P. Harrison puts it:

For the sort of enlightened humanism—there can be no question of the forest as consecrated place of oracular disclosures; as a place of strange of monstrous or enchanting epiphanies, as the imaginary site of lyric nostalgias and erotic cranky; as a natural sanctuary where will animals may dwell in security far from the havoc of humanity going about the business of looking after ‘its’ ‘interests’. There can be only the claim of human mastery and possession of Nature – the reduction of forests to utility. (121)

Alshan has been sent by Elin to redeem Enar from the notorious Vikings. Sybilla is the feminine counterpart of Alshan. As Alshan is a representative of the masculine redemption, Sybilla represents the feminine salvation, while both Sybilla and Alshan represent the original roots of humanity. This is one eco feminist exercise Alice Borchardt indulges, in order to enunciate a new philosophy of life. Sybilla is set against the backdrop of forest “screened by a few trees and bushes….the sound of waves thundering against the rocky stone” (Devoted 421). Both Owen and Sybilla
reach the place, “blundered into a parry of armed men, Hakon’s men” (*Devoted* 422). Promptly, she becomes a typical woman of the forest and she forges a strategy for safety in her own way. This is how the novelist makes of Sybilla’s decision, as she writes, “She had been quick-witted enough to go up the trunk of a tree like a squirrel and Owen followed. Even as the warriors passed below, her bird calls warned Alshan and the rest in time for them to seek hiding places. So far the weary old man had kept them safe on this journey” (420).

And finally, Sybilla brings Owen back home safely. The novelist makes use of Sybilla and Alshan, the representatives of the original humanity. Together, they ordain Bishop Owen as the new representative of the new humanity. This is self knowledge and the absolute truth constituted by the text. As Lyotard sees it:

> Liberation can be equated to the realization of some state of self-knowledge, to the Absolute Spirit in Hegelian terms. This requires us to think that the achievement of liberation is a ‘scientific’ undertaking as opposed to a narrative undertaking in which ‘being liberated’ is akin to accepting certain contingent premises about the Nature of a good life. (159)

Alice Borchardt provides a substantive basis for her account of the problems of foregrounding the postmodern feminist consciousness. Paradoxically, she seeks to clinch her ideology from the paganist epistemology. Like all postmodern texts, *Devoted* moves towards seeking a point of truth which guarantees humanism. It is here the novelist has been engaged with the meta-project of the subject. The account of history enunciates a two dimensional paradigm of belief. One is a new historicist
contest of history and the other being the fact of humanism conjoined with the misapprehended paganism. The text also negates the Christian idea of enlightenment. This is one rational response to the novelist’s response to the male crisis that is available aplenty in the novel.

G.W.F Hegel holds the perception that historicism lies in its essential tendency to ‘becoming’ history which raises art to a universalized historical truth. He writes:

Becoming, history is a conscious, self mediating process. . . This becoming presents a slow-motion succession of spirits, a gallery of images, each of which, endowed with all the riches of spirit, moves thus slowly just because the self has to penetrate and digest this entire wealth of its substance . . . took over the empire of the world from its predecessor. Their goal is the revelation of the depth of the spirit, and this is Absolute. (492)

In this sense, Beguiled comes as one manifestation of history. While the Bishop Owen is a part of humanity, Elin is the part of human reality. The dramatic emergence of Elin in the beginning of the novel is one strategic foregrounding by the novelist to proclaim the birth of a terrible beauty. Elin is fast like wind when she attempts to save Owen from the attacking enemies. The following passage is an illustration of her courage. As the novelist observes:

She’d slit the throat of what was left of the axe-wielder and pulled his body from under the dead piebald. She methodically stripped the
corpse. When the woman finished, she handed him the axe, but kept the knife she’d used to do the throat cutting, and tied it to her belt. He dismounted, took the bridle of the bay, and began walking. She followed, slinging the dead man’s possessions, bundled in the saddle blanket, over her shoulder. (*Beguiled* 4)

Yet a woman, Elin is part of the human reality. She is a victim of the masculine superstructure as one finds her body reflected against the lake:

> The marks on her body were truth. Raw patches of skin on her back still unhealed, torn by the whip. Sores on her ankles and wrists burned into her flesh when she fought the ropes that tied her. Purple and yellow bruises where the hands of some men held her down so others could have their will of her. (8)

The masculine superstructure has done enough to destroy feminine fertility as seen in their physical act of “sailing upriver to plunder and destroy” (15). As the novelist writes:

> Each time more cities and people fall in their hands. Desolation is everywhere. There is nothing along this river but the smoke of burning and the stench of death. The river is their highway and all who live here pay tribute to them or . . . . They die. All the rivers of France belong to them – the Seine, the Marne, and the Oise. They sail everywhere a navigable stream flows. I have not heard of a one they don’t rule. Not a one along whose banks they don’t spread fed and
destruction. ...from the north they come, more and more every year.
And like the north wind and the frost, they wither and blacken all they touch. Three times the lord of Chantalon, Count Anton has bribed them not to attack. But there can’t be a fourth. We have nothing left.

*(Beguiled 15)*

Elin’s identity is affirmed by the statement “my mother was the woman of the old people,” (30) which forces Bishop Owen to regard her as a witch initially, but later he perceives Elin as a new representative of an unknown humanity of yore. While in *Devoted*, Owen is part of the picaresque, in *Beguiled*, he is essentially a part of history. Owen is juxtaposed to Hakon. Hakon evokes an illegitimate proposal with Elfwine after having Reginald eliminated by treason. Elfwine is Hakon’s victim, in that, she has been turned into a fetish commodity, as evidenced in the Viking whorehouse. Clara is another illustration of the subaltern. Nevertheless, Elfwine, like the Biblical Esther, sets out to redeem her people. Hence, *Beguiled* could be compartmentalized into three segments. Initially it is the historical moments of life concerned about Bishop Owen and Elin and then, it is about Godwin and his fighting companions. Finally, it is all about the destruction of the Hakonian Empire. Again, like *Devoted*, Alice Borchardt forges a new alliance between history and the people of the forest. The initial moments of the novel open with the first encounter with Bishop Owen accompanied by his deputy Martin and the people of the forest represented by Elin and her friends Sybilla, Tigg and Alshan. This is a historical moment in which the Vikings seem to control the events of the visionary. They possess huge ships, thanks to more than a few decades of war. The boat, as it is called, is the symbol of
the Viking history. Bishop Owen has been extended suggestions by Martin who is “the really massive parish priests of the only fishing village” (6). The ship is projective of the Vikings’ pride and masculinity, as illustrated thus, “The wood that framed the boat’s body was freshly scraped, oiled and gleaming, Garlands of glistening Oak leaves, pale while-berried mistletoe, and lacy cedar hung draped along her sides glowing against the black wood” (Beguiled 3).

Alice Borchardt negotiates the Viking villainy with the immaculate pristine glory of the people of the forest as found in the following passage. She writes:

But the true richness of the valley lay in the fertile soil, the bottom land along the river shore. There the living torrent blessed them all. The rich, heavy, well watered fields and forests along its length held water like a jug. In a bad year, they could harvest two crops; in a good, three. Only war brought starvation and suffering to the valley. (4)

To Bishop Owen, the people of the forest have been the historical asset. As Alice Borchardt observes:

Her friends, Sybilla, Tigg and the old leader Alshan were beside her. They were her dowry. And had proven a rich one with their help held gone from being a minor, unrewarded churchman, bullied by the count and the neighbouring large landowner. (4)

This is one historic position Alice Borchardt eventually submits as the foregrounding principle. One can see that the Bishop’s struggles are constituted by a set of power struggles. Beguiled inevitably involves a maximum bridging of gap
between post modernity and history. The literary connotations about *Beguiled* are possible only when they forge a link between history and modernity. History is prioritised as it simultaneously constitutes the contemporariness of text. Two different possibilities are seen: one is the historical development of history and the other is the non linear progression of events. For instance, in just a single chapter, Alice Borchardt fuses three components of historical events. One is connected to the historical interjections of Bishop Owen and Elin, the other being Godwin and his men engaged sometimes with domesticity and lastly, Hakon’s plot to undo the ecclesiastical construct pattern of Bishop Owen. Naturally, this is one postmodern dimension called *Pastiche* in which the text is bound by the evolution of future, diverged through the development of history of the past. Borchardt conceives history as an imperative in the process of the evolution of new meaning. In the opening chapter, Elin’s people demonstrate endurance as revealed in the behaviour of the persons “who feared them, protected them, and sometimes worshipped them” (*Beguiled* 4). As Alice Borchardt observes:

Before the Romans marched, their stately tread tramping out stone roads, before the Gauls raided, fought and threw up their green ring forts, Elin’s people wandered under the trees. They gathered acorns, chestnuts, and honey to make bread. They netted fish in the cleanse forests, and forked ducks and geese in the marshes along the coast. (4)

Though relatively small, the opening chapter establishes the native superiority of the Vikings. Hakon appears as a sadistic marauder of history as evidenced in the cruel act of killing a female slave. Bishop Owen and his people stand shocked to this
incident as this “little girl stopped screaming when the rope closed her throat” (Beguiled 15). As Fredric Jameson feels, “this situation evidently determines what the architects’ call ‘historicism’ namely the random cannibalization” (202). The Viking treachery constitutes the anarchy of history and this is one perspective through which Alice Borchardt wishes to drive home the fact that history, with all its anarchic propositions, represents a many sided temporality. A Bruno Latour writes, “We do have [in the text] a future and a past, but the future takes the form of a circle, extending in all directions, and the past is not surpassed but revisited and reshuffled …in such a frame work, our actions are recognized at last as poly temporal” (76).

