Chapter Three

Toward a Poetics of Feminism: the New Historicism and Post-Modern Feminism at the Crossroads

In this chapter, the researcher intends presenting Alice Borchardt’s ideas and visions in the perspective of New Historicism. The main objective of this chapter is to show how the ideas and the visions turn out to be useful to comprehend the world of Alice Borchardt is a better and deeper way. The researcher wishes to pinpoint how multiple, yet contradictory practices of History, connect by themselves with the contexts of Alice Borchardt’s production of events. One finds in The Wolf King, Dragon Queen and The Raven Warrior, slated for discussions in this chapter, a constant interaction of history, feminism and the ideology of the past with the present. The postmodern novels of this chapter reveals that the very term civilisation, as glorified by history, is projective of nothing but a life of falsity, and by its sense of male pride, has in fact, negated the vital connect between gender and humanism.

The Wolf King opens with the conspicuous absence of a missing woman. When Maeniel returns, he is terribly shocked by the fact that his wife is missing. He puts the blame on Gordus as his “present conduct amounted almost to hysteria (The Wolf King 14). [hereafter referred to as WK] Gordus shifts the responsibility on Regeane, who is much worried about the great Charles’ army, “says that one good blizzard would wipe out the Frankish warriors” (WK 14). Regeane thrusts on herself the role of the saviour of humanity. She must protect her people from “these kingly quarrels being nothing but a nuisance to humbler folk” (15). Maeniel is presently
residing on the Roman debris, a so called fortress that “may have been the tablinium office belonging to the general who commanded the fortress. (WK 15) Alice Borchardt again, presents the Roman ambience. One is struck by the Roman lavish settings as the following passage attests:

Over the years he’d made the room into a place of luxury silk rags
Some were in the east covered the floor and hung on the walls, insulating the cold stone… silk brocade for nippy spring and autumn ones: and heavy, woolen and silk tapestry for the worst winter weather. (15)

Maeniel has to rescue his wife. He waits for the wind to drop. He turns wolf with the wind, “blowing the thick rough of fur at his neck up around his ears and battering his sensitive tympanic membranes inside with its harsh fluttering sound” (19). He is joined by his horse Audoral. The scene shifts to the monastery, where one witnesses the Abbot and his men decked with malice and vileness attempting to injure Regeane and the Saxon who had saved her from the bitter blizzard.

Alice Borchardt is quite conscious enough to rope in Christianity as usual -- “The Christian god was downright – malicious” (24). She establishes the downright malice of the monastery with an event in which one finds the Abbot’s men torturing the Saxon. The Abbot watches the event, jumping “up and down with glee” (25). They all take turns to break the Saxon’s ribs. The Saxon is terribly injured as his lazy eyes see dead men “died at one or another” with “one’s head lolled strangely on his shoulders” and “another’s skin…. blackened… and part of a charred bone… visible at
the elbow” (WK 25). In the meantime, Regeane manages to escape and she joins the Saxon. Together, they are a witness to the gory details of the monastery:

The chair stalks were lined with corpses some recognizable, dead possibly only a few months: others were only garments and died skin, teeth, hollow eye sockets and brown bone. One recent corpse seemed unmarked… it was clear he had been buried alive…. Next to him was a woman. She was naked. She was nailed to the wooden chair by a dozen spears, none through a vital spot. She might…. have lived for days. (32)

Both Regeane and the Saxon escape the worst torments and later they join with Maeniel and two of his men. In order to intensify the sterility of the non-human world, Alice Borchardt interrupts the event with a boar, “with a felt of flame” which makes “the corpse gang [fall] to the floor” (33). Maeniel and Regeane and then their compatriots reach Geneva, a town which “wasn’t much” but looks pretty as “it mirrored the mountains and the dying light” (40). He sends for his people, some of them are out on a hunt for Godra and so “he had thirty warriors in his train” (40). Maeniel still has burning wounds “inflicted by the abbot” (40). Maeniel is particularly ready to sacrifice his life for his wife since she is very valuable. He says, “I killed more than one man for her and I’d kill a thousand rather than see her parted from me for an hour without my consent. I waited for her for a thousand years” (42). This is an illustration of a historical backdrop, which Borchardt exploits to capitalize on the effectiveness of theme. It is worth quoting Linda Hutcheon here. She writes:
The interaction of the historic graphic and the meta fictional foreground the rejection of the claims of both “authentic representative and “inauthentic copy alike, and the very meaning of artistic originality is as forcefully challenged as is the transparency of historical preferentiality. (110)

In the meantime, the Frankish warriors arrive to conduct them to the camp site. “Arnulf of the Breton marches” is the chief warrior who promises to take them “to a place of comfort” (WK 44). Yet, it is not much a place of comfort, as Alice Borchardt writes:

On one side were the tents of the Saxon nobles, but on the other, the ox-drawn wagons holding “comfort women” and purveyors of food and drink. Once it had probably been an open window… stinking of a combination of odours: human waste, spoiled food, liquor, and clouds of smoke from the fires nearby. (44)

The comfort woman is one instance of woman’s subalternity in the Roman kingdom. These Romans are responsible for the human anarchy created out of fighting. Alice Borchardt brings in the historical speculation that “war is said to be the sport of kings and I cannot think their appetite for it will ever abate” (46). Caught in the web, Maeniel presents a ring to Antonius “a priceless creation of heavy gold set with a beautifully carved head of one of the Roman emperors” (49). In turn, Antonius gives the ring to Arbeo as a bribe for he wishes to know, why they were “being treated like this way?” (49). With Arbeo fallen to their side, Regeane sets out with him as a guide in search of Otho’s tent. She witnesses the great king’s army which is
in a mood for revelry. And the victim position of the feminine is intensified as illustrated by the following passage:

There were lines in front of the taverns and the brothel wagons. Some whores accommodated customers publicly, lying on the baggage in the back of the ox carts while men lined up in front of them…. the higher paid ladies of the professional class, those who preferred longer associations – courtesans, in other words – presided over loud and occasionally violent parties. (WK 51)

They reach the camp which “was formed roughly like a set of rings, with the king’s pavilion in the centre” (52). The nobles are seated around. And Otho is found in the tent in a pathetic condition. He is pinned with “knives driven through his wrists and ankles” and he has been “given no food for four days” (55). He still clings to life in and out of consciousness. Historically, Otho is corrupt to the marrow of his bones. He has taken in his life that money is the only thing worth having in life and so “he’d sought wealth with a single-minded energy and diligence” (55). He is given to sex, or the more complex considerations of love. And so, his own greed had landed him in his present situation.

*The Wolf King,* on the outset, brings in Charlemagne whose armies are stationed in the outcoasts of Italy. Historically, Charles lays siege to Geneva to add to his conquests a mighty nation like Italy. Specifically poised against him is the vile Desiderus under whose monarchical rule, the mercenaries rule the coast. Desiderus is pitted against the armies of Charlemagne on the other side of the Alps. In between, there lies a wild ambience in which Maeniel is the omnipotent. This virginal stretch is
threatened by the cunning Desiderus. Hence, while on the one hand, The Wolf King is history revisited, on the other it is a text in its metaphorical context. Regeane emerges as the representative of the feminine in contest with the masculine. Also, Regeane comes as a metaphor of feminist liberation, as one witnesses her role as a saviour of many victims who happen to be women.

Following The Silver Wolf and Night of the Wolf, The Wolf King comes as portraying gender in the historical context and history in the feminist context. This is what Jackie Cassada speaks of The Wolf King as she writes:

When an escaped Saxon slave rescues Regeane from death, he becomes embroiled in the dangerous adventures of a pair of shape shifters whose magic and prowess change the lives of all they encounter. Set against the rise of the Frankish kingdom, Borchardt's latest addition to the series began in The Silver Wolf and continued in The Wolf King follows the fortunes of soul mates Regeane and Maeniel, as they struggle to survive during one of the world's bloodiest historic eras. Fans of werewolf fiction and historic fantasy should enjoy this tale of ancient history and even more ancient magic.

(www.go.galegroup.com)

Jackie Cassada’s observation compliments the text. At the same time, it fits well with what John Crowe Ransom speaks about the historic impulse. This is what John Crowe Ransom writes of the historic verve, that one must cultivate before perceiving a historical text. He writes:
On behalf of the historical studies, without them what could we make of Chaucer, for instance… Chaucer writes allegories for historians to decipher, he looks out upon institutions and customs unfamiliar to us… An immense labour of historical adaptation is necessary before our minds are ready to make the aesthetic approach to Chaucer. (234)

Alice Borchardt, no wonder, addresses the gender issues while invoking history. Regeane is fixed against two power relations, namely Charlemagne and the malicious Abbey, supported by the cunning king Desiderus. Hadrian the Pope is another power structure. For instance, Lucilla is the Pope’s mistress. Lucilla is part of the ignorant feminine multitude who feels that “ignorance… a great deal better than certain types of knowledge” (WK 75).

Silvie is another example of a victim. A tavern keeper by profession, she has to undergo rigorous insults and humiliations heaped upon by her husband, Hugo. Hugo is the son of Gundabald. Silvie is terribly afraid of Hugo who has “had a savage, feral cast to his features” (69). Hugo runs around with his castaway friends who intend to molest Silvie. Once terribly attacked by her husband and his outlawed friends, she seeks shelter in the company of Lucilla. Along with Lucilla and Silvie, one encounters Dulcinia, a singer in Silvie’s tavern. These three women are three categories constituted by Alice Borchardt, which naturally, makes her a unique writer, whose passing away was informed prefixed by her special character. As observed in the New York Times – Obituary column:

Alice was, from an early childhood, a voracious reader. Largely self-educated, she took great pleasure in the historical back ground and
details of her novels. She loved to write battle scenes. Her hobbies included raising orchids, and she loved her pet cats. A memorial service will be held at two o’clock in the afternoon on Saturday. The 4th of August 2007 in the Jasek Chapel of Geo. H. Lewis & Sons, 1010 Bering Drive, Houston, TX. In lieu of flowers, memorial contributors may be directed to the American Cancer Society. Eternal rest grant unto them, O Lord. And let perpetual light shine upon them. May they rest in peace. Amen, May their souls and the souls of all the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace. Geo. H. Lewis & Sons Houston 713.789.3005 (www.legacy.com)

That is why Alice Borchardt fixes Regeane, pitted against Hugo. Hugo is terribly afraid of Regeane. He is also terrified of Lucilla, not that she is a bold woman, but she wears the Papal endorsement. That is why Hugo runs around clamped by his imaginary fears about Lucilla who he feels, will do worse. Bishop Hadrian’s Abbey is filled with the gory details of the Roman history. Of this, Alice Borchardt writes:

The Saxon decided these must be the abbot’s trophies. The choir stalls were lined with corpses. Some recognizable, dead possibly only a few weeks, others were only garments and dried skin, teeth, hollow eye sockets and brown bone. What, was very clear was that they had all died horribly. (WK 32)

This is one power structure that Alice Borchardt projects to the readers. She intends exposing the early Roman Catholic church as riddled with vice and corruption. The Saxon who accompanies Regeane, after having saved her, recognizes
the church where “he and the other slaves had been loaded into one every week from
where he had been imprisoned” (WK 35). The Abbotry turns out to be a malicious
superstructure under Pope Hadrian. For instance, as when the Abbot is a witness to
the torture of a Saxon prisoner:

The abbot jumped up and down with glee…. and… landed on his
ribs… then they all took turns seeing if they could stay on top of him.
He [the Saxon] gritted his teeth, twisted and turned, trying to stay alive
while the whole crew tried stamping him to death… two of them got
him by the arms and toured him back to the middle of the long room.
(25)

Exactly, at this point Alice Borchardt strategically brings in Maeniel, the
shape shifter. Maeniel is an instance of this parallelism as one witnesses him as a
shape shifter. One finds in the Saxon’s observation of the animal kingdom an
authorial intrusion, as the passage goes:

The Wolf is a trustworthy friend, a bad enemy, faithful to his kind,
gentle with humans, a devoted father to his children, chaste, and
attentive to his duties to his pack. What man could ask to be more
virtuous? The gods placed the wolf for our instruction that we would
know how to behave. Then they gave us a talisman, a mark of other
covenants with them that they care for us, as we care for them. (67)

Hugo is representative of a power structure. He is the very metaphor of the
Roman – “alcoholic for-adulthood being recognized at age twelve” (105), for he “had
courted disaster by trying to buy his way into the inner circle of great magnates surrounding the king” (WK 106). Regeane has been a witness to Hugo’s treacherous upkeeps with his brain “when dried out it worked fairly well” (105). Again, Hugo is part of the Roman history and eventually, the decay of it. Gundabald and his men work for “the decay of the Roman Government” as manifested in the “street violence between the contending families” and “no night passed without a savage brawl between one family’s adherents and another’s” (109).

