BOOKMARKS: GIRLHOOD READING THAT MARKED US WOMEN

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For

Carillon, Inta, Jacqui, Lisa, and Wendy,

my BookMarks sisters.

Our stories are bound

together

within.

Abstract

This thesis is contained within the frame of a plot diagram, since it is a story about telling stories about stories. The conflict was initiated when it struck me that I had been living unawares inside a contradiction: I called myself a feminist, yet I loved and promoted the "Great Works of Western Literature", a canon reflecting patriarchal metanarratives. This conflict shaped the question, "What does it mean to say that we are gendered by what and how we read as girls?" I looked for clues by re-searching my graduate coursework, amongst the discourses of critical pedagogy, postmodernism, interpretive inquiry, and feminist literary criticism.

Translating theory into rising action, I adopted as my approach the memory-work techniques described in Female Sexualization (1987), an exemplary work of feminist research. I formed the BookMarks Collective, comprising an affinity group of six women, including me, who met and responded to the question for five months by writing, critiquing, and rewriting memory-stories about their girlhood reading.

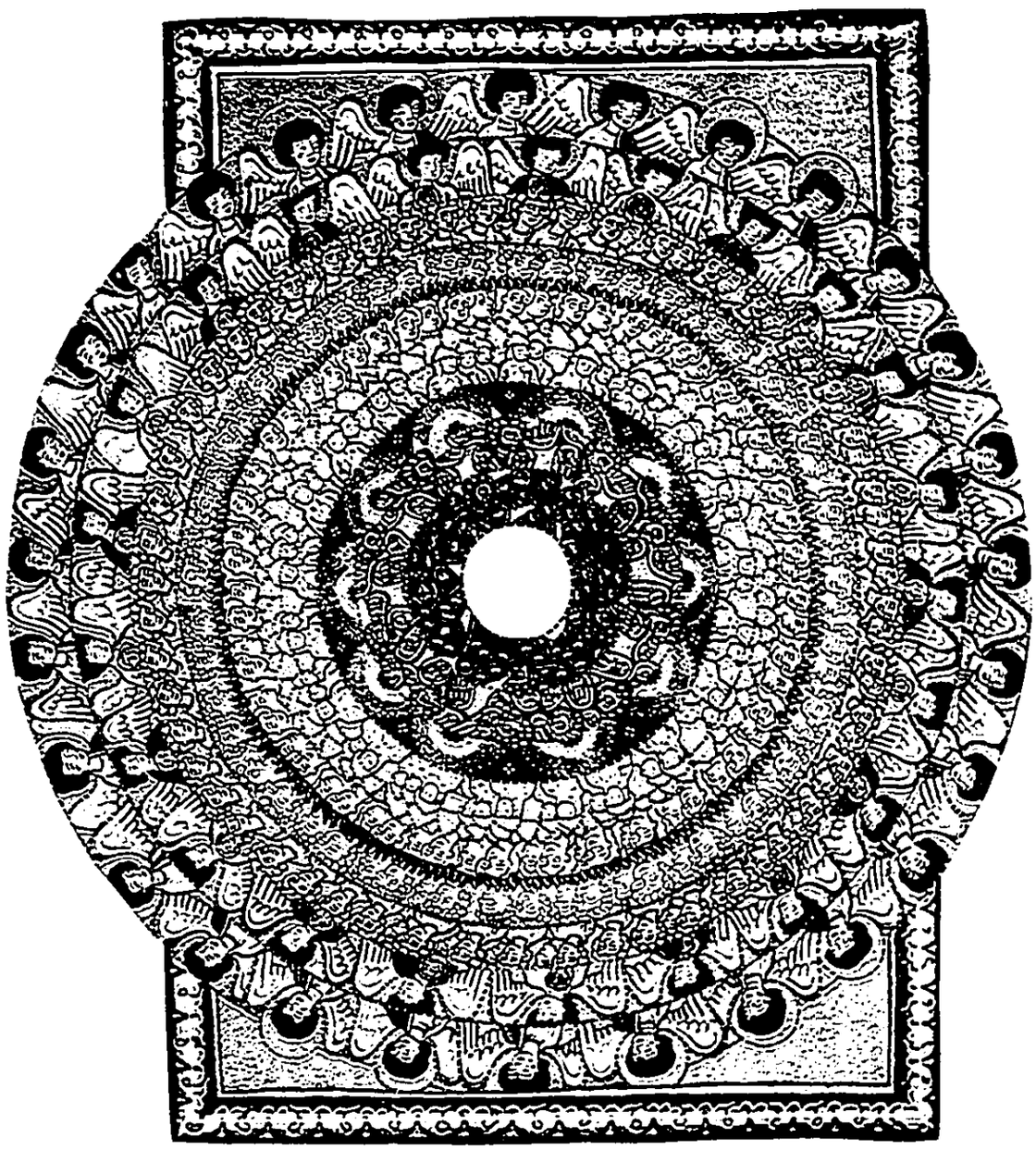
The experience of collectivity itself became the story's climax: together we opened the door to a world we would not have discovered alone or lived theoretically. Together we brought to life the belief that change in ourselves preceeds pedagogic change, our conversations having sparked insights about our beliefs and practice