Alice Borchardt projects a female character attached to the domestic chores. One finds Rosamund the housemaid and Anna the housekeeper. One finds, Rosamund is efficient. Yet, she ends up as a victim of masculinity. As Alice Borchardt writes:

Rosamund was sixteen. She was one of the housemaids. When she wasn’t being a housemaid, she was selling her favours to Godwin’s knights for pecuniary and presentational considerations. Godwin had heard she had quite a bit of silver and jewellery in a lockbox under Anna’s bed. (21)

Likewise, Anna “was an ancient, rising seventy or so. She was doing mysterious things to a large mound of flour on the side board behind him. She kept house for Owen” (21). At home, both the ladies radiate the energy of life. They keep the knights and soldiers fully fed and properly disciplined. Yet, Rosamund later has been sexually abused by the drunken soldiers. Enar’s wife, Ingund is another instance of a woman who is trained in domestic warfare. Once when “The city had been
attacked by a few months ago, and she had shown a real talent – for warfare. She wore a mail shirt and a beat tusk helmet” (Beguiled 23). Presently, she is under the care of Godwin who hopes that “she’d suspend her marital activities, at least until the Vikings attacked the city again” (23). From the beginning, women have been part of the stately passion constituted by home, women have also been involved in male games. While speaking of passion, G.W.F. Hegel observes:

The particular interests of passion cannot therefore be separated from the realization of the universal, for the universal arises out of the particular and determinate and its rotation. . . Particular interests contest with one another, and some are destroyed in the process. But it is from this very conflict and destruction of particular things that the universal emerges. (89)

The reader gets an account of the state of domestic women in history who necessarily supplements support to the power hegemony. The events establish Alice Borchardt as a typical collector of historical materials hitherto unfamiliar. And here Walter Benjamin’s idea of the task of the historical materialist warrants mention. He writes:

A historical materialist cannot do without the notion of a present which is not a transition, but in which time stands still and has come to a stop. For this notion defines the present in which he himself is writing history. Historicism given the eternal image of the past, historical materialism supplies a unique experience with the past. The historical
materialist leaves it to others to be drained by the whore called “once upon a time” in historicism’s *Bordello*. He remains in control of his powers, man enough to blast open the continuum of history. (254)

*Beguiled*, is also a postmodern text which incorporates the novelist’s preconceived assumptions about history, before creating a meaning for the present. As Pierre Macherey writes, “the work that the author wrote is not precisely the work that is explicated by the critic. Let us say, provisionally, that the critic, employing a new language, brings out a difference within the work”. (7)

In this chivalric sequel to her medieval saga *Devoted*, Borchardt returns to ninth-century France and the city of Chantalon, where the bishop, Owen, and his wife, Elin, confront Viking raids and treachery as they try to bring peace to their people. To fortify his meager troops, Owen, with the aid of the mysterious forest people, journeys to his father's stronghold to entreat his aid. Instead, he is captured by a hedonistic community of Bretons who offer him safety and peace for his people if he agrees to be their king--and death if he does not. As Owen undertakes this hero's journey, Elin is left to defend Chantalon against treason and a deceptive inciter sent by the Viking lord Hakon.

Another instance could be cited from Borchardt’s reference to the historical armoury. One finds the Bishop Owen and his men packed by the ancient weapons the troops carried. They are magnificent crossbows built by Dennis. A victim of war, Dennis develops the hobby of making building crossbows when he recovers after having lost a leg “in a skirmish with brigands the first year Owen was Bishop of Chantalon” (*Beguiled* 27). The crossbows Dennis built are light. Hence, they can be
loaded quickly “and so for as accuracy was concerned, they were stunningly lethal”  
(*Beguiled* 27).

Dennis works hard with the Bishop, in order to make an encounter with Hakon very effective. Alice Borchardt suggests one instance of Godwin having been irritated by Hakon’s men who offer large sums of money to covert Dennis to their side. This historical instance naturally connects one to the modern arms race in which bribery and corruption are necessary evils. As Glenn Burger observes in the introduction:

> To bring postmodern and premodern historicist and theoretical, marginal and hegemonic into a different less knowable relationship with each other, to imagine a productive middle in which relationships between the past and present marginal and dominant, canonical and non-canonical can proliferate (xiii).

Alice Borchardt’s postmodern presentation is ordained by the historical impulse which contextualizes *Beguiled*. As Carolyn Dinsham writes, “A queer historical impulse is an impulse toward making connections across time between on the one hand, lives, texts and other cultural phenomena left out of sexual categories back them and, on the other, those left out of current sexual categories now” (1).

In the ensuing story, Alice Borchardt brings in the taverns as the cultural totems. Roureda is the tavern keeper. Arn is her husband. Much wine flows in the taverns to keep the fighters in good spirit. Sometimes the taverns are also the resting places of these visitors as they are supplemented with women. Alice Borchardt contrasts the scene with the places of quietness. One catches up with Elin against the
backdrop of the huge trees of the forest visited by small ducks. The vision of the entire neighbourhood from the tree is a metaphorical significance of eco-supremacy. Alice Borchardt also brings in a conflict arising from the outside. In *Devoted*, one witnesses the psychic crisis of the Bishop for having chosen this ecclesiastical vocation. In *Beguiled*, one witnesses the crisis as emanating from outside, this time from Bishop Owen’s parents Gestic and Clotil. They write letters to the Bishop persuading their son to divorce Elin to take up a Christian wife. The Bishop Owen is initially upset by the letters, because during the Viking process of distractions, these Christian legionnaires went into hiding to protect themselves. On the other hand, all through his marital life, Elin stands beside him, in dedication, fighting till the last. The novel also brings in Elspeth’s distress as Routrude, one of her king’s men arrives. Hakon uses Routrude to infiltrate into Bishop Owen’s land. He reaches the place carries out his task, and Routrude’s choice is Elfwine as he bribes her with gold. Also, he promises Elfwine a lot of jewels and money if she opens up the well-guarded gates of the castle when the Vikings arrive.

One finds Elin seated in the sweat-bath with the steam clouding the air and here one is given to understand that the steam of Nature is all set to contest Christian spirituality. The steam is the inviting spirit attached to the people of the forest known for self assurance and courage. One also witnesses Pominola, one of Elin’s young cousins, “showing a strong resemblance to her uncle Agelf” (*Devoted* 236) Pominola connects Elin physically with the people of the forest of “spices and seed grain” (236). Enar, a man of Roman civilization, is afraid catching up with them since he finds the people of the forest astonishing as “they move as easily through the shadows
as the wind itself and might almost have been part of the night” (*Devoted* 256). As Alice Borchardt observes:

They left the village behind them, plunging again into the embracing safety of the darkness under the trees. What they ran through now was more parkland. Though it was still almost always possible to stay among the trees, it was sometimes necessary to dash through a clearing. Enar noticed Alshan always put on a burst of speed when he did so. (257)

This is a cultural formation with which Alice Borchardt proclaims her ideological implications and, her implications rest on deconstructing the male politics. According to Felicity Baum Nuss A:

At the most basic level, the Foucauldian account of cultural formation that the new historicists have adopted by depoliticizing power, calls into question the efficacy of local and contingent political action: since all of life is always already inscribed within and predetermined by structures of dominance and subordination, the powers that be will always be the powers that be. At a more local level. New Historicism logically focusses its attention not to the subversive and suppressed elements of society but on the dominant structures-and largely without criticism. (98)

The object of new historicism is not the comprehension of context but rather the culturality of history. In *Devoted*, one sees the culturality of history or the
historicity of culture as effectively translated into literature by Alice Borchardt. The political and the social formations of the interest of Christendom have been found to be mobilized through an ideological Cross. The Cross of crucifixion in the hands of Hakon and his people promise the redemption of humanity, which in fact is not so.