Like Maeniel, Regeane is a secretive shape shifter living in Rome at the end of the Empire’s decline. Distantly related to Charlemagne, she becomes a pawn between the French and Italy’s scrappy Lombards. She is betrothed to Maeniel, the guardian of a passage through the Alps who is sympathetic to the French king. Intrigues and counterplots abound as Maeniel speeds his way to retrieve his reluctant bride, Regeane, in whom the woman and wolf selves often spar contentiously with one another. According to a blogger nicknamed “Moonlight”:

Borchardt finds the perfect metaphor for the once opulent Roman civilization, now hostage to its bestial appetites. She elaborates on the decadent excesses of the time with gleefully vivid descriptions of gluttonous banquets, grotesque leper colonies and violent lusts sated both on the battlefield and in the bridal bed. Readers who like their fantasy dusted with gritty realism and who can forgive anachronistic modern dialogue in a period melodrama will find themselves indulged with more than a few twists to this werewolf tale.

(www.werewolves.com)
Hugo’s mother Madonna Helen is a victim of their masochistic Roman paradigm as represented by its medicinal legacy. She is a lab rat in the hands of the physicians. She is a representative of the female body ill manipulated by the so called medicine men.

To Regeane “this maggot brained abbot” (WK 24) is representative of a male paradigm. As Gayle Greene and Coppelia Katin observe: “The paradigm of male dominance has been criticised from several angles. First, it identifies male control over the exchange of women with another per se and makes culture itself dependent on the subjugation of women by men” (7). Alice Borchardt sees the subordination of women in Lucilla, and Silvie. Lucilla is Pope Hadrian’s mistress and Silvie is the tavern keeper. The illegitimate affair of the Pope and Lucilla has brought forth “her son Antonius and her daughter Anjusto [who] had married into one the wealthiest and most socially prominent families in Rome” (75). Regeane too is perceived in terms of the tyrannical ecclesiastics enshrouding her. As the novelist observes:

The physicians had bled her copiously and prescribed all sorts of expensive nostrums containing poisons like mercury, alum and opium… This treatment had brought her several times to the edge of death and had reduced her to such a state of wrath like emaciation that Hugo had trouble believing he was looking at a living woman. (111)

Alice Borchardt foregrounds two relative yet parallel constructs. On the one hand, one finds women as part of the monarchical construct and on the other, women as part of the social construct. Contextually, the male paradigm exists on two levels. The masculine takes over both the constructs. Alice Borchardt expands the concept of
female subjugation stranded in the complex web of historicity. This complex web is characterised by a complex cultural determination which “can no more talk about ‘woman’ than about man” (Cixous 96). Nevertheless, Alice Borchardt has got something more in the novel to say, as she writes:

We could brush aside these quarrelling kings and rule the world. Rule it our way. Return in to what it once was: forests without end, savannas where a million wild beasts roamed, deserts bejewelled with flowers that leap from the stems by day and starlit skies by night… a thousand colours when the northern lights glow in the heaven. (WK 154)

The proclamation is intensified by Maeniel who says, “Is it profit a man if he gains the whole world and loses his soul?” (154). Alice Borchardt’s knowledge of faith in history forges a historicity which rekindles the subjective consciousness of the male. Her text carries materials which are manipulated in such a relativist posture that there is a break with classicism. Ultimately, her text moves outside the narrative restrictions. A postmodern text it is, The Wolf King, effectively forges Regeane as special in that, she possesses the “turbulent spirit” …[and] rebellious soul” (114).

Gisela, Regeane’s mother, is a victim of Pope Hadrian who threw her into a poor marriage “to an outright barbarian and scoundrel” (115). A non human switch over can be figuratively extended into an individual attaining selfhood. According to Sonny, a book reviewer:

OT: Anne Rice has said in her books that when people become vampires, they never really change, they just become more completely themselves. I think that what she means by this is that people strip
themselves of the limits their humanity put on them or that their 
society did, which is why you see a lot of them men breaking down 
barriers of sexuality imposed by society and a lot of the women just 
wandering off because they are no longer forced into the role of the 
stereotypical mother. (www.kelleyarmstrong.com)

Alice Borchardt holds the perception that the subordination of women is the 
consequence wrought out by the malignant ecclesiastical construct, which is 
organized by monarchy and supplemented with archetypes. Under this pretext, gender 
is organized against the male anarchy in companionship with the non-human 
ambience, of which, Maeniel is the deputy. Regeane too “forsook their borrowed 
human shapes” (WK 116) which is figuratively her rejection of the male dominance. 
The novelist stands sensitive to the Christian idea of enlightenment. She wishes to 
posit her organized hypothesis that women live too close to Nature. Hence, as against 
the backdrop of “the river valleys at the mountain’s foot” (132), Regeane sets out on a 
quest for identity. She now becomes an agent of the eco-ambience. While positing 
the eco feminist paradigm, she brings to fore the collusion between the feminist 
ideology and eventually, the humanist, too. One needs to be aware of the novelist’s 
perceptual demonstration of a new ideology which assures some promise of 
redemption to woman. Regeane is now enriched by the eco ambience directionality, 
as constituted by the novelist, increases the worth of the content. As found in The 
Publishers Weekly Review:

Fans of Borchardt's two previous novels in this series (The Silver Wolf 
and Night of the Wolf) will welcome this latest action-and intrigue-
filled installment that continues the saga of lady werewolf Regeane and her sworn shape shifter mate, wolf-turned-man Maeniel, in Dark Ages Italy. In a cliff-hanger opening, a runaway Saxon slave saves Regeane from death in an Alpine avalanche. When the two attempt to take refuge in a nearby monastery, they discover a mad abbot tinder the control of an invading demon spirit, the Bear, who leads a ragtag troop of bandits and monks turned zombies. Although they escape with Maeniel’s help, the Bear follows, determined to possess a werewolf body and increase its power. Maeniel undertakes a mission from Charles (Charlemagne) to scout the geographical and political landscape ahead of the king's troops as Charles lays siege to Lombardy and its self-indulgent ruler, Desederius. In the meantime, Regeane's greedy cousin Hugo bargains with the Bear spirit and finds himself caught up in Desederius's plot to capture Maeniel. Fortunately, Regeane and the Saxon arrive in time to rescue him. Borchardt's strength, as usual, is her deeply researched setting, which brings alive the barbaric era after the fall of the Roman Empire.

(www.go.galegroup.com)

Regeane is found bathing and she becomes the silver wolf. Her wolfish status provides a clear overview of human struggles against the tyrannical claims of masculinity. This is how Alice Borchardt makes of the feminine crisis through forest imageries, as she writes:
Things did grow here in the region of perceptual shadow. Soil trapped in the nooks and crannies of the twisting roots supported a magnificent variety of ferns and other odd plants, the likes of which Regeane had never seen before something that rooted itself in bark dropped long trailing stems covered by leaves so tiny and numerous that they looked like fur… the fact that the trees created an almost impossible surface over which something like a wolf would not be able to travel. (WK144)

Alice Borchardt seeks to organize gender as the basic gradation of a woman’s experience. The “perpetual shadow” “the twisting roots” and “the long trailing stems”, are indicative of the gender premise.

Alice Borchardt moves on to project another facet of the social construct, which subordinates women. Hugo’s mother attests this subaltern status as one finds her “bleeding” to slow death by her physician. The physician treating Hugo’s mother is, representative of the male hegemony, which has the privileged right to intrude upon the female anatomy. Alice Borchardt frowns upon the Roman academia, which has managed to dominate the fields of knowledge before twisting itself into the feminine autonomy. Hugo resorts to cheating and violence by which, even his wife is no exception. He is part of a human construct. According to Gayle Rubin, “by which the biological raw material of human sex and procreation is shaped by human intervention” (165). And again Julie Soul writes:

Ripe with sensual images, the reader is thrust back into this time where nothing is fair, and everyone can be your enemy. Yet, Regeane finds friendship among the danger - her closest friend ends up being one of
the most fascinating characters -- Rome's most esteemed courtesan, the beguiling Lucilla.

Does Regeane find happiness? Is she able to sate the wolf, and yet live as a noble woman? If you have a love of werewolves, but are looking for something different than urban fantasy, let Borchardt take you back into the days of Rome where you will run along with Regeane under the full moon and feel the thrill of freedom. And if you enjoy this one, there are two more to come. (www.soultrekking.blogspot.in)

The assimilations and the devaluation of women is a significant trait of the so-called male hegemony. It vociferously undertakes to subjugate femininity through voluptuous disintegration of the female. Regeane is one manipulative tool in the hands of Alice Borchardt. She sets out redeem the feminine subjectivity, as simultaneously she undertakes to deconstruct the cultural perception of gender. As a woman, she participates in the larger perception of the female subjectivity. A new woman is what one witnesses in Regeane, as she stands against the backdrop of Nature. According to Tamaranth:

*The Wolf King* tells the story of Regeane and Maeniel’s new life together. It’s a thrilling tale of black magic and pagan spirits, chicanery and blackmail. The cruelty and uncertainty of everyday life in Charlemagne’s fledgling empire is demonstrated anew as Regeane’s patron, Lucilla, is captured and tortured: as Maeniel and his fellow wolves join forces with the Frankish army: and as the two werewolves (not to mention Maeniel’s merry band of followers, and Regeane’s
mysterious Saxon admirer) become inextricably wound into the political affairs of ambitious petty rulers.

Regeane and Maeniel constitute a terrible pair, through they are distanced by unfortunate events. Maeniel and Regeane spend more time apart than they do together, and both are headstrong individuals who attract loyalty and love from many of the mere mortals who cross their paths. If anything, they are less affectionate towards one another than their reputations, and their repeated avowals of love, suggest. (www.tamaranth.blogspot.in)

To Regeane, the subjugation of women is a cultural reality. It is centered on the labyrinthine materialistic condition as personified in Armine. Armine is “the king’s representative in the cloth trade” and since the “kings have to eat”, Armine is “supposed to supply… financially from his estates” (WK 136) Armine, Hugo and Desiderius are part of this “ancient wisdom” (136) for which, they sweat and toil, stumble and fall. Alice Borchardt terms this “the new barbarian aristocracy” (136). As she records, “despite poverty, church teaching, war and civil disorder, the appetite for ostentatious apparel had only grown among the new barbarian aristocracy” (136).

According to Tamaranth:

That lack of romantic closure, as much as any of the other loose threads left hanging at the end of the novel, suggest that this is the third volume in an ongoing saga, rather than the culmination of a trilogy. There’s certainly plenty of scope for more character development -- and Borchardt could reasonably follow her sister’s example and
explore the lives of the ‘supporting cast’ of werewolves.

(www.tamaranth.blogspot.in)

Alice Borchardt pinpoints the junk commercialisation of history with the bear. As the bear blurts out:

For once, after all these ages of preying on these gibbering half apes who replaced any own kind, I would have an equal partner, one who could share my mind, my will. We could brush aside these quarrelling kings and rule the world rule it our way. Return it to what it once was - forests without end. (WK 154)

The monarchical manor is expressive of squalid valour and ill health, as one finds the country side “reverting to wilderness” (159) with the Lombard’s keeping the Roman women as slaves. Regeane witnesses such things. She is shocked by the knowledge of those who grow by the crops “seldom planted close to the river” (159). The old rustic innocence centred on wolves “feeding on the somewhat well aged carcass of a bullock who looked as if he’d fallen down a bank and broken his neck” (159) is gone.