that none had come to on her own. Together, we re-read "gendering" as a process within a complex and contradictory constructed reality in which we both act and are acted upon. Together, we recognized the power of collective consciousness-raising to enable us to re-view the textual meanings of our lifestories, allowing us to become conscious agents in their ongoing construction.

Acknowledgements

At every stage, this project has been a collective endeavor. It was my pleasure and honour to work and laugh with the women of the Bookmarks Collective, to whom I will always be indebted. I also owe much to my co-supervisors, Robert Runté and David Smith, for their collaborative wisdom, and their steadfast support of this work in its many, often odd, transformative stages. I was especially grateful for their support during those vegetative periods when there wasn't much evidence that anything was growing. To my committee members, Robin Bright and Jane O'Dea, I extend my appreciation for their thought-provoking feedback to various versions of the thesis. I want to thank Cynthia Chambers as well, for having time and again pointed me in the direction I needed to go.

On the home front, I have been blessed with the friendship of Lori White, who so often cheered and encouraged me in the dark and wee hours. And for my lifelong and long-distance friend, Deborah Forbes, I thank my lucky stars for having brought such a deeply wise and loyal friend into my life. To my parents and sisters, Wendy and Cheryl, I wish to express my profound gratitude for their always supportive and encouraging words. Most of all, I thank with all my heart my husband, Tom McLeay, and our daughters, Devon and Cara, who had to live with me while I fussed and fumed my way through the writing of this thesis. You made all the difference.



Preface

The cover of this thesis is a visionary image created by Hildegard of Bingen (1098-1179), prophet, abbess, artist, writer, and teacher. "In this rich mandala," Matthew Fox (1985) explains, "all of creation is represented as interdependent and celebrative. Angel and human commingle, intermix, interrelate....Truly, the entire cosmos is invited into this living mandala, this song" (p. 77). With Hildegard's vision, I welcome you into this collective work of memory.

I decided to take up Hildegard's invitation as my own after she "spoke" to me through the voice of my friend, reading Hildegard's words long-distance over the phone. At the time, I was lying in bed, incapacitated by trigeminal neuralgia, characterized by episodes of excruciating pain radiating through the sides of the face. This condition, its cause unknown, had struck me down at age forty-two and seven months, just as I had begun to write my thesis, effectively silencing me. In blinding pain and furious self-pity, I heard:

> 'When I was forty-two and seven months old, a burning light of tremendous brightness coming from heaven poured into my entire mind....All of a sudden, I was able to taste of the understanding of the narration of books.' Hildegard was overcome by this experience of intuition, connection-making, and insight and

> went to her bed sick. It was when she 'placed my hand to writing' that she received new strength, got out of bed, and spent the following ten years writing her first book called Scivias. (p. 9)

I began to understand my pain as a message that could be interpreted as disabling or illuminating. I have chosen to let it light my way as I inscribe a path I hope will meet at some point with yours.