In both *Devoted* and *Beguiled*, Borchardt pinpoints some crucial cultural objectives of the Roman Christianity. She contests the idea that Christendom is a context and not a human essence. She finds Christianity as another infrastructure hopelessly reduced to a pathetic demeanour. On the other hand, the people of the forest, who are not essentially Christians, possess the human essence of living. They manifest humanism, the quintessence of human existence. Alice Borchardt’s text is aimed at the Roman Christians who are demonstrative of a failure to grasp the human essence. No wonder, they resort to violence, bloodshed and treachery. They suppress any sign of humanism. Elin and her mother Wilsa is representative of the immaculate paganism that provides a lot of answers to the questions. Both *Devoted* and *Beguiled* demonstrate the fundamental humanist ideologies, before they create a social context. Both the novels depoliticize Christianity by putting into question the very creditworthiness of the contingent Christian actions depicted. In a new historicist perception, Alice Borchardt’s submits the historical objectives of hegemony. Significantly, she holds the view that feminism is a cultural imperative which attempts to thwart the male power. As Louis Montrose writes:

> Historicism is a critique of dominant critical ideology than a subject for ideological appropriation, thus contributing to its almost sudden installation as the newest academic orthodoxy to its rapid assimilation.
by the “interpretive community of Renaissance literary studies. It remains unclear whether or not the latest ism with its appeal to our commodifying cult of the new will have been anything more than another passing intellectual fancy to what Fredric Jameson would can the academic market place under late capitalism. (18)

For instance, in Devoted, Alice Borchardt engages herself in the evolution of new meanings out of the images of history. And for that, she makes a literary Odyssey into a historical past in order to excavate its ideological framework. Women are found to be consciously, put out of the space. The novel is expressive of the ideological paradigm that manipulates the feminine image into the other. Alice Borchardt, by de politicising male hegemony manoeuvres Elin into an emergent which is a radical feminist position. In other words, Elin not only contests the dominant male values, but also emerges as a radical saviour of her community. At one point, Elin sees her husband as a dissonant subject burdened by male chauvinism. This is another new historicist concern, one finds in the novel. As Felicity Nuss Baum observes:

New historicism, in its alignment with some versions of feminism and Marxism, needs to take more account of the dissonances that merge from the juxtaposition of strongly held consistory subject positions through history, to consider the mode of production as well as class, gender and race relations, The relationships among them cannot be adequately conceptualized if discourse is imagined to float free of lived experience. More exactly, without a notion of materiality of ideology, new historicism fails to establish a literacy of causes and effects and
thus displays a relative indifference to these social relation and hierarchies. (135)

In a new historicist perspective, one beholds *Devoted* as a novel which demonstrates the configurations of male hegemony. The male hegemony Borchardt speaks of belongs to AD 900. One witnesses the ecclesiastical power suppressing the female subject. The taverns one finds in the novel are representative of the male power tinged with sadomasochism and by that, the novel takes into account the fact that a woman is culturally perceived as a desirable commodity. The tavern has always been marked by a bacchanalian revelry which forces women “to have bottomless ability to endure humiliation and degradation” (*Devoted* 132). Elin, herself is one such victim driven to despair and sexual violence by the Roman Christians. At the tavern there is feast for everyone. As Alice Borchardt writes in the novel:

> Inspite of the cold, the doors of the hall were thrown open. Bonfires to cook the oxen sprang up in the city square. A little gold bought a lot of beer and the first casks were broached even as Owen was being led to slaughter. Flat drums, and handballs appeared, and the dancing began as the beer started to circulate among those gathered around the cooking fires. (134)

Godwin, a noble lieutenant of the Bishop Owen goes about proclaiming his black gospel as he says, “I think a visit to the whore house might be propitious. Godwin …. Stick to honest whores, no married women…” (135).The tavern is one Roman cultural totem which foregrounds the social construct of male power. The taverns are that structures of power that determine subject positions of women. They
foreground the structures of power and they fail to take account of the fact that representations must also be read or mediated by the female subjects. The individual feminine subjectivity is projected by Alice Borchardt to be a function of difference, class, race and so forth which destabilizes power.

The purpose behind the projection of taverns is that these pleasure houses, ironically zoom the feminine as it continuously proclaims the commodity status. The tavern keeper, who is a woman, is an ironical representation of history. It is a contradiction in that, Anna is the tavern keeper. Anna is a woman who has been ironically submerged into masculinity. Yet, supplemented by Elin’s support, she enacts an ideological determinism on women sexuality. Anna is able to establish and construct her own implication of sexual ideology. Jonathan Dollimore has made an exhaustive study of feminine submission. He holds the ecclesiastical infrastructure as responsible in that it readily ordinates a woman with negativity. Yet, Anna attempts “to establish the fact that deviant” (21) sexual identities can become sides of resistance to the language ideologies and cultures of the dominative.

Anna is also having a connective cultural link with humanism constituted by the people of the forest. Humanism is declared by the people of the forest as represented by the closing lines of the novel:

A shell of cloud lay over the valley and from beneath its edge shone the first fiery light as the sun rose. The water had a smooth metallic sheen, gray and silver in the light of the new sun, cold and deadly as a sword blade burnished, filed to a razor’s edge, and readied for battle.

(Devoted 467)
The phrase “readied for the battle” proclaims the continuum of life punctuated by conflict and contractions. The great project of Devoted is oriented towards the liberation of the self. Alice Borchardt has successfully brought out the relationship between dominant histories. One is naturally able to perceive that Devoted is a historical event for one simple reason that it dwells at length on predominant historical and cultural science. The text is warped by a specific historical condition. The novel dismantles the enlightenment concept of history with a radical reinterpretation of postmodern structuralism.

Likewise, Beguiled is intruded upon by Bishop Owen’s ventures into an unknown land with Alshan and Sybilla. The moment Owen begins to travel with them, he comes to believe that he is sheltered, secured and sustained in life. There is a conflict of interest between the Bishop Owen and Alshan. For instance, Alshan perceives Baptism as a bathing incident. He contests the Christian faith in Baptism as connected to the conquest of women. Alshan tells the Bishop point blank that his father “let himself be washed by the priest” before he captured “the Frankish girl, Clotil’ (Beguiled 155). This act is perceived by Hakon as the most unchristian as he holds the ceremony as a cultural excuse for a wrong deed. One is naturally aware of the contest of the values between Christianity and Paganism.

Alice Borchardt brings in the incident of a forest rite in order to establish the sterility of the dove spoken; Sybilla leads Owen and his company through avenues “dodging all human habitation” (Beguiled165). Sybilla seeks the help of Alshan as they travel through the dense forest. The forest fire is another instance of a pathetic fallacy which is expressive of the anger of the Divine. The Bishop Owen is trapped in
the forest. He witnesses the whole of the river bank, burning fiercely with the pine
trees exploding. This is one point of encounter of that is, the Christian with the forest
fire.

In Alice Borchardt’s view of history one finds the dominant patriarchy within
a socially established structure of religion and gender. *Beguiled* populated by women,
who happen to be slavish victims of masculinity. Elin manifests a redefined cultural
position as she oscillates between the domestic and the social garbing the roles of a
housekeeper and then the deputy of the people of the forest. Eventually, she ends up
the cultural, “sample of a half masculine feminine rebel” (Stead 456).

Elin does not deny any identification with the cooks and the helpers who
happen to be women. At the same time, she is part of the rebellion against Hakon and
it so happens she has to be a saviour now. This is one composite cultural part of the
radical feminine, drawn irresistibly towards history to perverse historical myth. Alice
Borchardt forces in a perception that history is never anything but repressive of
gender. As it induces the suppression on the feminine, it produces the masculine. For
instance, she says that the very idea to contest patriarchy one needs to abandon the
feminine features. In the case of Elin, she restructures feminism by being a devoted
wife to Bishop Owen. Hakon is the metaphor of the repressed desire in a tremendous
effort to free himself from his religion. He sees to it, that he indulges in some
ferocious unchristian force. Hence, he engages in a conflict with another Christian --
the Bishop. This conflict within is the gaining point for Alice Borchardt. She engages
the readers with Elin in the contest against religion.
Beguiled negotiates with Roman history and then the Vikings to enhance the feminist epistemology. Elin and Sybilla are two pointers who indulge in deconstructing the historical feminine into the postmodern feminine. This is one present concern with Alice Borchardt to whom the writing of history is gender construction. Eventually Beguiled constructs another plot out of history. In the process of other things, masculine superstructure is destabilized and a standard postmodern plot is retrieved. The forest is retrieved from the hands of the masculine. Sybilla is the archetypal mother who receives the archetypal father, Owen. Eventually Beguiled could be identified as a text which perpetuates the feminist life force. Like the Shavian life force, Alice Borchardt posits the feminist life force as ultimately destabilising the patriarchal hegemony. The novel manipulates itself into making a new pact that even neutralizes male hegemony. This is similar to the modern nations’ military infra-structure which comprises female soldiers and nurses as crucial components.