As Hadrian and Lucilla take a walk in the garden, one is exposed to the historical malice. Lucilla is a victim to the vile and malignant male aristocracy. One sees her body “scarred by torture at the hands of Lombards” as she remembers “the pain as . . ., the nails were jerked out one by one” (161). The body has been subjected to further sadistic proportions as “they brought out the hot irons” (162). Pope Hadrian remembers the day when they first meet, when Lucilla is “pregnant four months and
had walked a long way from the mountains that ran like a spine down. She was with quite a lump of gold, strapped to a belt around her wrist” (WK 163). Lucilla arrives at the entrance of the Italian city where desolate widows are kept in “safe lodgings for the multitude of female pilgrims who thronged to the holy city” and Lucilla is lodged in “a room up a narrow stair on the third floor of a bakery near the ruins of a forum” (163). Pope Hadrian sees her only to fall in love with her. Thus, Lucilla becomes the Pope’s mistress. Lucilla is the victim of both the ecclesiastical and the junk commercialist constructs. While the commercial aristocracy has reduced her to the status of a prostitute, Pope Hadrian keeps her as a secret mistress. As William Thompson writes:

The third work of an ongoing series (earlier novels being The Silver Wolf and Night of the Wolf) The Wolf King continues Alice Borchardt's romantic horror fantasy set at the end of the Roman Empire and the later rise of Charlemagne. Attempting to carve out territory correlative to that of her sister, Anne Rice, Ms. Borchardt has chosen shape-shifters as her theme and protagonists, specifically a pack led by the nobleman Maeniel and his bride, Regeane. (www.sfsite.com)

Lucilla has to be the servant to the two spheres of aristocracy – namely, the public and the private. Publicly, she is destined to be the fetish commodity of the urban mass, and privately, she is supposed to fulfil the amorous propositions of the Pope. Lucilla’s history enunciates the dehumanization and devaluation of gender. Significantly, her personal space clamps upon her the institutionalized motherhood, which illustrates how the clandestine private warps women into a subaltern. Lucilla is
also a mute witness to the gory gothic male disorder. While Pope Hadrian holds the ecclesiastical construct, Lucilla is subject to her usual womanly role of mothering children. As Gerda Lerner writes it, “while men conquered territory and built institutions which managed and distributed power, women transmitted culture to the young and built the social network and infrastructures that provide continuity in the community” (179). While Hadrian gains god-like power, Lucilla is paradoxically thrust to the segregated other status. Again William Thompson observes:

Based upon the book’s conclusion, the various storylines in this novel appear to serve little more than as a chapter or bridge to the next book’s continuance of the series. A tale in which the heroes and heroines are gaining ever-increasing and god-like powers, ranging from the ability to talk to animals and plants to prophetic visions reaching millennia into the past and future, with an insight to sense all life and gaze into the workings of the universe, invisibility, and even more talents hinted yet to come, the accretion of these powers threatens at times to overwhelm both the context and characters of the narrative.

(www.sfsite.com)

*The Wolf King* is thus a comprehensive expression of cultural historicity in which, the characters are wrapped by contextualised history. As Valerie Frankel observes:

*The Wolf King* carries readers back to the fall of the Roman empire, a time of ghosts and werewolves, in this breath taking historic fantasy adventure. Alice Borchardt sprinkles her novel with romance, danger,
and intrigue, as her heroes war against the growing evil presence in the land, as well as some enemies who are all too human. Borchardt’s world is rich with incredible details of Italian history, as well as the powerful fantasy that she weaves.(www.sfreader.com)

As a representative of the utilitarian precept, Lucilla encapsulates a more comprehensive perception of the female historicity. This is what constitutes the legacy of the historicized feminine. This is one perspective, which helps Alice Borchardt negotiate the historicized feminine. For instance, Lucilla is also projective of a woman’s intricate past. She has colluded with the ecclesiastical construct and generates a parallel culture as seen in her capability of producing slave proclivities. This is one ambiguous position, History creates. Though, in the status of Hadrian wife, she only ends up, with the paradoxical signification of a victim. As Salman Rushdie observes, “History is always ambiguous. Facts are hard to establish and capable of being given many meanings. Reality is built on our prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as our perceptiveness and knowledge” (25).

Significantly, As Valerie Frankel observes:

This novel perfectly concludes The Silver Wolf, as each character of the first book continues their life. However, the second book in the trilogy is a prequel from centuries earlier, and seems out of place between books one and three. In Night of the Wolf, Maeniel learns to become human as he and his friends plot the downfall of Julius Caesar. The focus of the other books are dramatically different, as the first focus on Regeane, a persecuted young girl hoping to find love. The
third book struggles to win an immense war, looking through many different points of view. (www.sfreader.com)

In presenting Regeane as a shape shifter, Alice Borchardt attempts to deconstruct the masculinise historicist epistemology. Pope Hadrian is projective of the sovereign subject and Alice Borchardt dismantles Papacy by constructing the Pope as fathering children who turn out to be the legitimate citizens of the country. Hence, Regeane has made the Lombard king the central point of reference. He is also the metaphorical projection of an epistemology constructed on the foundational hierarchy, in which, the masculine is the privileged pivot. Regeane is all set to undermine the hierarchy, before dismantling the masculine - historicist epistemology. As Valerie Frankel observes:

This story presents a classic battle between good and evil, as Charlemagne and his followers attack the corrupt and cowardly King Desederius of the Lombards. Christianity and paganism also fight for supremacy in this tumultuous world. Even as the thugs and murderers stalk the land in search of innocent victims, a primal evil desiring no less than the destruction of all mankind stalks Regeane and Maeniel, trapping him as bait for his courageous wife to rescue. Regeane must use all her bravery to face this creature, and not lose her own humanity to the growing wolfishness within her. Her struggle to preserve innocent lives seems doomed in this ancient world of violence and terror. Living in a country trapped between the two warring clans, it is
Regeane's duty to protect her subjects from evil and corrupted power.

(www.sfreader.com)

Regeane is Maeniel’s better half, worldly wise, devoted and patiently bears the adversities of life. Yet, she stands still poised for a revolutionary retaliation. Regeane is, as Susan Gubar suggests “radically subversive, the results of one woman’s defiance which must have cost either her life or her humour… a mysterious but potent act of resistance” (259). Regeane subverts the mythical demeanour. Her shape shifting to a wolf and her spending the nights under the moonlight, are indicative of the deconstructionist mode. As the novelist writes:

But then the wind ended, the rain pounded straight down, extinguishing the fiery tree, and Regeane was surprised to find she was looking out at the world through an enclosure of fern fronds. She was wrapped in the soft fronds of the fern she rested against (WK 148).

As Valerie Frankel observes:

This book is a superb specimen of feminist fantasy, hosting an enormous cast of strong characters, but also allowing for romance as well as the historical facts. The author's extensive research shines from each page, embellished with incredible sensory details, from food and street smells to the images of a crumbling Roman past. With superb characterization, Regeane faces her duality as woman and wolf, just as her husband faced his in Night of the Wolf. Along with many familiar characters, the author introduces a few new faces and agendas. Those
enemies that have survived the first book return, with more vengeance planned against Regeane and her powerful husband.

(www.sfreader.com)

Regeane is now entrusted with the task of saving her husband Maeniel. Maeniel is captured by the Lombard king and brought to Pavia “the breadbasket of Lombard kingdom” as it “showed… a collection of magnificent villas, expensive public municipal buildings and recreational establishments” (WK 169). At the moment, the kingdom is in crisis as the novelist puts it, “The poorer class of the town were proving more difficult to control – much more demanding about their legal rights, for instance – than the rather cowed humiliates of Roman times. But the direct presence of the king and court were to some extent holding things together” (176).

Maeniel, still in chains, is brought into the forum before the cold-eyed commander of the king’s guard. He realizes his human limitations as he contemplates, “The man would struggle. The man didn’t know how not to struggle. But the wolf would centre him with the knowledge and confidence of the night hunter’s peace with the changing world and his eternal assurance of his place beneath the stars and among them” (178).

With Maeniel in chains, Regeane has to reformulate a new strategy. Her affirmation of the new woman makes her move. As the novelist writes, “Regeane knew the rules; her eyes were downcast… The road quickly began turning into a street. Houses of timber and wattle and damson crowded on both sides… But she could still see a curtain or two more as she walked past. Just ahead loomed the gray stones of a Roman gate” (190).
Regeane manages to wiggle through resistance and at times, she resorts to her wolf side since, “The wolf knew them before the woman did” (*WK* 191). Like her man, Regeane is (191) found “climbing the street” and “walking” against the wind blowing up the street. There she meets Dorcas, a baker from Pavia. Dorcus follows the trade her father and her husband have done before her. Both Regeane and Dorcas make a good acquaintance. Dorcas’ son Robert brings tales of woe. He is engaged to Mona. The Lombard soldiers as Robert says “dragged Mona off… wearing my ring.[as] They cut off her fingers to take it” (209). This is an illustration of history which moves into the present to make significant strides towards postmodern culturality. As Jeannette Winterson writes, “The future is foretold from the past and future is only possible because of the past without past and future, the present is partial. All time is eternal. There is no sense in forgetting and every sense in dreaming. Thus the present is made rich. Thus the present is made whole.” (62).

Thus, Dorcas and her son are part of the lawless city and Desiderius shows “no willingness to listen to his people” (210). And Mona is not the first as Dorcas says:

Mona is not the first my son. Lillas was accosted on her way to the fountain a few weeks ago. She is but a new bride… She lost the child she was carrying. When her father and father-in-law confronted the king, he laughed in their faces, and two days later, her husband was killed in the street almost at his own doorstep. (210)

Regeane beholds the community as “a humble gathering of a few sympathetic souls who come together to mourn some unimportant men and women who met their
deaths by misadventure” (WK 215). Yet, she hopes that these departed souls will “make the very powerful Desiderius rest uneasy on his throne” (215). She sees the men “just as shadows superimposed on the faces… the absolute darkness of the grave with them… marked by the horror of their morality and entrance into eternity” (215). She now descends into a self-radiation as the novelist writes, “we are all more and less than the flesh. We wear from birth to death, but we are never sure why or how much” (215). According to Mary Tabor:

Emily and Charlotte Bronte did passion and English weather. Jackie and Joan Collins did passion and Hollywood glamour. Now, a new sisters' duo, with their own take on passion, are on the book scene: Anne Rice, the veteran vampire chronicler, and Alice Borchardt, who shares her younger sister's fascination with dark fantasy but turns her focus to ninth-century France and Vikings. (www.nytimes.com)

Dulcinia’s song is accompanied by a huge viol and two of the drummers, as she “raised one hand [with] every voice in the square hosted as she began to sing” (WK 226). Her song is deep seated on humanism as the topic is all” about a lover who compares his sweetheart to a rose” and it is just “a sprightly song” (226). Dulcinia, like the Biblical Esther, sings for her people. She is supposed to liberate her people from the clutches of those perspiring humans “… masked by the thousand odours generated by… all the items of commerce in the shops and warehouses around the forum” (235).