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I. INITIAL INCIDENT: IN CONVERSATION

Where to start is the problem, because nothing begins when it begins and nothing's over when it's over, and everything needs a preface: a preface, a postscript, a chart of simultaneous events.

-Margaret Atwood
The Robber Bride

Not long ago, during her last visit to Lethbridge, my friend Deborah and I were sitting at my kitchen table, drinking strong, honeyed coffee and reminiscing about books we'd loved when we were girls. Deborah recalled that when she was eleven, she'd read and reread The Scarlet Pimpernel, and any of Douglas Bader's accounts of World War Two R.A.F. adventures that she could get her hands on. She nodded when I asked if she remembered the Friday afternoons we'd spent in grade six, listening with shivery pleasure to the Greek myths Mr. Palmer read aloud to us in his deep, resonant, very British voice. He'd also read most of Rudyard Kipling's stories, poems, and novels to us, my favorite of which had been Kim. Recalling her keen interest at that age in the works of Charles Dickens and Sir Walter Scott, Deborah noted that our teacher had possessed an uncanny knack for choosing just the sort of action-packed, chivalric, daring-do novels that she'd been reading herself. "Of course," she remarked offhandedly, "as I read or listened to any of these novels, I always identified with the male central character."

The girlhood "favorites" either of us thought to mention are historical adventure stories featuring male protagonists, all of whom could be classified as romantic heros. While the novels include female characters as well, they were not the figures with whom we'd aligned ourselves. While Deborah and I had read countless other

books when we were eleven and twelve, many of which we could recommend as being very good stories by and about females, these were not the books that came to us in the first passion of remembering.

These aspects of our girlhood reading were striking, but what hit full force that night was the casual, taken-for-granted way in which Deborah mentioned that "Of course" she'd identified with male protagonists. I'd heard and said the same thing myself on any number of occasions, but the impact of the "Of course" as an indication of the degree to which we two had come to accept this reading pattern as natural, normal, to-be-expected, and inevitable, hadn't struck me until this incident occurred. And then it felt as if I'd been whacked over the head with a baseball bat. Head throbbing, my ears rang with the question, "Why haven't I looked at this before?"

I would have avoided this pain if I'd seen it coming. While I'd expected that my graduate research would be shaped one way or another by my feminist convictions, I had not intended to look critically at any part of my much-loved Literature. I had been ready and willing to undertake a comparative study of the treatment of gender issues in elementary basal readers published in the 1970s and the 1990s, which I thought might provide useful, straightforward information that I could print up in tidy charts and lists. Before Deborah's fateful visit,

I had already finished my proposal for this comparative study, including an extensive literature review, plenty of appendices, and even a pilot study, complete with impressive-looking colour graphs. This study would have been clear and concise, and certainly would not have posed any threat to my fondly-held beliefs about what constitutes Good Literature. I had no intention of looking at anything that might cramp my personal reading style or choices, for I consider immersing myself in a Good Book to be more than a great pleasure - it is one of my life's necessities.

My love of literature has been a public as well as a private affair: as an English teacher, my professional life has been centred upon a belief in and promotion of The Classics. Patricia Duncker (1992) discusses this uncritical devotion to the Western literary tradition in her book, Sisters & Strangers: An Introduction to Contemporary Feminist Fiction. Duncker begins by telling the story of her own reading, at one stage of which she, too, had been reluctant to look at Literature with a feminist's eye:

> I took good care not to read Kate Millett's Sexual Politics because, at that time, I was wedded to a politics of literature which embraced the Great Tradition. This consisted of a long string of supposedly lonely, isolated geniuses, creating order out of chaos, shaping the world in their own image,

> and in the course of their heroic struggles coming up with Eternal Truths and Everlasting Values....Kate Millett turned on my heroes, the gods of the sexual revolution in the 1960s, and made them out to be a pack of violent misogynists. I was very anxious that I might have to stop reading--or at least stop enjoying reading--D. H. Lawrence (p. 1-2).