Alice Borchardt simultaneously unfolds the story of Elspeth. Elspeth is Reynold’s widow and now a second wife of Hakon. This shows a triangular dimension of betrayal, treason and confiscation. Reynold is believed to have been burnt to ashes by Elin. Hakon and Elspeth believe Elin to be “the witch at Chantalon….interfering to protect her lord, the Bishop” (Beguiled 219). Elspeth has a clear mission at hand. She only wants “to stand with the rest of her people on the earthen rampart behind the palisade surrounding her fortress” (218). She is a historical determinant in that, she is all set to protect her community and then her children at any cost. As she speculates, “At whatever cost, she must find another husband, the
strongest one possible, and a man able to defend her lands and her children. Whatever she had to endure at his hands she could bear, if only she knew Eric and the girls were safe” (Beguiled 222). She does not get upset when Hakon invades her land with the idea of taking her as his wife. She attempts to negotiate Hakon’s trickery and manipulate a new existence. At the same time, she is also aware of the discrimination. While Hakon’s men are concerned about the royal feast, Elspeth’s people have to depend on the crumbs falling from Hakon’s table. This is how the novelist makes of the situation. She writes:

The faces of Elspeth’s people grew grimmer and grimmer as the fire raged on. She knew why. In the hall they ate beef, venison, duck and chicken not to mention other wild game taken in the hunt. But in the villagers, her minions, the peasants, depended on the pigs that foraged in the woods for the winter supply of meat. (218)

Elspeth could be equally fitted in with Elin in that she has comprehended the art of survival. Alice Borchardt projects Elspeth as another feminine type which grasps the complex of masculine history in order to forge a new feminine identity based on survival. Like Elin, Elspeth can spur “her horse to full speed” “heedless of the danger showing the signs of precipitous flight” (219). In order to seek vengeance on those responsible for her husband’s flight, she even draws help form freeholders. She is caught in a dilemma between arising out of her position, as the victim of the masculine Hakon and the mother of her children. This is how the novelist makes of the dilemma as she observes:
Elspeth ate nothing; she fed the children and bedded them down for the night. She did her best to control herself before the children, but once they slept she gave herself up to the tidal wave of despair that welled up from the bottom of the heart. She crouched and watered by rain, all living things came to birth among its branches. (*Beguiled* 220)

Hakon, on the other hand, perceives Elspeth as a pricey catch. On the pretext of consideration, Hakon confronts Elspeth with the promise of salvation. While Elspeth is a historical metaphor of feminist determinant, Hakon is one of the historical masochists. Once Reynold is dead, Hakon shuts Elspeth up in the women’s quarters. Elspeth holds both Reynold and Hakon as deputies of sadomasochism. While Reynold lavishes his pleasure and power on women other than Elspeth, Hakon rightfully claims Elspeth as a woman paraded in company for his sake. This is what Hakon tells of Reynold, “Reynald had no friends. He was a treacherous, covetous, cold-hearted bastard, callused as a ploughman’s foot. To him everyone, man or woman was an object to be used for pleasure or profit” (226).

Elspeth knows that Hakon is right. She also holds her brother Bertrand responsible for the death of her husband. Elspeth gets the first score by making Hakon promise a huge ship that will sail her children to safety. As he agrees:

Then he snapped his fingers. “I have it. I’ll give him his choice. Lands and a stronghold, or a long ship and a crew. A gift of immense value, that, my lady. I don’t know if you realize how much it costs to outfit a ship and hire a skilled crew to sail her should neither one strike his fancy, he may take gold up to the value of one or the other. (230)
Yet she is aware of the ephemeral feminine sealed by the male hegemony as she contemplates, “Is this all my life? First, Reynold’s embraces. Then I pass from his arms to the next man’s and from him, perhaps, to the next” (*Beguiled* 236).

Nevertheless, Elspeth retains her feminist radical position when Hakon uses the word ‘whore’ on her. She retorts saying, “My hands are strong. I bought you. I’m buying you. Not the other way around” (236). Yet Hakon, from all his sadomasochist propositions, pities Elspeth, “the poor lady, bred to be the consort of princes and kings, now sold to be the play thing of a private chief”( 240).

Hakon does not seem to get down from his masculinity, which is historically determined through the phrase “not at your will but at mine” (241). It is a cultural proclamation of the ecclesiastical hegemony. Elspeth thus comes as a metaphor of women. While on the one hand she is projective of a victim, on the other she demonstrates the feminist determination. Alice Borchardt wonderfully fuses these two positions in the following passage, as she writes, “I am a woman, she thought. I have power. Reynald had tried to deny her that power. He had shut her in his so called “women’s quarters” away from her people. They knew what Reynald had done and how she suffered for their sake and her children’s”. (241)

At the same time Elspeth is a pragmatic woman who has properly comprehended herself. Yet historically she is part of her people who have “yielded the land first to the woman of the hearth, tender, peace maker, child bearer, lover, begetter of life” (242). She can only lament thus:
Now Reynald was gone. And Hakon - this magnificent man-beast was as innocent as a babe about the ancient ruling powers that held the land he wished to own. How long? She guessed before the Romans, perhaps even before the Gauls, the land was consecrated to its people. She was their descendent, keeper of the flame. \textit{(Beguiled 241)}

Hakon, is a cultural component of the Roman Savagery. This is what Alice Borchardt makes of the Roman characters as she writes:

> The cobbled street was cleaner here. At the centre of the square a fountain played, pouring clear water into a basin. Beyond the fountain stood the tall white colonnade of a Roman portico. Once the oval row of columns had embraced a wide open plaza that framed the entrance to the magnificent sprawl of an ancient villa. \textit{(273)}

Even Bishop Owen wonders why such orderly people like Romans fabricated disorder in the cosmos. After these events, Alice Borchardt sets out to establish Elspeth as a complete lady. Elspeth’s evolution of wholesomeness of being is established by the novelist. One finds Elspeth is so cool and daring and Hakon is so enraged and frightening, “standing for a moment, shivering in the night wind”. He is frightened and enraged, “All the more enraged because he was frightened” (281). He is indicative of the Roman past and also of the future foretold. As Jeannette Winterson writes:

> The future is foretold from the past and the future is only possible because of the past. Without past and future, the present is partial. All
time is eternally present and so all time is ours. There is no sense in
forgetting and every sense in dreaming. Thus the present is made rich.
Thus the present is made whole. (62)

In this regard, it is worth quoting Robert Cowley here. He writes in the introduction:

History is properly the literature of what did happen; but that should
not diminish the importance of the counterfactual. What-it can lead us
to question long-held assumptions. What it can define true turning
point. They can show that small accidents, a spilt-second decision is as
likely to have major representations as large ones. (xi)

Turning to the Night of the Wolf, one finds that it is primarily concerned with
the contest of the non-human versus the human. The novel basically is entrenched in
the dispute of humanity before finally asserting that the humankind is sterile. The
sterile humankind has been bereft of all its potency to uplift the worn out ethics. Over
time, Alice Borchardt is of the opinion that humanity, essentially male chauvinistic,
has lost its credibility to posit any demeanour. Having stripped womankind of ethics,
the male anarchical superstructure, according to her, has outdone it’s so called
creditworthiness is to speak of order and good-will. More accurately, Night of the
Wolf is Alice Borchardt’s sincere endeavour to demonstrate this perceptual
perspective that might look very well fit into her own ideas of life. Her subject matter,
half woman and half wolf, in many ways, are her radical proclamation.

At the outset, Alice Borchardt suggests that there is much to be drawn from
Nature. Hence, by parading an eco ambience, she posits well the idea that the cosmos
is a sensorium, next only to its creator, who acts through it to create or rather recreate the ideal. By invoking an all ideal Nature, Alice Borchardt excavates the unknown. One must take caution that Alice Borchardt’s delineation of non-human world is not fixed on metaphysical perceptions, but rather, an epistemology which is concerned about the well-being. The novelist, cautiously yet strategically carves out a doctrinal arena, in which the epistemic precept of love communicates through the creatures and the creations of the virginal forests.