Dulcinia, like Regeane, finds women oppressed, politically and ideologically. She holds them sure victims of suppression. She perceives the female populace as
stranded by the conceptual reality of materialism. Her role is illustrative of a
redeemer, who keeps the conviction, that women alone can negotiate this situation.
She further perceives the Lombard king and the Bishop together as a historical
conclave, which has internalized gender as models of fetish commodities. Dulcinia
asserts women must work out an identity before confining themselves to the
transformation of a society. She is not ready to compromise, as she is concerned about
the integrity of the body, mind, and soul. As Monique Witting observes:

They say that at the point they have reached, they must examine the
principle that has guided them… They say henceforth what they are, is
not subject to compromise… They say that any symbol that exalts the
fragmented body must disappear… they, the women, the integrity of
their body, their first principle, advance marching together into another
world. (72)

Regeane, along with Dulcinia, enunciates the simple principle of feminist
rebellion. She is expressive of a woman’s dire need for a political solution and she
beholds in Dulcinia’s song an attempt to transgress the male superstructure. This
eventuates into a political resistance. Hence, Alice Borchardt submits the initial
transformation of subjectivity in Regeane too. As Luce Irigaray puts it;“for a woman
to arrive at the point where she can enjoy her pleasure as a woman, a long detour via
the analysis of the various systems that oppress her, is certainly necessary” (105). For
Regeane, salvation is possible only through a direct confrontation of political action.
She wishes to diffuse the commodity status inscribed by men. She sets out to
explicitly outdo the male assumption of hierarchy in which women are relegated to
the other. She further, thus works out a pattern of resistance. This is one pattern of resistance that Alice Borchardt follows in her writing. This is a mark of her genius. In this regard, it is worth quoting Helen Cixous here. She observes:

It is impossible to define a feminine practice of writing… for this practice can never be… enclosed, encoded- which doesn’t mean that it doesn’t exist. But it will always surpass the discourse that regulates the phallocentric system. It does and will take place in areas other than those subordinated to philosophical/theoretical domination. It will be conceived of only by subjects who are breakers of automatisms, by peripheral figures that no authority can ever subjugate. (253)

Shape shifting comes as one illustration of the deconstruction mode. Through this strategic application of personality, Alice Borchardt goes in for a metaphorical reconstruction which posits a new value, a new meaning and a new consciousness. As Shoshana Felman observes:

How can the woman be thought about outside of the masculine… other than opposed to man, without being subordinated to a primordial masculine model? How can difference as such be thought out as non-subordinate to identity? In other words, how can thought break away from the logic of polar opposition? (4)

Alice Borchardt’s *The Wolf King* offers expression to the monarchical contradiction and the consequent fault lines. The novelist’s main intention is to underline the failures of monarchy to save humankind, let alone women. The
monarchy, supplemented by the ecclesiastical constructs loses its credibility because it turns out to be cheaply materialistic. This is in no way susceptible to feminine ideology, as it is engulfed in the materialist ideology. Alice Borchardt invokes Nature as having creditworthiness to liberate humankind. This is the reason why she adorns both Maeniel and Regeane with wolfish status which is embedded to the wild Nature. Eco poised as she is, Alice Borchardt traces back to the dawn of civilization, in order to clinch reason. The Wolf King excavates a history of human emotions, as Theodor Adorno puts it “consists in the fate of human instincts and passion repressed and distorted by civilization” (qtd. in Cook 5).

Postmodern polity stands largely fixed in opportunism and transition. This is one of the strategies adopted in the hierarchical superstructure. Maeniel becomes the wolf, figuratively, the vengeful native as the “wolf lunged for the druid’s throat” before he yields “up everything will, memory and finally, at last consciousness itself into nothingness” (WK 20). He flings out of history, punctuated by assassination, into the postmodern anarchy, perversion, slavery and betrayal. The novelist even makes a coalition with Nature as Maeniel the wolf now encounters wolfdom. He sees the mother wolf keeping her young with love and kindness. Maeniel becomes part of this animal existence punctuated by selfless love and innocence. Borchardt’s purpose of the portrayal of the animal world carries an objective – while establishing the severity of mankind, through a historical of act of betrayal and treason, she takes one to a wolfish ambience, in which one witnesses a potent ethical paradigm. The following passage is an illustration, “Then she [the she wolf] came and was a beautiful sight in his eyes. A young she – wolf, her hearts sullen with milk and load of meat in her belly
for her pups. She drank and her eyes met him over the pool. She gave a slight start, then walked around the wall to look down on him” (WK 211).

Alice Borchardt pinpoints the fact that humanity has lost its potency to disseminate any ethical balance. Hence, she brings in the non-human conditions which metaphorically enunciate a new living with a lease of new ethics.

A postmodern text, *The Dragon Queen* with its self narrative, is centred on human love and eco-balance. One witnesses the dragons playing on the beach, with the clear proclamation of the novelist that “the only way that you learn about love is to love and be loved” (*Dragon Queen* 25). [hereafter, referred to as *DQ*]. The novel is also reflective of the Arthurian legend. According to Neal Wyatt:

> The tales of King Arthur are pure reading pleasure, mixing romance, magic, and myth into stories that continue to spin off into new threads. As winter melts slowly into spring, spend the last of the cold dark nights ensorcelled by the magic of Merlin, the boy he found, and the knights of the Round Table. (110)

The dragon as a symbol lies heavily burdened in the novel. Yet, with a visionary strategy, Alice Borchardt weaves her story from the dragon world, which is indicative the primeval innocence.

According to Sheila Soup:

> Set in a Britain freshly rid of Roman rule, this tale is loosely based on Arthurian legend. Readers meet a noble Arthur, a wise Morgana, a mesmerizing yet nasty Merlin, and a very different sort of Guinevere.
Raised by wolves and endowed with ivy like skin armor reminiscent of Celtic tattoos, this young woman is no frail maiden in need of a Lancelot. Young Guinevere blossoms into womanhood while finding herself at the center of a struggle for the soul of her country. On one side is the powerful arch druid Merlin, who has sold out to Romano-British slaveholders. On the other side are matriarchs, sorcerers, and sorceresses, all of whom honor the old ways. With a sense of destiny and the fire of youth, Arthur and Guinevere navigate worlds mundane and surreal. Magical encounters border on the whimsical while retaining an often-frightening edge. During these encounters, Guinevere discovers her affinity for dragons and chooses her destiny with Arthur. (154)

Back in the animal world, one sees “three of them, two men and a woman…. after leaving the child gone directly back down” (DQ 28). Idonia is the human who leaves the child in the animal world.

History is back again, in the company of Idonia, Dugald and Titus Maeniel recovers the static historical truth of these “Romans presentations” (33) for everyone knows they have no morals. And yet, the Saxons are no better. Unlike Merlin, Idonia is exhibitive of the feminine grandeur and splendour.

Alice Borchardt attaches the abandoned child to the animal world. The child begins life suckling at the wolf’s teats. In the company of the she wolf and the pups, the child “was just as happy to stay where I was” (51). The child is the ‘I’ of the novel. And then later the “I” turns out to be the historical Guinevere. The non-human
world adopts Guinevere, who grows up in a world of love, concern and sharing. Guinevere’s first adventure with the pirate predicts her evolution of life. She is first exposed to the war band, a historical realism tinged with an ethical blank. The helpless villagers support this war band which indulges in raids, and then “flirt with the girls of the village” (DQ 54). No villager loves but only tolerates them, and hence there is “potential disaster for a family with a marriageable daughter” (54). Especially, the boys of the war bands are really tough and sadomasochistic that they quite often enact their masculinity on innocent girls at the cost of the virginity. Once, Guinevere encounters Baio flirting with Issa, the village chief’s daughter. When she warns Baio of the impending attack by the pirates, he is too romantically involved with Issa to listen. Guinevere has to fling a pebble that “took him square to the middle of the forehead” (55) to rivet him to sense. She administers a lot of strategies to help salvage the island from the pirates. The pirates thrown aboard leave behind Kyra, a victim of molestation. Together with Kyra, Guinevere sets out to redefine gender. She is on a quest for a wholesome of being. In this regard, the words, warrants mention here. Jasbir Jain writes:

And freedom means to breathe freely, to meet people, to have an openness of experience. But women have been kept in kitchens and parlours, in purdah and in luxury but deprived freedom. Virginia Woolf in her two lectures on: Women and Fiction (1928) later developed into A Room of one’s Own (1929) develops this at length. The narrative begins with the young woman being shooed of the lawn and being denied entrance to the library, both acts of exclusion. She is
treated as a trespasser and must needs have a chaperon. Her freedom is curtained and made dependent on other people. (3)

Kyra is the reminder of this historical reality submitted by Alice Borchardt, as she writes:

As to the women aboard the vessel, they had seen their fathers, brothers, husbands and sons killed by the slaves. Many had been raped, some repeatedly and those pregnant or with babies at the breast had seen their newborns killed, because a woman with a child at the breast was worth less than one without. They showed no mercy. (61)

Guinevere is accorded the status of a new woman. As the novelist puts it; “for when women take revenge, it is with all their hearts and souls, not to mention considerable inventiveness and ingenuity. Every villager attests the fact that without her [Guinevere], we would have been taken by surprise” (DQ 61).

Kyra is a one-eyed woman. She is the rape victim of the chief of the pirates who “gouged my eye out because I fought him when he tried to have me” (62). She has lost her man and son, Camry. Kyra is given refuge and she takes up rebuilding not only the village, but also Guinevere, who is presently seen wearing a boy’s suit and her hair cut like one. She quietly refurbishes the house and fixes the floor up with hides. An excellent weaver herself, Kyra brings Guinevere her sad story of victimisation. As the novelist records:

Being a woman didn’t get me much of anything… that was when he gouged out my eye, saying it would make me more compliant, and he
was right… I behaved the way the other women did, doing what I was
told, even seeming to welcome their embraces (DQ 65).

Kyra begins to reconstruct her fragmented self and body in the company of
Guinevere. She teaches Guinevere the songs of yore and teaches the legendary stories
of the past. Guinevere learns astronomy, and the “meaning of the constellations—
the warrior, the fish, the dragon, the twins, the bull, the lion, and many more” (70). Yet
Guinevere’s relationship with Kyra is something more than that. As she speculates:

That satisfied me. Kyra taught me history. Not as the Romans knew it,
the story of wars and kings, but about the journey of the humankind
and how we won out over both gods and beasts and now rule over both
of them… All but for the veiled, she who is fate, and even the Romans
but kneel before her. (71)

Guinevere begins to grow. A new woman she is, she learns to fight from
Maeniel. Dugald teaches her “of real dragons and how to rule”, as she finds time to
run at “wild along the shore with mother, Black leg and Kyra” (78). Alice Borchardt
fits Guinevere in the company of the agents of Nature as one finds Guinevere hunting
“deer, rabbits, and even bear and big cats” (78). As Guinevere attests, “I ran with the
wolves until I could run down hare, and I can still go for miles even after a lot of
strife, labour battle, and child bearing” (78). And thus, Guinevere is affixed to a
virginal ambience of Nature:

Then there is green, the coloured emerald learning secrets, light and
fair as masses drifting sea grass on the water, or clear shading away
into blue where the sea meets shore. But blue, blue what do we know of the blue? The pure arch of summer sky over the ocean or the blues as light is lost, first transparent, then translucent, finally shading in to shadow as the surrounding beasts reach the deeps. \((DQ\ 83)\)

Enlightened by Nature, Guinevere sets outs through the journey of life. Her evolutions of life, as constituted by the events that follow, submit what Guinevere is. She grows up to be a woman. She is exposed to knowledge by Maeniel and then Dugald. Both of them argue quite repeatedly about this. Dugald is strongly supportive of the Romans as signifying “the culminations of thousands of years of civilisation, beginning in the east and spreading westward” \((84)\).

Maeniel, at the same time, is worried about Merlin, who rears Pendragon’s son to be a king. Alice Borchardt foregrounds these incidents before Maeniel’s act of equipping Guinevere with an axe, “similar to the ones carried by Roman cavalrymen” \((85)\). Further, Guinevere encounters a failed kidnap attempt by one of Merlin’s men on board, who promises her nice jewellery, if she really cares to walk with him “up to the rocks” \((86)\). In the meantime, Guinevere is a witness to the great epidemic brought to the land by the crew of the ship. Issa loses her son to the epidemic. And worst of all, her stepmother, the she-wolf dies.

Alice Borchardt’s forges a new value in the death of Guinevere’s mother. The dream she has before her mother’s death, establishes the divine in the animal world. In the dream, her mother does not fear death as she says, “none of us do, and it is God’s gift to us” \((87)\). The statements stand antithetical to the human desire to live long. That is why, Guinevere is of the perception that “mother was a wolf and maybe
she didn’t want to go to a place where there were humans” (DQ 93). Guinevere is able to conclude thus of Maeniel, as she speculates “wolf or not, I can believe he has a better education than Dugald” (93). She also recollects with a sense of gratification, her mother’s selfless love, as she believes, “I would have died had not mother been willing to give me her milk and for no short time” (93). Alice Borchardt enacts the event of the last rites of Guinevere’s mother with more humanness. A human can imagine, as she makes of Guinevere’s reaction thus, “I walked out on the headland and put my head on mother’s body a cold lump under the linen. The flames… blazed with fierce intensity as the roaring, exploding sheets of fire took my mother’s soul to the stars” (97). As one finds in The publisher’s weekly:

Magic rules in this first volume of a trilogy that focuses on the fabled Guinevere's adventures before and after she comes to Camelot. Borchardt (Night of the Wolf) paints a vivid portrait of the future queen, who is no pale Pre-Raphaelite princess. Suckled by a she-wolf, this child of power is protected by a Druid, Dugald, and the Gray Watcher, Maeniel, not to mention a shape changing wolf man. Daughter of a pagan queen, this warrior beauty takes control of her own destiny. Bold, courageous, prophetic and possessed of powers that enable her to communicate with dragons and wolves, as well as with a shrunken head, this Guinevere engages the reader immediately, even as a spindly toddler thrown into a wolves' den.