More distinctly, Alice Borchardt, by resorting to a direct realist perception, presents an argumentative verve centering on the principle of pure love and liberty. For instance, “Humans in their blindness think intelligence has one path--theirs! But this brain – older and wiser, though not as acute – knew knowledge has many facets and routes” (Night of the Wolf 3). [hereafter, referred to as NW]

Significantly, Alice Borchardt resurrects the non-human when “The Wolf awake” to the nightly rhythms that resonate in the flesh, blood, and bones of all earth’s creatures and ironically, “Man, alone, has forgotten them, forgotten they are ever mattered” (NW 1). To Maeniel, when he is wolf, memories of life hit “an immortal consciousness as old as life” (1). He is also awakened to the human fact as evidenced in humanity’s mastery over fire. Maeniel attaches fire to the Divinity as “fire was a gift of the gods”. (2)

Alice Borchardt is showing the readers what it means to reason out as she exploits Chapter one. In her sincere adherence to the objective of truth, she presents one with history too. Maeniel is attached to history. Dryas, the female warrior comes from the lands of yore to hunt Maeniel down. She is found in the company of Blaze
and Mir-Mir has taken up a young girl as his second wife who is heavily resented by Dryas, the daughter. Alice Borchardt runs the two worlds of human and non-human in a parallel way. One witness the non-human world blessed with selfless love, and a limitless concern for others. On the other hand, the human world is characterized by revenge, hatred, bloodshed and sorcery.

Maeniel, while “the wolves of his pack slept soundlessly and without dreams,” contemplates upon the human condition which “despoiled without conscience in compunction” and has also submitted itself to the “feckless arbitrary commands of those who manoeuvred themselves into a position to rule their own kind” (NW 2). One is also exposed to Maeniel’s anger, when he sabotages the nearby farm shed with fire. This he does in order to establish his wolfish stance. He drops into the sheepfold and the sheep awaken from their deep slumber, disintegrating in all directions making the farmer run towards Maeniel with blazing torches. Once attacked, the blazing torches become the agents of fire.

Amidst this, Alice Borchardt brings into focus another issue -- the feminist position of the humankind. One witnesses women as victims evidenced in the seducers sacrificing virgins to savage humans. As the novelist puts it:

The procedure was a simple one. When the rising moon’s tip touched the top of the standing stone, the girls would be driven into the grove. The men would follow. The girls were virgins. They would not be virgins when they emerged in the morning. Some would be weeping. All would be bleeding. (11)
One is sensitized to the historical perversion which thrust women “to this endless unstoppable male lechery” (*NW* 11). Dryas comes as liberated lass as found first “mounted on a beautiful blood gay mare” and adorned “by a broach formed of poppy flowers and leaves” (22). She comes as a saviour of the feminine carved out of history. She is legendary as she proclaims – “The Old world is finished. A new one has begun” (23). She has come to contest her doctrine of liberation, presumably with Maeniel whose forte is his environment characterized by warmth and immaculate love. And in that, Alice Borchardt remarkably creates an eco ambience where the non-human element is the centre. As she writes:

... Wild flowers surrounded the pine-needle carpet. Mother of thy name would rise beneath the snow and twine with blue-flowered bergamot mint-violets bloomed in the spring time… Later in summer wild carrots, the yellow composite daisies, sunflowers, and dandelions lit up the thickening grass. Harebells peered from the shelter of tall pines.

(27)

On the contrary, Dryas is part of distant history, as revealed in her travel “a long way and all she has seen on the journey were death, destruction and pain,” yet she is “the scared, broken, despairing girl”, (29) who once “tried to live together in justice and peace” (30). In her journey across Gaul, she has seen terrible deaths. She is struck by crisis, a kind of “sorrow that ruled her heart” and so intense that “it seemed to blot out the sun, even on a bright day” (30). Hence the moment, she arrives at the house of Mir in the company of Blaze, she is terribly frightened not only by the impending disaster but also “by her inability to comprehend what her deepest instincts
to tell her was happening” (*NW* 30) and this is how Alice Borchardt makes of the situation in which one finds Dryas draped in misery caused by her psychic conflicts. She writes:

> She was not an intellectual, but a warrior, a person of action. So the feelings of grief threatening to drown her soul in a tidal wave of pain at these too old fools- the few surviving remnants of a class of thinkers and teachers who had shaped the only world she knew since the beginning of time. (30)

Dryas is contrasted with Jnona, who “communicates an exquisite and unknown sensation to his [Maeniel’s] mind and body as he invaded hers” (31). Dryas experiences an identity crisis and her eventuating fears are concretised through the deep forest in which she is stranded. As she begins to climb, she becomes aware of something like the rude ladder, “which led her around his giant granite boulder and over the valley below” (36), yet, the pride in her does not give way to defeat, as she holds herself “of the royal line, guardian to queens and queen herself, as simultaneously her common sense informs her that “these hollows may not lead anywhere” (36) and this is how Alice Borchardt makes of Dryas, as she writes:

> She was Dryas, the warrior, the teacher of sword, shield and spear…. one who could read the trajectory of an enemy’s sword swing and leap over it to decapitate him…. keeper of knowledge, forgotten by even those Gauls. Reader of stone circles and chamber tomb patterns whose origins were lost in the mist of time. (45)
Dryas has taken up the assignment of killing the man-wolf “who so savagely harassed Mir’s people” (NW 45). In the meantime, Maeniel forges a new alliance with Jnona. Jnona’s husband loses his hand to Caesar’s men. His indifference towards Jnona brings her closer to Maeniel who provides physical pleasure.

With Night of the Wolf, Alice Borchardt has been engaged with gender issues as she makes Dryas the mainstay of the novel. Dryas is the one hunting for Maeniel. At the outset, she is seen to be antagonistic toward Maeniel. Yet, she has come to strategically pit Maeniel against the Romans headed by Caesar. The novelist foregrounds Roman history, as it simultaneously juxtaposes gender issues. The gender issue is centred on Jnona and Mir’s wife. Both of them have been chased by Caesar’s warlords who hope that they are a prize catch. Jnona is part of a splinter village which lies shrouded in grasslands. Mir’s wife, who is too young to be his wife, is also part of this village. As she understands, “The elder members of Mir’s order had been known to stop wars by simply entering into the field between the combatants, so great was the respect in which they were held” (62). Mir establishes his position to the Roman Firminius that “he could not sell Dryas for the good and sufficient reason that he did not own her: his wife could not be sent to Rome. She was too crippled and too ill” (64).

While presenting the human world as infested with human conflict and human violation of rights, Alice Borchardt takes one to a non-human, ecological ambience, which is known for its immaculate serenity of existence. Maeniel is seen as the man-wolf in a dreamy stature. As the novelist puts it, “He was man floating breathless in jade green water, then wolf, his pelt so asked… drowsing eyes open, jaws snapping
hopelessly at the air and light above him” (*NW* 66). Maeniel possesses eagle’s wings as he circles “riding the thermals up and up into the canyons of the stormy sky (66). By speaking of the wolf’s memories and that of an eagle’s, Alice Borchardt hyper rates the natural world “where conifers with trundles... ruled the mountain crests, driving down roots that split the living rock like wedges and held their massive trunks like giant claws” (66). Maeniel forges a physical intimacy with Imona who feels that she has clinched the very wholesomeness of her being. She is Leon’s wife. Leon maintains a secret link with the Romans which cost him the life of his kith and kin. Imona is finally lodged in a dilapidated castle.

The novel proceeds with Maeniel swaying between man and wolf, as he puts on a hectic search for Imona who is lodged in the distant castle. Alice Borchardt further intensifies the novel’s objective with Roman history and the cultural events related to it. The Romans arrive in Mir’s valley, and “they marched, burning every farm and killing every one of Mir’s people ‘they could catch’” (69). Fulvia is part of the Roman history. She arrives with the intention of kidnapping Dryas into Rome for which Julius Caesar might give her rich gifts. She is also one of the mistresses of Julius Caesar for whom, she arranges gladiators who fight and die in the arena. Dryas is one such gladiator and hence, the Roman legionnaires are after her. Fulvia who is “dressed as a hunter” (74) is all set to invite Dryas for a duel. The sword fight establishes Dryas as a mighty fighter. The human conclivity as again juxtaposed by Maeniel’s stature as a wolf projected by Alice Borchardt. One finds him struggling “with ideas, concepts a wolf’s brain was never designed to understand” (79). Maeniel,
the wolf, contemplates on human aggression with the human’s walking “away… wearing a wolf skin…. and….. fore paws dangling at their shoulders” (*NW* 79).