(www.publishersweekly.com)
Alice Borchardt projects the evolution of the young Guinevere, through a postmodernist pastiche, among the few things. The historical Oracle at Delphi is invoked. Guinevere asks, “if we would face raids that year” (DQ 98). Gradually, the novelist posits an eco feminist drive as one finds Guinevere going out with “other woman to collect acorns and hazelnuts” (98). Guinevere is much concerned about her old people as she works her “way to and make sure you had plenty of food” (99). This is revealed by Alice Borchardt through Guinevere’s speculation, “So, I and the rest of the women had been climbing around the rocks for several weeks, collecting the surplus. It reposed in big baskets on the threshing floor. They had to be turned every day to ensure they were dry before they were placed in the basement of the chief’s house” (99). Further, as found in The Publisher’s Weekly:

A fine, lyrical storyteller, Borchardt reinvents familiar characters, including a young Arthur and an evil Merlin, who seeks to control the- once and future king of Camelot. This dark sorcerer may dismay some Merlin lovers, as he would rather see Guinevere dead than as Arthur’s queen. It’s an interesting concept in a long line of derivative explorations of a mysterious character who has long enchanted Arthurian fantasy devotees. In the prologue, Guinevere writes: "I am myself a creature of the dance, the imitation of the movements embraced by the dialogue between earth and sky," and readers will eager for the dance to be continued in the next instalment.

(www.publishersweekly.com)
Guinevere, is part of the community’s economics too, as she is engaged in the collection of enough food for winter. She has been embedded with an arduous task “that might be dangerous somehow before bringing bread to the table” (DQ 99). Alice Borchardt positions Guinevere, as against the backdrop monarchical anarchy as attested as follows, “The king makes a loud noise among the people and says, “we have women here for the taking. Who needs a wife? Hire them for a year. See if you suit. Yes, some have children at their skirts. All the better, you will know they can breed well. Come and look ...” (100).

Guinevere is against this, and she has “no wish to be bestowed in a place not of my choosing” (100). This sets off a rage in Dugald, her teacher who moans, “that this is what comes of teaching a woman to be independent” (100). Alice Borchardt sparks off another contest with Guinevere’s brother, Black leg expressing his desire to marry her. He has enough reasons to justify that they are not blood relatives and he has only fostered her when she is abandoned by her kin. The rest of the events establish Guinevere as a mighty hunter and then, the saviour of her community. In her capability to set up fire, she defends Maeniel and Black leg from the notorious onslaught of the Bear. She emerges as a metaphor of a new woman. And eventually, her becoming a new woman arises out of her subaltern status.

Guinevere is aware of the cultural reality that woman, though useful as a companion, should have to end up “a third or fourth wife of a strong lord or the successful leader of a war band” (DQ 104). She must spin, weave, gather wool, and tend to his dairying. Guinevere grows up to be the darling of Nature enshrouded by the valley and the lakes, enlightened by the cool air and the dying sun. A mighty
hunter she is, Guinevere can run well with an animal’s speed before she hunts them down, and can even skin precisely at the boar’s snout. The turbulent adventures she encounters are all figurative significations of her life’s pathways. In “the deep gloom of the summer forest”, Guinevere moves on “like a column of light” (DQ 113). She is now capable of grading the ambience as she “could smell the air, clean, so clean it held only the scent of the trees and grass” (115).

In order to enunciate a sense of completion of the metamorphosis, Alice Borchardt immerses Guinevere in the mystical aura of Nature punctuated by “the broadened streams, the fish that carry lights on their bodies and the jellyfish wandering among the water like phosphorescent balls (122). She is suffixed by the dragon, which signifies wrath. The dragon by the revelation “of its origins and life” (123) enunciates a new beginning. Wisdom comes from the dead. The dead man teaches Guinevere, the significance of death which “is the fate not just of our kind, but of all living things” (129). As she recollects further, “Maeniel told me once that a very wise man tells him that if we did not die, we could not live” (129). The dead man evokes an awakening in Guinevere. As she understands now, she is no ordinary woman. She does not have to go whimpering.

Guinevere is awakened into another place of reality, which warns her of stagnation. Stagnation causes death quickly and hence, she should not draw back now, but “must go forward” (148). Guinevere does move forward into the path of realisation of self as projected by the dragon. This is how she speculates the journey of life:
As they told me during the journey no other living creature is at peak with men. We have attained great power and we use and abuse it in a casual manner. Knowing no laws but own, we are a scourge to all the other great kingdoms of life. They might feel a friendship with me, but not with any other of my kind. (DQ 149)

Alice Borchardt reaches the next level of psychic refurbishment of the subject. In order to intensify the growth of self in Guinevere, she uses the magical world populated by the dragons and the dolphins. Guinevere, as such is found submerged in Nature’s ambience characterized, by a selfless love and purity. Purity as constituted by Nature’s elements gets equated with the virginity of Guinevere. As cited in the web site:

The Dragon Queen is a vast departure from the Arthurian legends that we all know and love. So much and so that many of the characters are unrecognizable. I like the idea of Guinevere as a leader and a warrior. There are far too many negative role models in modern fiction. Many in novels aimed at young women. A Guinevere, who is not a selfless court ornament, or a simpering, adulterous, twit, is most welcome. Even refreshing, a sex addicted, sadistic, blood thirsty, Merlin on the other hand, came as a bit of a shock.

(www.mingtianlaoshi.wordpress.com)

When Guinevere is nearly lost in the fathomless depth of the forest, only the dragons come up to save her. They acknowledge Guinevere’s courage, and not her men’s intelligence, as they take her across wild cliffs; Guinevere is filled with music
and joy as she sees “rising waves with deep troughs, purple, green and black in the failing light” (*DQ* 137). When she listens to one of the big black whales singing, she concludes that this must be her world. This is how Alice Borchardt projects her mindset, as she writes:

> And again music floated into my mind. It told of a land frozen, summer and winter alike. Off bergs drifting, glittering like diamonds in an all too brief sunlight; of bears white as the snow packs over which they hunted; birds that didn’t fly but swarm, insulated by their feathers in an almost frozen sea. (138)

Further, the dragons assure a “union with the love of God” (138) here. Alice Borchardt posits an environment, untouched by the outer world of caprice and malice. The wind from the sea is indicative of a cleansing agent which “blew away some of the fog” (138). Guinevere begins her new phase of life with the dragons. The food is unadulterated as it is “wrapped in seaweed and seasoned with both salt and the crystals of honey” (139). The magnificent arches of the mountains and the cliffs do not bother her.

Alice Borchardt projects the idea that Nature alone has the potential to provide human kind its ultimate succour and solace. Also, Guinevere’s pure state of mind is equated with the fact of her being a virgin. Nature alone can provide comfort to Guinevere. The “cliff the hallows, and the darkness below” (143) do not battle her, but add only joy and fulfilment to Guinevere. “The water tasted of morning” designates Guinevere, as the pioneer of a new moment seen beyond “the glow on the horizon and sunrise” (143). All the natural elements gain elegance when it is
perceived through the presence of the Flower Bride “which is a tree formed of the flowers” (*DQ* 143). As Alice Borchardt quaintly describes, “Blue eyes the colour of the martin’s breast; long dark hair brown as the queen’s bark; and skin pale creamy white, and brushed with the merest hint of flame like the flowers” (143). At one point, Guinevere becomes the Flower Bride. This is one narrative transition, with which Alice Borchardt proclaims a new directionality of character. As cited in the web:

> We also meet briefly, two of Arthur’s companions, and find them also much changed. They aren’t completely human. Having read other books by Alice Borchardt featuring ancient pagan demi gods, unicorns, and journeys across the River Styx, the seal people were no surprise here. Why did Borchardt only hint to it? Why not just use the word “Selkie”? Reading the descriptions of an unusually pale man, with dark hair and liquid eyes, who catches fish in a unique way got a little frustrating. ([www.mingtianlaoshi.wordpress.com](http://www.mingtianlaoshi.wordpress.com))

Nevertheless, Guinevere is interrupted by Dis, the Lord of Death. She now feels the fire pouring over her fingers “into the dead wood that blocked the stair” (144). She feels the power of Dis, which extends itself toward her. Now, she hears the wild shrieks of the seabirds promptly following the lightning that “scorched the rock” (145). The fear of death intrudes upon her as she gathers:

> The fear of death is a wonderful and terrible thing. It sent me fleeing back to the wall, under the light wall, near the vine. The pain struck again and I understood my choices, because the palm of my fire hand
was purple and the purple shed away to blackness at the nails. My hand was dying (DQ 145).

And then, Guinevere sees the apparition of Merlin, the chief Druid of Britain, who wants her dead. This is followed by a group of slaves who are left behind, by their captors “to guard…. something important (147). As they confess “Our lives depended on our doing a good job, but like many slaves over the countries, we revolted against our masters” (147). The dragons reach on time to deliver Guinevere “to the quay on which I was sure the Gray Watcher must have first set foot in Britain” (149). Guinevere is forced to encounter the most evil thing in her life -- Merlin. Now, she remembers what the dragons have said during the journey that “no other living creature is at peace with men” (149). There is then, an authorial intrusion: “We have attained great power, and we use and abuse it in a casual manner knowing no laws but our own, we are a scourge to all the other great kingdoms of life. They might feel a friendship with one but not with others of my friend” (142). According to Zachary Petit, “She’s the writing legend who gave vampire fiction new life. He's one of today's most promising young thriller authors. In this exclusive dual interview, mother and son discuss the family reunion of sorts where their writing paths are crossing for the first time: the supernatural genre” (www.go.gogale.com)

Guinevere, nevertheless is captivated by the pressure of Arthur “who would inherit the seat of a high king” (151). She is relieved, that there might be some rescue. He is enthralled by Guinevere’s innocence and beauty, for he beholds her “as beautiful as the morning star” (151). He feels that he is now free to follow his own inclination. He makes her the offer of marriage. Paradoxically, Arthur is also another
signification of history, burdened by the fact “that most chieftains of his rank take – sometimes must take – more than one woman, and… Find it both inconvenient and sometimes impossible to marry in the conventional sense” (DQ 151). Guinevere likes his candid Nature for in just “one smooth stroke he had offered… the respect and recognition due any ranks” (151). Guinevere’s arrival prompts a ritualistic sacrifice. She is bathed and accommodated in a huge room furnished with alabaster cranes and “a band of mosaic on the floor” (153). As the novelist puts it, “the sacrifice was on the altar, ready to be poured into the trench; “oil, fruit, wine and last but not the least, a sleeping child. The thick scent of verbena filled the air in the smoke rising from the fire, ready to chase the smell of the blood” (153).

Alice Borchardt contrasts the Nature’s world of the dragons, dolphins and the Flower Bride with Merlin’s world characterized by the “soap, heavy with myrrh, surprisingly rough” (154). Guinevere manages to wriggle out of the place and she promptly hits “the circle of light in the pavilion” (154). She is backing home with the Gray Watcher, Black leg and Kyra. Alice Borchardt arranges the events in such a way, that they reinforce the thematic potential of art. As John Brannigan writes, “An important realisation of new historicism is that literature and history are inseparable… literature is a vehicle for the representation of history; it does contain insights into the formation of historical moments. It reveals the processions and tensions by which historical changes come about” (169).