Further Maeniel’s contemplation brings out the humankind at its worst. As the novelist writes, humans were pitiless to all creatures, even each other. A male not strong enough to hunt with the rest of the warriors was killed at his first testing… The humans had changed only a little since then. They were “smarter now and lazier, but just as darkly tainted with cruelty” (80).

Soon after, Alice Borchardt introduces the Roman representatives who are after Dryas. Lucius is one who has earned freedom by virtue of his victory as a gladiator. Julius Caesar also accords him a General’s status. In one of his war raids, he is terribly injured. Caesar secures for him a Greek prisoner, Philo, who turns out to be Lucius’ physician. Alia comes as Lucius’ maid “who had saved his life by returning him quickly to the Roman encampment” and “she was a good servant; humble and hardworking” (95).

Maeniel feels deeply deprived of his sense of identity, the moment he encounters the Roman legionnaires. His is a world which makes “you seem young as children: the rocks, the sea, and the stairs” (100). He holds the Roman intrusion as a super structure which has engaged the gender issue out of which Imona is a victim. Maeniel identifies Imona with the “Emerald water, thundering and raging at the rocks, crashing its way into white foam” (110), pathetically given to death by the “senseless brutality” (46) of her own people Imona is a victim of the relation of male power suggested by Mir’s partaking of the gory killing.
While Maeniel flourishes with his search for a completeness of being, he hits a psychic crisis eventuated by his swaying between man and wolf. He moves “through… the interlacing branches… creating a cool, grew glem beneath” (*NW* 98) yet “on and on he travelled” (98). The crisis intensifies as Alice Borchardt makes of it thus:

You, even your kind are latecomers to the earth,” the trees told the wolf, “and man, an aberration in the long, slow warp and waft of time, a knot in the thread woven by the Gray ladies.” “So be it”, the wolf thought. He was tranquil. “I am content to be what I am and besides, there are things that make you seem young as children, the rocks, this sea, and the stars. (99)

Alice Borchardt gradually connects Maeniel with the Roman merchant, Decius. Decius meets with an accident in the forest as his horse bucks, when it sees a wild boar. He is thrown into the air and then “came down with a yell and a loud slap of flesh on leather just before the horse bolted” (106). Maeniel “warm and sympathetic by Nature”, saves Decius before “he vanished into the snowy darkness” (109). The death of Imona sparks anger in Maeniel. He seeks to wreck vengeance on Mir as he hopes to kill him. This is how he speculates a futurist stance:

I am no longer a wolf. Mir would be easy to kill. A real wolf would have done the deed quickly… but I… I must look at him, into his eyes, and search for guilt, want, need, desire, fear. I want him to be afraid the way she [Imona] must have sometimes been afraid because surely she knew what they were going to do to her. (169)
And, Maeniel begins to wonder “why didn’t she stay here with me? Did Imona prefer death at the hands of her own kind rather than life with me? (NW 169). Dryas comes to the pool later, the pool where Mir felt Imona must have “first met the wolf” (176). Dryas is repelled by the idea of seduction by Maeniel. Her sexual congress with anyone in her entire life was horrible and “the memory was one of terror” (176). And, to herself, “her own attractiveness was only another weapon (177). She edges on close to capture Maeniel. She reaches the beautiful autumn woods filled with “the unchanging evergreens and pines” and the oaks “brown and the scarlet gold of aspen and poplar”. (178)

Maeniel, on the other hand, wishes to entice Dryas into a physical intimacy. He is rather reluctant, for he senses in her “something different in that she carries no aura of death about her” (178). Nevertheless, when Dryas encounters Maeniel the wolf, her heart hungers for the completion of her wayward soul:

Physical desire entered her body the way water soaks a cloth and left her just as limp as wet linen… her eyes searched the twilight for the wolf, but she didn’t see him. In his place was a man and he moved with the assurance of the great killer, in a few moments, he was bending over her. (180)

No wonder she is enveloped by Maeniel. Dryas allows “herself to fall limply against him as if in total surrender” and she is always ready to “wish for that splendid pleasure, that burning delight “which surged like some dark fire in her veins” (181). Yet in spite of all that she experiences, she is also paraded by the memory of her son” dead, given into the hand of darkness” (181). He clamps upon Dryas an eternal
psychic crisis. Dryas is quite often marooned by the “strange look of comprehension “in her son’s eyes, which dumps her with “nothing left but darkness” (NW 181).

Maeniel and Dryas’ sexual odyssey is backdropped by the Roman ambience in which one sees slaves “newly purchased from one of Caesar’s gladiatorial land (lud): and these stated for death in the arena at some festival or other” (182). The same holds good for the two Greek girls who as the “favourites of Fulvia in their time” attend Philo’s chamber. These Greek girls are the Romans’ fetish commodities and Lucius has the premonition that “they would not survive long in the unhealthy brothels clustered hear the Tiber” (182) for one simple reason, “thirty to forty men a night would destroy most women’s health in the matter of a few years” (182). Lucius is part of the Roman cubiculum where “there was no real accommodation for servants” (183). The Gallic women who attend Lucius and Philo have their homes nearby. Lucius is part of the Roman history, who like Cassius, is expressive of a terrible grievance and grudge against Julius Caesar. This is how he retorts when Philo addresses Caesar as “divine Julius” (183). He says, “Has the senate voted him divine honours? You man he is not satisfied to be a man in Rome, father of his country, consul for life, and whatever else those whimpering senatorial toadies can dream up, and he wants to be a god too”. (183)

Lucius has been terribly under stress, owing to his sisters Fulvia’s sexual escapades. As one of Caesar’s secret paramours, she generates a psychic crisis in Lucius. Alice Borchardt concretizes this crisis through the Roman Cubiculum. As she writes, “His bedroom cubiculum was another source of conflict between himself and
his sister” for “she considered his desire for privacy, one of a number of an unpleasant eccentricities that made him an unfit heir to the Basilica fortune” (*NW* 183).

Fulvia, on the other hand is given to the presumptuous sexual equations in life. She lives in what Lucius “considered gilt-edged squalor with two secretaries” (183). Furminins is one of her attendants who procure several pretty men for her “whenever she felt amorous” (183). At other times, “she slept in solitary splendour on silk sheets in a bed of aromatic lemonwood covered by brocades” (183). Lucius is staggered by the “big triclinium closes to the front door” with the floor “decorated with a mosaic of a garden” and the walls “being pure white marble” (185).

Fulvia is quite often entertaining Caesar and Cleopatra. The company of Caesar and Cleopatra at Fulvia’s residence sparks off grandeur of eminence as enjoyed by Fulvia. This is how Alice Borchardt makes of Caesar’s intimacy with Fulvia, as she writes:

> He [Caesar] was raising Fulvia’s hand to his lips and bestowing a pretty compliment on her. He compared her to a Praxiteles’s Venus he had seen in Greece and ordered copied. The copy would be shipped to Rome to grace his dais when he finally settled down. (187)

To Lucius, this gorgeous admiration of his sister by Caesar, pushes him to perceive Caesar as “old and the years had not been kind to the conqueror” And for sure Lucius feels, “yet he was old and the hounds of time were not on his heels” (187). It is the novelist’s intention to project the Roman Empire as sterile. Hence she reserves no beautiful words for Cleopatra. This is how she makes of the situation
through Lucius’ glimpse of her, as she writes, “he looked at Cleopatra. No she wasn’t beautiful, but she was something he had never seen before a woman the equal of Caesar” (NW 188). Whenever Cleopatra smiles at Caesar, and gives Lucius a look, everything feels hasty which “caused his [Lucius] knees his turn to mush on the spot” (189). Cleopatra also comes as a deputy of history who is not Roman but Egyptian. Her palace at Alexandria, is:

A drafty labyrinth. Many parts of it are of immense magnificence, other parts are haunted by both great and bloody legends generated by my forebears but nowhere do I find the comfort and relaxation created by the inhabitants of Rome. These villas are wonderfully suited to the climate of your great city. (190)

In a new historicist perception, one understands that Rome is expressive of the rotation of power as evidenced in Caesar’s statement. “I owe your father’s daughter a great debt and I haven’t been able to repay most of it” (193). This is one circulation of hegemony, Hortensus, father of Lucius and Fulvia, raises “enough money” (193) for Caesar, and now Caesar is all set to allow Fulvia to take up the gladiatorial responsibility, one that of generating slaves to work for Caesar. When Fulvia seeks land for future war funding, Caesar is all set to offer her as much as she requires. This is one feudal position which regenerated wars as “All wars generate slaves”. Fulvia is not worried “where they come from” for she feels that her people can “train them” (193). Fulvia is also considerate enough to secure a notable place for her brother Lucius as she seeks Caesar to “please assure him of a command” in his army and also “make him one of your legates, if possible” (193). Caesar’s Roman power is one of a
societal structure which believes in the decentralization of hegemony. It is the rotation of authority through the creation and endorsement of the most elemental authorities concerned with the landlords. Here, hegemony does not solely rely on Caesar alone, for he himself is an adherent to decentralising power which naturally calls for the participation of the available substructures.