The Dragon Queen also projects culture and history in parallel. Alice Borchardt brings into focus the political and cultural ideas of the historic times of Arthur. A literary text does its duty in the sense that it provides options to explore the
working of the creative literary canon bound by the literary devices. While one is engaged in exploiting the historicity to interpret the literariness of a text, one is also aware of the literary devices that meditate history. In other words, Alice Borchardt’s *The Dragon Queen* manifests “the historicity of texts and the textuality of history” (qtd. in Brannigan 170). Hence one could surmise that *The Dragon Queen* is history embedded in cultural politics as it unmaskes eco feminism, feminism and post structuralist paradigms. It is deeply interlinked with the ethics and moral values of Author’s time. And so, *The Dragon Queen* could be an allegory of the feminist encounter between the European kings and the native subjugated women. The story of Kyra is crucial to the interpretation of the novel. While Merlin represents the colonial sadomasochist, Kyra is indicative of the subaltern. Alice Borchardt foregrounds the turbulent Nature before she invokes the disastrous male anarchy as personified in Merlin. The statement, “the road was a terrible place, frightening yet beautiful”, suggests the subaltern and the eco feminist simultaneously. Guinevere finds herself, once having escaped Merlin and his lot, on an island “wrapped in a fog that was mixed with rain” (*DQ* 183). Guinevere is stranded in a place “the rocky coast of Scotland” (103) as she is swept over by the merciless rain. Once cleared of Nature’s wrath, she encounters the volcanic cliffs, which portend disaster. She cannot put her foot forward. Since the path is “slick, very green grass mixed with lichen and tufts of moss”, she feels that she is “locked within the cages of a throne” (184). The crisis is intensified when she recognises the flowers “within the cages of thrones” (184). This diffuses a mild identity crisis in her. The crisis is intensified, when she recognises the flowers “within the cages of thrones”. It reminds her “of roses because some were red
often dark as red velvet – others white marked with scarlet bars” (DQ 184). The novelist projects Guinevere’s fragmented self, thus, “It was not here, the muggy heat only a long summer in the wetlands brings. I had begun to perspire. The damp clouds drifting among the throne bushes wet my face. I didn’t see any other people, and the island felt somehow alien” (184).

The fragmentary self seeks a safety valve of illusion. Guinevere gets off to a dream. Majesty is Maeniel’s raven which heralds good news, and safety to its people. As the novelist observes, “He was respectable, intelligent and had a family of his own in a niche on the cliffs” (185). Guinevere thanks the bird “as well as I could” (185). The bird flies Guinevere safe ashore out of the forest which is “a maze, clear paths rare” (186).

Soon after, Alice Borchardt switches to the historical moment in which one finds Merlin as a merciless human. He is representative of the cultural male anarchy which derives pleasure out of pain. Merlin is found in all his perversions, when he strips an innocent boy, before he takes away his life. As the novelist puts it, “The villain had been leading him [the boy] by a chain fastened to a huge cock ring. It was so large that it must have made normal sexual intercourse impossible. Merlin was stroking the boy’s chest” (198). Merlin pressurises the boy into a new stimulation of pleasing pain. He kneels behind the boy and begins to caress him. This is how the novelist draws the horrible apparition that makes Merlin: “Now it was no longer Merlin but a wreck of things the sea cast ashore – nets, driftwood, broken floats, lengths of twisted, rotten rope lashings of kelp and doles” (DQ 202).
Though Arthur is under the custody of Merlin, as the latter has taken his mother, Ingund, a captive, there is some respite. He has two wonderful companions Gawain and Cain. Gawain is significant in that, he is a manly man of twenty-three “and had already acknowledged four bastards” (*DQ* 206). He had been conceived after his mother’s six month visit to the Isle of women, “a thoroughly strange place” (206). She conceived of a non human a giant seagull which “took Morgana to the top of a crag, and the mating took place in the air among the clouds over the open ocean” (207). Cain is his bosom companion. He is so amiable, kind and concerned towards Gawain. Both Gawain and Cain have entrusted upon themselves the duty of the oath man, who never ran even if they do not will, under Arthur. Alice Borchardt projects the position of the three thus: “Hawk of May, Gawain, was one of the people of the hawk, born as it was thought, of the union of his mother with a hawk. There were others, many others. Arthur the Bear, Morgana – yes – Morgana – an owl, Cain, the seal” (215).

Merlin proceeds with his anarchical act by entwining the boy with the rope so hard, that it not only twists his body into a curve but also strangulates him by the throat. As Alice Borchardt writes:

The boy had an erection so often that it looked painful. The sorcerer was careful not to touch the genitals. He seemed to be waiting for something. He slapped the boy gently on the rump… the boy moaned in pain… Uther had never seen a male so engorged. His organ looked as big as horse’s. (199)
The boy is later pushed into the pool when he “began gasping for air” (DQ 201). When it is clear that the boy is recovering, Merlin pushes his face into the water, and then pulls it out saying, “You are alive. Did you know that?” (201). When the boy thanks him he “bent the boy’s hand back… Then, with one swipe of the knife he’d used to cut the ropes, he cut the boy’s throat” (201). As Alice Borchardt writes:

This is Merlin’s rite associated with his sorcery. And one Merlin was sure the Saxons would prevail. But they didn’t in face they were forced to flee in large numbers. What they need is a high king who will accommodate them, and thanks to your artifices, Arthur is the only heir. (216)

Alice Borchardt develops the storyline of Guinevere side by side with Arthur’s Guinevere emerges as a philanthropist, who envisages a genuine vision of humankind. She attests the very dream in the company of divine Nature. The dragon, a mythical animal, is demonstrative of the innocent and divine power of raw Nature. The dragon, then allegorically, projects itself, as the further vision of destiny enshrouded in immaculate love and splendour. The dragon is one creature that braves all sorts of weather before it brings in sure redemption and safety to Guinevere. The dragon’s potential is but brought out by the novelist who posits the great capability of performance. The novelist’s gradation of the dragon is the intuitive will of the splendorous Nature, which alone can salvage the postmodern humankind. The dragon, further by fierce power, fears “no storms” and is “fast, strong and travel in – among the lost” (217). Summarily, it invokes the historical Ulysses, who delights in voyages to heavenly domains hitherto unknown to humankind and unsurpassed by any
generation of voyages. The Dragon is expressive of a fierce, yet vibrant spirit, as it progresses to seek, to strive and never to yield. Further, Guinevere is patronized by the philanthropic gestures of the Flower Bride. As evidenced in her adornment of the flowers, she feels comfortable and quite confident, as she braves her way through the stormy threats enacted upon her by the chauvinist Merlin. Strapping “the flowers to my waist” with “their fragrance drifted around me”, (DQ 218), Guinevere is never at a loss to continue her journey towards safety. The Flower Bride engulfs her psyche with its “violent whirls” and then with its “brilliant colours of white, red, orange, blue and all the shades in between – cascaded from sleep cliffs adorned with broken rock” (DQ 218). She feels extremely strong as she glimpses “between patches of thick fog that lay on the water” (218). As Olive Banks observes: “By seriously exploring the Nature of female sexuality and the conditions under which it can flourish, the radical feminists have been successful in coming to terms with women’s needs without denying them altogether or subordinating them to male demands” (221).

Guinevere contests religion with her perception of Nature. She establishes the fact that heaven comes under the church’s propriety and no doubt, church is another factor, which has designated woman as secondary. Once, when she raises her doubt about this, Black leg tells her, “why couldn’t we spend an evening eating fine – cooked venison without attempting to solve all the conundrums of the universe among ourselves” (221). Yet, she attests the fact that “Mother left me her heart” (222). Guinevere’s mother, the she-wolf, brings her up with the knowledge, chipped out of her perception of the kingdom of possibility as she says, “she lives in mine, and to a wolf is the wisdom of first things first” (222).
Nevertheless, Guinevere has been reinforced by another crisis, a crisis eventuated upon her by this knowledge of contest. Through the forest imagery, the novelist foregrounds the issue, as Alice Borchardt writes:

The world was completely dark. The only sound was from the wind whispering in the forest. The fire was long burned out, but the rocks were still warm. I was thirsty…. I had wanted the salt. My exertions were such that I craved it. But it had awakened thirst in me and the water nearby was all salt. (DQ 222)

Though, Guinevere has the potency to outwit the complexity and intricacy around humankind, she feels “this darkness overwhelming” and she has a premonition that the wolf Maeniel “taught me to carry light the way most humans do” (223). She holds Kyra responsible for educating her with this knowledge of perceptive sensibility, “for they knew each star pattern and had songs for each one. “the salmon, the warrior, the maiden and all the rest” (226). She is sure that Kyra is possessive of the ancient wisdom.

This accelerates an identity crisis in Guinevere as she speculates, “I was really frightened now. The sheer terror of my predicament struck me, and I felt the stone in the belly that is deep, mortal fear” (226). She is also oriented toward the knowledge of the unknown by the Flower Bride, where “skin was the delicate flower petals of the spring – blooming vine, the long trailing branches of the willow, her hair” (228). This is indicative of the identity strain in Guinevere. It attests the fact that Guinevere, as a human, may not be able to fully comprehend the divine agenda of Nature. Yet, she feels that the wide chasm between herself and the Flower Bride, “They are woven into
the warp and weft of the universe. Their time is of ours. To them each morning is the first morning. Each spring is the first and again the last the world knows. That is why no man foolish enough to love one ever survives. He is always betrayed”. (DQ 228)

This is one sterile postmodernist condition that Alice Borchardt wishes to drive home. She makes Guinevere perceive this knowledge of truth and hence, the latter is determined now more than ever. Guinevere is all set to take a performative role which is imperative in the contact of the male anarchy. Through the following passage, Alice Borchardt illustrates Guinevere’s determination of self-will and courage, as she writes:

Do as the Flower Bride suggested, challenge my fate. I was doomed to be a scullion, running about the kitchen being badgered by a cook, a lower servant in a great hall, help prepare feasts I would never taste. Or the second, or even more, a minor wife of a great chief, bowing humbly to my betters and raising such children as my husband would allow me to bring up to respect their father. (229)

After having cursed Dis, Lord of the Dead, Merlin and his associate Igrana take their own path which assures her a self-identity.

Alice Borchardt now creates a momentous episode in which one finds Guinevere totally equipped to carry on. She reaches a farmhouse which has a thatched roof in that, “it was covered with low growing soft wheat and the wheat was still grass coloured and hadn’t begun to head up” (230). Guinevere is grateful to a lady whose “farmhouse is protected by the Flower Bride her own best guardian” (231). She makes
Guinevere “presentable” as she touches her hair which “arranged itself into a coil at my neck” (DQ 233) Guinevere finds herself “wearing a soft green dress… with a leather belt ornamented with bronze knots” (233). The farm lady bestows Guinevere with flowers which “have many powers, not the least of which is truth” (233). Alice Borchardt makes the little girl of the family to sit well with Guinevere. Together with the feminine lot, Guinevere builds her up physically. Guinevere passes on her newly inherited legacy to the child Treside that ---“she [Treside] should be warned to be cautious but not so frightened as to be immobilized by Terror” (239). And, thanks to Kyra, Guinevere “can, do all womanly things” (239). Guinevere’s noble deeds invite appreciation from Risderd, who “complimented our womanly skills [and] thanked me for watering the kitchen garden” (246).

Alice Borchardt now moves on to present Arthur’s crisis eventuated by Merlin’s wrath. Just like Guinevere, Arthur always invites compliments in that, he is all set to save a community of farmers from their enemies. The following observation illustrates his crisis: “I am Arthur, he thought, and I don’t know what that means” (DQ 218). Arthur’s identity crisis is eventuated by the historical reality, that he is born of conspiracy and ill will. He does everything to do away with the past that haunts him in the person of Merlin. Merlin wants to exploit Arthur’s sense of identity crisis through “the trick of the light that made… the letters vanished into an ebony shimmer” (269). The crisis of Arthur further, is revealed to the readers, through the silence of the forest out of which emanated “green, grey, black and russet, the colors of autumn” (269). It “thickens black as the opening of a well, a forest pool over dead leaves, the black lake of bogs, the black north wind, as the eyes of death in an empty
skull” (DQ 270). The intrusion of the Flower Bride brings consolation to Arthur. Arthur can feel “her caress on his cheek with that oh-so-soft fingered” (270). To Arthur, she is the representative of the first meaning of the first dawn “where mankind was not even an idea” (276) and those “ancient trees gave their souls into the wind and, borne by it, yielded up their life and created the poetry of the forests” (270).

Arthur, not projective of any human malice, “did most resemble a lizard” (270) to Guinevere. Through the snake and the lizard imageries, Alice Borchardt invokes the archetypes. While taking exception to this, Arthur undergoes a torturous thought “in this shadow land we all visit before waking” (292). As Alice Borchardt puts it, “Torture, why go to such elaborate lengths to cause him pain? The fortune always wants something, even if only to derive satisfaction from the struggles of his victim. His suffering was desired. The less he suffered, the more futile the torture was” (294).

Arthur’s crisis is further intensified by “the skulls staring up at him (and) beginning to acquire personalities” (295). Arthur resurrects history. Alice Borchardt recaptures facts through Cain. Cain brings in the reminder that Vortigen is Merlin’s victim. As he observes, “They were murdered when they tried to make peace with the Saxons. Merlin is a supporter of the Southern landowners who keep them as mercenaries. He felt that the office of high king should be abolished” (314). Cain also posits the fact that the Saxon tribe is characterized by the rotten soldiers and corrupt legionnaires. And in the end, as he puts it, “we were driven back to our forests and swamps, into one futile revolt after another” (315). He stresses the point that the Saxons do not have a ruler like Arthur. His idea of the Britons warrants mention here:
Luckily, we had our forests and swamps here. In the south, in open country, stronghold after stronghold fell, and the people were enslaved by those chiefs clever enough to make common cause with the Romans and become traitors to their own people. In that part of Brittany, you served the Romans or you died. (315)

The evolution of Arthur as a redeemer is witnessed when he becomes so corporative and expressive, as he saves Balin and the community from the enemies. Yet, the episode enunciates another historic encounter for Arthur as he speculates, “Between Arthur and Merlin and King Bade, whatever he was, there could be only war” (DQ 364).

Similarly, Alice Borchardt’s The Raven Warrior is also part of the tales of Guinevere, which posits the idea that a character could emerge with an identity, only after having accomplished a task. The story develops into a triangular dimension -- the imitation, the picaresque and the making of an individual. On the one side, one witnesses Guinevere all set to safeguard her people and the high meadows attached thereof from the Saxon thieves. She has been rightly guided by the supernatural elements. On the other side, one witnesses Black leg, her playmate, imitating manhood. The adventures of both -- Guinevere and Black leg are supplemented by the historical Uther, accompanied by his wife inland. They set onward hoping to safeguard humanity. Added to those, one finds the villain Merlin and his sadomasochist weavings on his wife, Ingrane. The novel is thus, all about how the strong and the virtuous perpetuate a continuum of life so that, the notorious wizardry of evil is eliminated. As the American historian and theorist Hayden White observes,
“[Historicity lies in] a specifically historical inquiry. . . born of the necessity to establish that certain events occurred of the desire to determine what certain events might mean for a given group, society or culture's conception of its present tasks and further prospects.” (49).

The stories of the historical past about men attached to history constitute the werewolf status. No wonder, Alice Borchardt puts forth the mythical picaresque as the foregrounding principle to enunciate her vision of life. The novel encompasses the picaresque adventures of more than a few characters. Alice Borchardt forges on evolution of life, as steadfastly seated on the adventure principle. Yet, the Divine or the supernatural intrusion is a case in point. This is followed by the pathway of tribulation, the encounter with the Divine, the dead as living witnesses.

*The Raven Warrior*, again, with its humble beginnings straightaway declares the agenda of life. The terrors of life that are aplenty are laid bare before Guinevere, who is supposed to deliver her people from the treacherous Saxons. Hence, Alice Borchardt designates her with speed, as she writes: “Despite our many struggles, we moved with almost unbelievable swiftness toward the south and the forts of the Saxon shore. On the tenth day, we arrived at the mouth of the river that sped through the farmlands. Ten days of moving in the heaving, pitching sea” (*Raven Warrior* 5) [hereafter referred to as *RW*].

Guinevere is also exposed to the terrors of life. At times, she feels desperately dejected owing to her fragmented self. She is the queen of the Dragon Throne. She is endowed with the responsibility of life. She meets with resistance from her own camp as "it had fallen in with my plans to go to war on the Saxon raid eve"(*RW* 6). As
a woman, naturally to the Saxons, Guinevere is nothing but the relegated other. Hence, they have some thoughts as to, "what did a woman, a child, as yet, know of warfare?" (RW 7). As Karl Marx writes:

In the social production of their life men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of them to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society, the real foundation on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. (425)

Guinevere thus, forges a union with her friend Albe. Albe is careful and yet cautious in her suggestions. Guinevere is thoroughly pleased in the company of Albe. Albe, as a victim of rape, has faced a long period of insult and shame. She has to undergo a rigorous period of extreme danger and perverse humiliation, and so, she is drawn inward into sadistic perversions. As the novelist observes:

He [Merlin] was standing behind her, whip in hand. Oddly, she felt relieved. She had been afraid he was going to kill her. But a whipping would not do that. He had whipped her before. . . But then this was easier to see her suffer than at war with his overwhelming need to possess. (RW 16)

It becomes crucial to consider the historical characters as just eminent historical figures which communicate with the readers as illuminating strategies of
historical representation. Also, they are expressive of a network of cultural materialism embedded in history. *The Raven Warrior* posits a triangular paradigm. One is Guinevere’s journey to redeem her people from the Saxons, and the second one is represented by Black leg's initiation into manhood, in communication with the water spirit and the last one being Uther and Morgana's ride to establish a kingdom, ridden from Merlin and Ingrain's sorcery.

*The Raven Warrior* is not a unitary episode but a unified expression of humanity in endless struggle. Though this is not an event of a particular site, *The Raven Warrior* signifies a particular culturality of history too. One can experience a unique range of historical episodes, readily available as particular historical manifestations of humanity. For instance, Guinevere trespasses the non-human world as her identity is formed by her endless struggles. On the other hand, Black leg, the shape shifter, is evidential of dismaying social adaptations in collaboration with the water spirit. Together, both Guinevere and Black leg epitomize the enlightenment project of clinching a universal normative order for the refurbishment of human potential. The sexuality implied by Alice Borchardt illuminates the idea of enlightenment as existing, just as beauty exists in the postmodern anarchy. Like the postmodern architecture that posits the beauty of knowledge, Alice Borchardt’s *The Raven Warrior* flourishes with the fond hope of retrieving the essentially progressive tenets of the postmodern evolution of life. The text, by fixing itself in history, diminishes the barriers of time and space so that, as Johann Gottfried Von Herder puts it, "The chain of culture and enlightenment stretches to the ends of the earth" (51).

What one witnesses in *The Raven Warrior* is that the world is a nursery of
murderous ill will and conflicts. As Herder puts it:

Man, from his very Nature, will clash but little in his pursuits with
man, his dispositions, sensations and propensities, being so infinitely
diversified, and as it were individualized. What is a matter of
indifference to one man, to another is an object of desire and then each
has a world of enjoyment in him, each a creation of his own. (59)

The main line of the story is set on Guinevere and her painted people, who are
hard pressed by the Saxon pirates. The Saxons turn out to be the threatening Uther
and his Queen. They push their debauchery on the innocent community so hard that
"the painted people [might be] deprived of their alliance with the Venetia" (RW 22).
The pressure is on Guinevere to redeem her people from the Saxon thievery or else
"they fall like ripe plums into the hands of the Southern Saxon conquerors led by
Merlin" (23). On, the other side, she is supplemented by the orbiting venture of Black
leg. Black leg is accompanied by "The lady of the Lake", who is "seated on a mossy
stone. . . silvered by moonlight" (30). The Frankish King Clovis lends money to the
Saxons and he even doubles the money by carrying out raids on the British Island. He
also pays the Huns to attack the Burundians. So naturally, these innocent people
encounter sheer thievery from all sides. As Alice Borchardt writes:

This sort of treachery prevailed all of society. Local lords were happy to allow
brigands use their lands as a base of operations, provided they raided only
their enemies. The emperor in Constantinople paid off barbarians who
threatened them, sending these tribes to attack the kingdoms of the west. (34)
The ordinary men, including the small farmers of the countryside suffer as the Roman lords fleeced taxes out of these innocent multitude until, "they were forced to sell their children into slavery to pay off the tax gatherers" (RW 34) Nevertheless, for want of survival, these ordinary people unite themselves and form the Brotherhood. Maeniel the half human, sees the Brotherhood "as the last hope of what had been the Ancient Emporium" (34). Now that, Guinevere has gained support from the Brotherhood, she flourishes to encounter any. This is one female experience, the novelist creates so as to forge a new perspective of life. As Gayle Greene and Coppelia Kahn observe, “Feminist scholarship undertakes the dual task of deconstructing predominantly male cultural paradigms and reconstructing a female perspective and experience.” (2).

Guinevere clamped with the greatest responsibility of not only reviving kingdoms but also retrieving the very feminine constituted by the deep forests of Wales. Alba and the deep forests of Wales are created by a unique system of hegemony "vested in their women . . . like Morgana" (45). However, "a woman can be forced and the earth ruined, and both happened when the Romans came" (45). The Romans are projective of sadomasochist anarchy. Again, they are the personifications of the configurations of cultural stupidity and greed. Yet, the dragon people of the deep forests of Wales and the painted people of the forest forge an alliance to reinhabit nationhood. In perfect communion with Nature and hard work, they draft a new world, “the Painted People exploit the rich fisheries of the cold, gray sea, where whale, ling, cod and walrus abounded. . . they also sailed south into the blue Aegan, the lands of honey, oil, and wire . . . traded with the Egyptians. . . and the distant city
states... at the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers" \((RW \ 46)\).

The Romans smash the prosperous community again and they go to the extent of hiring the Saxons to calm "an assault on its freedom and drive a stake through the same heart" \((47)\). Uther and Morgana represent the balance of terror. They plan to move on though they believe that the Saxons might muster an opposing force. As Uther tells his wife, "So Morgana, if I fall, carries out my orders. I have spent my life as you have, building this army. Use it to do as I ask" \((51)\). As against these Saxons, Guinevere proceeds to pit her battle, though she feels, "what I was doing, or rather going to do, was dangerous. I don't know how dangerous" \((53)\). Guinevere reaches the place "that once held houses" \((54)\) and she tries to avoid looking to her right as she feels:

> It gave me chills to think that my summoning the dead might make one of the bodies swinging from a rotten rope break free and try to seize me. But when I turned toward the house posts, I found the wind was to my face. I couldn't smell them, and I could feel only emptiness where they were. \((54)\)

Guinevere wonders at the kind of manslaughter these Saxon warlords indulge in. A boy killed by the Saxon evinces a terrible psychic trauma in her. As the novelist writes:

> He [the boy] died, but didn't know how or why and didn't even resent that he had. All he knew was that one moment he had been warm, sleeping snugly between his parents with his brothers and sisters. And
the next, a confused impression of shows, the stench of the thick
smoke, and then the knowledge that he was part of dark, cloudy water
and would be for some indefinite time. (RW 55)

Alice Borchardt recounts a gory human violation of history which
encompasses the killing of the innocent extending itself in relation to king Uther's
tavel to London to safeguard his people. This incident acquires a special
significance, since the unholy Roman Saxon rulers operate in splintered power
structures so effectively that, at one time they can force an intricate anarchy on the
innocent multitude. Also, it is a new enunciation of human relationship initiated by
the female characters. According to Sherry B. Ortner, “Women tend to enter into
relations with the world that culture might see as being more like Nature immanent
and embedded in things as given” (82).

The travels manifest the cultural anarchy of the historical times. Also, the
critical scrutiny of the historical text. Also, travels lead one to those terrible historical
human right violations. For instance,

. . . their favourite way of propitiating the gods directly is burial alive.
When victims were intended to be placed in the divine presence intact,
not used for entertainment, the way condemned criminals are, fed to
bears, forced to fight as gladiators do, the Romans buried them alive
and left them to suffocate in stone chambers underground. (RW 56)

At the same time, the text acknowledges Guinevere’s position as standing in
steadfast juxtaposition with power structure. As Guinevere acknowledges, "He had power . . . power bought and paid for his pain, blood, sorrow and death. The way all real power is bought" (RW 57).

Alice Borchardt uses Black leg's fellowship with the water spirit to establish humanism. Black leg beholds beauty from the waterfall, "a wavering, golden curtain in this afternoon sun" and as against the backdrop of the rainbow he flourishes with the water spirit, "becoming one with water, light, and mist" (58). This is a new historicist position which captures the historical anarchy from the text as described in the novel: “There is evil in the world, disease, pain, death, terror. . . drunkenness and folly. There is evil in humankind, anger, baseless envy, hate, greed, and a shadowed streak of destructive cruelty that seeks out the means to give pain to others, and at times ourselves”( 73).