Here, in the light of new historicist’s perception, one could be confined to the reading of political hegemony which maintains the status quo of privacy by publicly notifying the cultural determinates as participants of a culture, yet in all they are representatives of a futile world lost in ethical confusion. Here, Alice Borchardt contrasts it with Maeniel’s world. She writes:

She [Dryas] found a fountain. The water bubbled up from the earth and formed a stream whose rocky bed was almost drowned in thick moss and fern… The ferns ranged from a lacy spray of small, chartreuse circles borne on almost invisible black wiry braches to stately olive-green arrow head-shaped fronds with thick midribs bearing hundreds of parallel leaves. (*NW* 202)

This is a feminist position. And here, Benjamin R. Barber’s comment warrants mention. He writes:

Feminism will no longer have to require enmity to men and alienation from self as the price of emancipation; instead it will promise to both women and men, the only kind of freedom the human condition
permits self realization in the distinctively human environment of
loving families and the just polity. (21)

Further,

She destroys the myth of virginity addiction and goes out into the
world to be raped by experiences. When the female hero either
literally or symbolically journeys to her ancestral home in search of her
father, she discovers instead that it is her mother with whom she seeks
to be rejoined, allowing her to develop within herself qualities such as
nurturance, intuition and compassion which culture delineated as
female. Thus she is able to develop positive sympathetic affiliation
with other women. Because of this integrated selfhood she does not
assume the role of the dominating matriarch because she believes that
all humans are candidates for full heroism, no one is to be mastered or
master. (178)

Dryas, remembering her son, “the spent eyes with clouded pupils gazing up
into hers” (NW 202) is reminiscent of humanism. Dryas, “dressed in fine clothing – a
white tunic without embroidery and the loose leggings of a rider” (211) goes in search
of Maeniel as she starts “up the mountain alone” (210). She is barricaded by her
psyche which informs her of her inability to conquer the non-human world. As she
speculates, “He is a powerful creature and you will not conquer him without help”
(210). Yet Mir’s words keep ringing in her – “catch the wolf and take him to hunt
Caesar” (210).
Alice Borchardt reopens Roman history, to focus on human conflict. Lucius is found to have been terribly insulted by Mark Antony. Before one encounters the conflict, the novelist foregrounds Dryas’s contemplation of human kind and she says, “of all the tales she heard of women who betrayed men” \((NW\ 225)\). She places the eco-humanist vision of sacrifice salvaged from the non-human world. It is the vision of truth—“Absolute truthfulness; the courage to lay down ... life, if necessary, not only without complaint, but without a second thought” \((225)\). The novelist further equates the human conflict between Antony and Lucius as the curse of human kind; “the fire people, when his kind [Maeniel, the Wolf]... first met them as hunters ... poor things... only scavengers of the frozen. Carcasses abandoned” \((232)\). This is not the case with the animal kind and a “fearless spirit that brought the wolves... and warm the few women who were trying to save their own and their children’s lives” \((223)\). The male hegemony might look fascinating yet in the eyes of one “not pleasant, not safe, not comfortable, and not even really totally comprehensible, but nevertheless fascinating” \((241)\). The surviving notorious patricians of Rome control the legislation, “but they seemed to have lost heart, or perhaps they were too much at odds with each other” \((241)\). These “haughty patricians do not mind insulting even most of the old families, who were almost equally socially prominent” \((241)\). Discrimination runs high as these Roman patricians looked down on them considered foreigners – “newly created senators from Gaul, Greece, Africa and some of the Laton states” \((241)\). No wonder Caesar is the Roman dictator and “the senate did... took dictation” \((241)\) promptly, as if from instinct, they declare “immediate enthusiastic approval to every
law or decree Caesar proposed” and they never mind, in many of their lethargic moments “to vote him new and unprecedented honors” (NW 241).

Lucius carries, a bit of a rebellious mood in his veins. He offers his cubiculum for a dinner get together Mahilius, “a conventional – looking Greek with brown curly hair” and Felix, an African Greek immigrant sent “to Alexandria to get a liberal education” (242). Lucius, hails himself as “the Roman business class” who “are allowed to stoop to make money from commerce” (243). At the same time he never considers himself as a patrician, as he wishes to exchange expertise on international trade with Manilius and Felix and this is how Lucius tears the mask of Roman civilisation in one of his conversations with Philo, his surgeon:

I’m not surprised… not that regulations would stop any of them if they should afford to keep a wife. But, as a rule below the rank of centurion they don’t have enough money… that leaves the local whores and they’re most likely to be dirty, drunken, and ugly if not downright diseased or dangerous… have a pimp hiding somewhere ready to cut your throat for a copper coin or your military issue sword and boots.

(244)

Lucius has already reached the nerve centre of the Roman Empire headed by Caesar. Hence, he is mindful of all the vice and corruption with which Rome has been chained. Lucius’ sister comes as a cheap lady who indulges in the immoral elation the country offers with the unauthorized power vested on her and with her close intimacy with Caesar and his paramour Cleopatra, she gives herself much to the whereabouts of her country, while Caesar arranges women gladiators to fight in the arena, so that he
can have simulated sex with Calpurnia. Fulvia uses her slaves, Macer and others to procure men for her. Philo tells Lucius that “she likes to watch people in... in... doing the act of desire [as] it... it excites her” (NW 257).

At one time, when Philo is kidnapped by Antony’s men, Lucius laments, “I can take care of myself. Are you at queuevale. Philo, you idiot” (262). Lucius finds himself alone and hence, quite uncomfortable. Though he feels his rage growing, he finds himself struggling with the same despair “he’d felt when he was talking that somehow he was powerless to control the direction of his own life” (263).

Lucius loses his companion and this produces a psychic fragmentation in him. Lucius’ psychic dilemma is:

A darkness deeper than the darkness of the simple night. A bleak emptiness where in the spirit doesn’t doubt the gods are only pretty images created by artists and we humans are nothing but better kind of animal allowed a small sojourn beneath the sun by the ever distant and perhaps, blind powers. And then nothing more. (NW 264)

And this history is written by a woman to a woman specific audience. As Irene Goodman observes:

Another factor in success with historical fiction is that the majority of the readers are women, and they like to read about other women. Much of history is dominated by men, which means you have to look for subjects that include women. The most common device is to take a
woman who really lived and let her tell her own story, free from the alleged misrepresentation of history. (15)

As Lucius is in a human state, fears death. On the contrary, one is led to the non-human world in which one witnesses Maeniel, the wolf thus:

He [Maeniel the Wolf] didn’t fear death; no wolf does. Even dogs are free of it… but for him,… the ever changing Nature of experience is what keeps him alive. He was not afraid to die, but he would hate to stop living. And in order to keep on living, he would have to join with creatures who were alien to him, to learn their ways and their rules.  