Nevertheless, there are moments when humanity exposes the burdens before it transcends the evils the flesh is heir to. As Alice Borchardt observes:

[King] Arthur understood this was one of those moments when humans stand hand in hand before Nature and form a circle of peace. We carry away from them gifts; the strength to live, to labor, to love. . . And Arthur knew he was king leader and high priest to these people. And if need be, their first and most important, sacrifice. (73)

This is an epistemological mode, which pulls out a present from the past. The episode attached to Uther, Guinevere and Black leg by contrast, lay claim to the representation of these historical events involving a set of agents at a particular period
in history. As the idea of epistemology implies, historic events are presented. On the contrary, the mystical, yet timeless virginal Nature sits on top of all the historical incidents related to the novel. While the rest of the mankind submits to the perilous and to the tyrannical Roman-Saxon nexus, Nature stands steadfast in protest implying till the end, the eco humanist remedy to those historical perils. While the Roman idea of human right violation is the declaration of accidental likeness, Nature manifests substantial identity. This is the immaculate Nature one finds in the observation of the novelist:

The woodlot opened up. The trees were almost exclusively oaks, small, dense, and dark stands of helm oak scattered among ancient giants. none of the trunks could be opened by the arms of one man, and many were so wide it would take at least a half dozen to make a chain around them. (RW 84)

Like Uther, Guinevere encounters a similar Nature in all its pristine glory:

“The forest was something remarkable. Dense, the trees. . . there was very little light beneath those trees except in those odd places where a lightning - burned tree had fallen, leaving an opening in the entwined branches of the canopy.” (103).

The association with Nature ordinates the characters and gives a unique human potential. Alice Borchardt’s presentation of the King Uther, Black leg and Guinevere underscores her mode of perception of history. These three figures of destiny constitute an incessant play of strategies. Alice Borchardt forges a moribund structure out of history, to lay it for the contest with it and then ultimately establishes a functional mode which is exclusively hers. In fact, Alice Borchardt makes on a two
pronged strategy to establish her idea of sexuality similar to what Eric Auerbach writes:

On the one hand fully externalized description . . . all events in the foreground . . . few elements of historical development . . . on the other hand, certain parts brought into high relief. Others left obscure . . . universal historical claims, development of the concept of historically becoming and preoccupation with the problematic. (23)

Again, The Raven Warrior may be regarded as yet another novel in which Alice Borchardt return to the linked coincidences of The Dragon Queen, at the same time trying to extend her command of character and her evolving eco sense. Black Leg finds himself in love with the water spirit. The water spirit is a metaphor coinciding with the artist’s eco poise. Alice Borchardt is of the perceptive reception to “the lost genus of the first of Earth’s great civilizations” (RW 225). This is one ultimate "mind power" which introduces Blackleg "to knowledge so vast that down through the endless ages . . . dominated the earth" (225). Again and again, Alice Borchardt uses the episode of Black leg and the water spirit to underline the eco formula. Alice Borchardt further deploys the supernatural planetary forces. As she writes, “She felt the turning of the planet . . . the wheeling stars that pass down . . . the galaxies coalesced like sea foam, [and]. . . The detritus of the dying stars . . . of life's complex logic, expressed in the long chains of molecules that energize the shapes of living things” (225). The garden enunciates a practical theory of evolution. The following passage is an illustration, “The garden around them took up the theme, and in light, colour, form, and a veritable symphony of sound, poured the beauties of its
complex matrix into her ears and his mind. Night and day, sunrise and sunset, a rousing rainbow of burning beauty, forever doing, forever renewed” (RW 226).

Here, one finds a more accommodating version of humanism carried across the pages. The eco-humanist verve, with its highly charged allusions presently brings to the readers, in a more comprehensible manner, the proclamation of a new life. The assertion of the feminine rightness and the fullness of Nature’s union, splendidly constitute a new epistemology of life. Like any human product, she is in constant travail to render an intelligible and coherent feminine sense of identity and fullness. One could discern in her, a principle of life, constituted by a judicious mixture of ecology and humanism. Guinevere is the deputy of eco humanism, who underscores the importance of the female for a new evolution of life. Hence, Alice Borchardt has thrust Guinevere into a constant conflict with male chauvinism as represented by the Viking pirates. The stature of Guinevere depends not merely on her contest with masculinity, but also on her potential capability of forging a new humanism out of the male ambience. Arthur is metaphorically linked to Guinevere’s trails and travails. Merlin the magician is representative of male space constituted by chauvinism. He is presented in perpetual contradiction with the convictions of King Uther too. Yet, he indulges in splendid magical incantations which impact on the consciousness of the other characters. Alice Borchardt uses the magician Merlin to intensify her futurist citation of truth. Like most magicians, Merlin slips off only to be readily misinterpreted, for he is projective of a sadomasochist, possessed by his own mysticism, and characterized by ill will and eroticism. Alice Borchardt demonstrates a few clever strokes of episodes of magic, which bring out the essence of human truth
that is beyond human. One would be really surprised to find Merlin ironically, siphoning strategic solutions of life, if one were to fix Merlin's magic a metaphor of intricate life. Merlin's magical poise has seethed ink on Guinevere's consciousness as revealed by Alice Borchardt thus: "Cateyrin and Meth began quarrelling about the cat, one wanting to kill and skin it, the other castrate it, then sell the neutered meat to one of the great families" (RW 233).

The design of *The Raven Warrior* is drawn from Arthur’s futurist vision as "he now knew that even in his mother's womb, he had been a King" (248). Arthur, like Guinevere is aware of the burdens of leadership. Hence he has chosen "to confront the difficulties, “small, segmented societies faced in their settlement of this corner of the planet (248). Arthur, at the same time, does not want to repeat the tyranny of the Greek monarch who "became too overbearing and so their political authority was withdrawn" (248). He is well aware of the historical fact that the Roman monarchy which dispensed with the kings once they had marked their boundaries. Even the Saxons were not an exception to this. Yet, the Saxons realized the potential creditworthiness of the old primitive order as "they all knew, and however they might flout their ancient code, they understood that in the end, it must prevail" (249).

Eventually, Arthur is aware of the three things a King must be able to do, that is, "fight, enforce the law, and love to maintain the life of his people" (249). Like Guinevere and Black Leg, Arthur constantly is in touch with the truth demonstrated by the non-human world. Arthur does not hesitate to draw lessons from the Canine Bax, as "Bax was the most intelligent dog Arthur had ever met" (251). Bax leads the way, "and Arthur was surprised how expertly the dog picked a path" (252). As Arthur
ventures out with Bax, he is able to clinch a new epistemology of life constituted by "only the powerful continuity of an ancient pattern" (RW 253).

Several incidents indicate that Alice Borchardt regards history as essentially falsifying the feminine notions. It is indeed the task of the artist to perform the task of historical contest which ultimately causes a revision of the general idea of history. The greater part of the later chapters is concerned with the feminist contest with history. The stories of Guinevere’s mediations fulfil precisely the function of this feminist contest. At the same time it also becomes clear as to where the novelist’s considerations lean. It is one thing that the novel is not all about King Arthur but only something about it. While praising his actions which run in almost perfect coincidence with the behaviour of Guinevere and the water spirit, it becomes imperative to pick out those unpalatable elements of the political constituents in constitutional monarchy. Alice Borchardt wonderfully exploits the three characters, Guinevere, King Arthur and the water spirit, to establish her contrasting attitude to myths. As the following passage illustrates:

I but illustrate an art that now is vanishing and being forgotten even among the painted people. And families no longer care that once that sat and ate, made love, worked and lived with their lives surrounded by the women records of those who brought their families into being, tilled the earth, fished the sea, fought and loved the ages until they created the times we live in. (325)

Guinevere contests the mythical positions. She hopes to forge a new version of history with its mythical scales shed. Alice Borchardt indeed, does not want to
idealize the life of monarchical proclivity. She puts before the readers threadbare the aristocratic infrastructure which perceives life constituted by kings and queens who merge on a common ground called greed, tinged with lust. To King Uther, humanity is essentially constructed upon lust as he beholds, "a place where lovers alone can go [and form] a bright kingdom. . . where none may intrude on their kiss" (*RW* 302). On the other hand, the women too are devoted to the mythical life "of pleasure of love" (305). King Uther's ventures are constituted by the erotic impulse capable of reducing bodies to promiscuous sex. His aged wife. . . Ingraine too, with her "impossibly beautiful body", attempts "to control his body" (311). Alice Borchardt fixes lust against the backdrop of monarchical constituents represented by "a mosaic of triangles" which "splintered into a thousand triangular windows" (311).

The contest of history active in the pages of the novel is drawn from the novelist’s specifications fixed on feminism. One could note that this contest has a direct bearing on the theme of the novel. Hence after reading the novel, one is reminded of history as the inheritor of the ancient vices of man as halfway between the beasts and the humans and sometimes, as sharing the Nature of both. In this regard, it is worth quoting Michael Barrett who observes that the “twin images of woman as, on the one hand, the sexual property of men, and on the other, the chaste mothers of their children” (45).

While King Uther and Igraine are encompassed by lust, Arthur is capable of redemption through Grace. Alice Borchardt’s undermining the medieval perception of monarchy as Divine, fixes the modern feminist intellectual currents in contest with the monarchical patterns. She is of the firm opinion that monarchy is a mythical
consequence, which once sanctioned the view of man as existing only for wine, women and song, and not just a rational being. Myth has posited the misconception that a monarch is just an economic unit legitimised to break all the virtues. This representative imbalance is called into question. Hence, one could also deem the novel in essential contest, not only with history and materialism but also the myths that have constituted history.

Guinevere in the entire run of the novel, attempts to forge a link with behaviour which represents humanism in all its splendorous visions. And she is able to do that: "perhaps when I spoke to the tree last right, I had established a connection that had it been completely broken" (RW 366). She is happy that she has thwarted the myth associated with "Quarrels. . . picked among the assassinations planned by enemies . . . licit and illicit lovers" (366). Guinevere is touched too deeply by the substance of Nature. As she speculates finally, "The tree was calmly indifferent to the vagaries of human Nature. . . knowing humans as only savage" (367).

Guinevere is a metaphor of freedom. While Guinevere attempts to subvert history, Arthur attempts to reorient humanity. Thus, by apparently writing history, Alice Borchardt rewrites history. This is Foucault’s perception of "effective history" as he writes:

> Effective history . . . deals with events in terms of their most unique characteristics, their most acute manifestations . . . the forces operating in history are not controlled by testing a regulative mechanism, but respond to haphazard conflicts . . . they always appear through the singular randomness of events. (154)
Thus, *The Raven Warrior* demonstrates the ambivalence of the monarchical patterns of history, as it refers obliquely to greed and lust, two of the many monarchical pursuits for which, history is renowned. Alice Borchardt negotiates her fictional materials to resist monarchy for one simple reason that it affects humanism in general and women in particular.

Though incidental in the ecological ambience, Alice Borchardt, declares that Nature is the subterranean refuge through which the Viking landlords have burdened the peasantry with poverty. Through the rabbit imagery, the novelist triggers deep sensations of eco-realism, hoping to forge a reconstructed identity. Guinevere is insulted beyond repair by the Viking landlords. Hence, the abundance of forest imagery eradicates history. Guinevere’s response to the disciplines of human existence registers the force of humanism generated by gender. She attempts to emanate gender from dogmatic and deterministic male claims. In this regard, Edwin M. Lemert’s quote warrants mention. He writes:

> Under what conditions did man construct the value of judgments good and evil? And what is their intrinsic worth? Have they thus far benefited or retarded mankind? Do they betoken misery, curtailment, degeneracy, or on the contrary, power, fullness of being, energy, courage in the face of life, and confidence in the future? . . . a whole hidden, growing and blooming world. (157)

Thus, in the process of engaging history, Alice Borchardt uses the feminine subject to destabilize history. One must admit that Alice Borchardt’s analytical
discourse generates a feminine consciousness backdropped by the configurations of history. While talking of history, she manipulates gender into speaking a new actuality. This new actuality is the forged new subject, inextricably linked to humanism.

Consequently, one might consider calling *The Raven Warrior* as post history. As Brannigan writes, "since it replaces one grand narrative of historical progress with another grand narrative of power" (217). *The Raven Warrior* flourishes towards "the proliferation of histories--women's history . . . the history of madness, or of criminality [as] . . . it tends instead to narrate the history of successive dominates" (217).