(NW 269)

Dryas is able to recollect the past aura and glory of her legendary ancestry. She is able to bring the best of her past which once stood in close nexus with Nature never intruded upon by civilization. As she says:

We sing beautiful songs… About how our ships once plied the cold northern waterways and sailed beyond the pillars of the sky, skimming the warm blue sea, the way the white winged seabirds do. We sing the song of the stars… the lights of Heaven that, properly read, point the way to the farthest corners of the earth. (281)

She proceeds further to eulogize human proclivity passionately linked to Nature’s serene divinity. Nature offers them meaning of life. As she says:

All have a meaning – the comb, the fish, the bird, the wolf, and the dragon. Woven in cloth and picked out in more colors than the
rainbow. Each tribe has one. Each family, each man or woman has their own, and it lives and dies with them and no other will ever bear it. (NW 281)

Dryas further laments, “And then Caesar came as in the lowlands” and then “Caesar prayed on” and notably “it was… extermination” (282). The intrusion of the big Roman civilization has only reduced the immaculate and innocent human proclivity into “ashes” where the people who cultivated “were dumped as corpse abandoned to the wolves and kites” (282). Dryas further proceeds to make of the situation thus:

The cows in the pastures and the sheep in the fields had their throats cut. The dogs and cats in the dooryard’s were clubbed down, trampled and kicked to death. Where the wheat would burn, it was fired, and even in the orchards, the trees were girdled, wilting and dying in the autumn sun. (282)

Dryas is able to bring Maeniel into her hold, as he is trapped. When danger invades Blaze and Mir and then Dryas, Maeniel, the wolf saves them. This act of rescue brings him his freedom as Maeniel strategically decides to be human to meet the humanity’s dangerous encounter. He also holds Dryas as responsible in “convincing about him to accept humanity” (248). He accepts to be a human as he begins his sojourn with Dryas toward encountering the Roman histories and eccentricities they call civilization. Thus, along with Dryas, Maeniel “his horse through a kingdom of desolation annoyed with her symbols” (302) the wolf saves them.
Alice Borchardt promptly introduces one to the artificiality of Rome as evidenced in the following passage:

A layer of odours… Man, clothing, perspiration, drink… smell of those humans who ingested large quantities of wine. Anger and illness, peculiar to the man himself… recognizable as a well known face is to a human being …. The great hall was being readied for the feast… A dozen joints of meat already hung over the fire pit in the centre… there was talk and laughter… about who would claim the champion’s portion from such a magnificent beast (NW 306).

Alice Borchardt’s submission of Dryas offers the advantage of studying gender and how as Norton puts it, “perceptions have differed according to class, race, ethnic background and place of residence” (332).

An understanding of Dryas’ world makes one to perceive the kind of power women enjoyed. On the contrary, Cleopatra, Calpurnia and Fulvia are female representatives of Roman Empire who emerge as the oppressed class of the capital and then, as the passive recipients of male anarchy. They are cut off from what Lenver posits as woman’s duty in a civilized society. “While men conquered territory and built institutions which managed and distributed power, women transmitted culture to the young and built the social network and infrastructure that provide continuity in the community” (179).

Alice Borchardt awakens one to the historical reality that women bear no responsibility as manifested in Caesar’s importance. The absence of posterity in the
palace pronounces a historical vacuum to follow. Fulvia comes as one representative to subjugate Dryas. She calls Dryas “a slave who is insolent…” (NW 340) Dryas has to fight the female representatives of subjugation first before she hopes to encounter the mighty Caesar. She asserts Fulvia that “you will not make me a slave “and” if you want something from me, this is the wrong way to get it” (341).

Dryas has been imprisoned by the Roman legionnaires. They have brought Dryas to a prison cell which has no provision for air or light. It is a “windowless box closed by an iron grating” with “Terracotta brick on one side of the tiny room formed a raised platform” (346). Dryas has been left with a small flame of light and “the straw tick… blood stained in more than a few places” (347) portends a violent invasion of her body by strange faceless Roman soldiers, night after night. As for the war prisoners, Dryas remembers what Aquila had said. “These Roman bastards believe the gods have given them dominion over the whole world” (347). Dryas knows for certain that she does not have the right to exert her dissidence. By their standards, Dryas is a criminal who has led her people “down from the highlands and helped them fight against Caesar, and no doubt would do so again” (348). Hence, she becomes “worthy to be an objectification of their power” (348). And so her body, which reigns supreme in its capacity to resist, must be battered, violated and squeezed into submission. This she must know is Caesar’s “demonstration of absolute rule. More so, Dryas once having violated of her body’s autonomy, becomes a slave and the Roman’s don’t care in the slightest how many of their slaves they kill [as] they enjoy the drama” (349). Caesar too is of the same calibre as he is concerned about
“how successful a conqueror he was… getting rid of any prisoners who were too brave” (*NW* 349).

Dryas is prepared by the Romans to fight “a new gladiator from Gaul” (355) as Caesar would watch it from the Coliseum along with Cleopatra, Antony and Fulvia. Dryas has to fight a wild board. She manages to kill it. Caesar who is watching the fight is sexually stimulated by Dryas’ “Slender hips… high, cone – shaped breasts, generous enough to hold the silver mail away from her abdomen… (and) the beautifully formed legs” (355). Maeniel, in the meantime, takes a walk along the Roman streets. He has never seen this kind of arrangements before looking at the slaves, he wonders, how they are kept from going insane. As he says:

> The crowding was appalling and he understood why their senses were so blunted. The city was so aroma laden that he found himself verging on losing his ability to think coherently. He simply, not even with a human brain – he simply couldn’t process this much information at once. (363)

Maeniel is “riding in a litter and the grunting men, twelve of them bearing his weight, gave off an over powering stench of fear and of the secretions of physical exertions” (363). He is overpowered by the noise of hawkers and “those of patrons quarrelling with the shop keepers” (364). He is as uncomfortable as the men riding under him and “given the encouragement of the driver’s whip”, the slaves “began to shout with joy as they entered the forum” (364).
After Dryas’ wonderful victory over the boar, Fulvia is delighted as “she offers her money, jewels slave attendants of her own (and) a villa in Baize, whatever, she could possibly imagine” (NW 371). Later, after a perfumed bath, Dryas is “seated in a chair, one of those rather spare things the Greeks favoured with a curved back and slender legs (373). Dryas is slowly transformed into a fetish object as revealed in her dress, “the damp muslin gown [which] hid none of the secrets of her body” and her body which creates “a seductive sense” of stimulation. Now Dryas, the warrior is reduced to Dryas, the woman. As the novelist puts it:

She was simply woman… woman as she is… born as much to quench lust as to create it. As ready to cradle a man to her breast searching for that burning delight beneath between her breast, and to share her delight in union with him, even as he brought his fire to rouse hers. (373)

Dryas is trapped in such a place with only Lucius to express a definitive concern for her. Lucius introduces Dryas to the cat with which she has to fight on the arena in a few days. Through the cat’s grit, Alice Borchardt, concretizes the scandalous Rome as she writes, “Yes, it was cat. The great head… studied her rather incuriously. Then it raised its paw to the bars and she saw the ends of the dreadful scimitar – shaped retractile claws. They extended themselves lazily from their furry sheaths and then slowly slid back in” (391).

The other side of the city shows Maeniel watching a dance in which a boy and a girl were both naked. The girl wears around her body snakes that threaten to strike. Yet, later “all to the whistling and skirling of the pipes and the heartbeat of the
dream” the boy finally “entered his kingdom, being welcomed through the gates in an intimate kiss by the woman’s other lips” (396). Maeniel too falls a victim to the corrupt humanity as one finds him “feeling the blood heat’, and later one finds him in Calpurnia’s garden embracing her feeling her body “bring him such grace and gentleness” (NW 412).

The whole of Roman city is infested with sex punctuated by perversions. Part of it, includes the sadomasochistic leaning the men possess. That is why Caesar wants Dryas to encounter the big cat called Terror. He loves to watch Terror messing with Dryas’ body with its paws. As Fulvia explains:

Terror’s bigger. The hide is orange with black stripes. Antony uses it to execute criminals. Caesar says he wins either way. If she does kill Terror, he gets lots of gold from Antony. Even if she fails, the sight of her fighting heats his blood. You, see, he wants to get Cleopatra pregnant again. (408)

Alice Borchardt brings into focus Gordus as “a hard man” who trains “gladiators for Caesar and others” (437). He is also a part of Roman history which has sent many men out to die and that’s why he’d built the columbarium the tomb. This is what Alice Borchardt makes of the gladiator’s position from out of Roman history:

The oath of acceptance, stating they would face punishment by whips and hot irons or even death by steel if they failed in obedience to their owners and trainers, was not a hollow one. He himself had felt the whip and even the iron occasionally and he inflicted them with a free
hand when he had men in training. There was no place for kindness or even, most of the time, for mercy in his profession. *(NW 437)*

Yet, gladiators like Gordus and even after “a taste of just how hard could be, they accepted the discipline of the ludus” *(437)*. Gordus is sentimental about women. He knows for sure that many men accepted slavery or even being driven into poverty “rather than allow their wives and children to suffer” *(437)*.

The novel comes to a close with Dryas killing the big cat and winning her freedom. Her victory comes metaphorically as one eventuated upon femininity and a continuum of women’s rebellion. She is part of history as a dissenting force which wages a relentless battle against hegemony. “The ides of March came raining” is one historical precept which proclaims the destruction of a male super structure. It also comes as one declaring the end of Roman anarchy headed by Caesar.