Like Duncker, I had kept "an absolute separation between my sexual politics and my textual sexual politics" (p. 6), never questioning the "English literary tradition within which I had taken such pains to find a place" (p. 2). How had I managed to consider myself a feminist educator and activist and at the same time unselfconsciously promote the Great Works of Literature, a canon reflecting patriarchal metanarratives? What mental gymnastics had I been performing to have avoided asking just what force in the universe decides what does and does not belong amongst the Great Works? What powers-that-be came up with the idea that we must work from a canon at all? What and whose truths and absolutes had I been touting anyway?

Somehow, it had been worth my while not to look at the ideological selection process that goes into the construction of a body of information which then passes as "knowledge", as "reality". I had been willing to see that reality "reflected" in the literature I was teaching. What did it mean that I had learned not only to "read"

into my belief system the norms and values of the Great Works, but had also taken up as my profession the loving "recitation" of narratives comprising the dominant cultural mythology?

What did it mean that I had learned to keep two different sets of "books", one feminist and another literary, and to keep it a secret, especially from myself? To ignore the contradictions, the mutual exclusivity of these dual "texts"? What did it mean to say that this dualism must have marked my teaching? Inscribed my identity as a woman? Constructed my reality?

II. INTERNAL CONFLICT: THE QUESTION

One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman.

-Simone de Beauvoir
The Second Sex

Sex is a biological fact. Some of us are irrefutably women and some of us are men. But that is not the end of the story.

-Patricia Duncker
Sisters & Strangers

A. STATING THE QUESTION

What does it mean to say that we are gendered by what and how we read as girls?

Inside this question is the belief that, while biological attributes distinguish the female from the male sex, the gender roles assigned each sex according to sex are neither natural nor inevitable, but rather, are constructed within the social fabric of a constituted reality. Reading manner and matter are building materials used in that construction.

B. ANTECEDENT ACTION: Coursework Informing the Question

During the course of courses that I took during my first year in graduate studies, I found that the question I ask above is the one that I had to ask. I was compelled to ask this question because it spins together several thematic strands vital to my pedagogic inquiry, the vitality of which I began to understand during the course of my studies. It was in these graduate courses that I was introduced to ways of asking that allow for the entwining into one question issues of gender, literature, writing and reading, constructed realities, remembrance, schooling, and collectivity.

The reading, writing, reflecting, and conversing I engaged in during my courses pulled me away from the warmth of my comfortable certainties and into a dark and stormy night filled with mystery, suspense, and not a little horror. Luckily for me, I wasn't wandering alone

through the murk: my engagement also provided me with some tools with which I found clues to help me in all this fog of doubt and uncertainty. Critical pedagogy, postmodernism, interpretive inquiry, and feminist literary criticism comprise the "gang of four" that threw me out into the dark and then threw after me the tools that helped me find my way through it. I became most interested in their complementary features, in the dynamic energy to be found at the junctures where they meet; it was at these shared points that I discovered the best clues to answer my question. And I have been most drawn to those educators and writers who look into the ways these discourses can be strengthened when they share a variety of spaces, like bubbles overlapping, 3-D Venn Diagram style.

No one theoretical framework or political ideology holds within itself all the answers; there is only so much air inside the windowless cell of a unified, singular perspective. A closed system, says William Doll (1989), is an isolated system, "removed from [its] environment, exchanging nothing with it" (p. 246), which cannot rejuvenate or transform itself. Aiming to find the final, clear, and complete answers inside any paradigm is a deadly business; living requires exchange and engagement with our messy, partial, unpredictable environment. Doll describes such an "open, living-system" as "autocatalytic [and] transformational" which needs environmental "fluxes,

perturbations, anomalies, errors: these are the triggers which set-off reorganization" (p. 246).

Just as deadly a business would be to claim that one has come to the question a blank slate, without opinions, perspectives, or prejudices. My search for points of affinity amongst the discourses in no way aimed or claimed to be an "objective" or "value free" search; I drag my subjective baggage along with me wherever I go, and that luggage happens to sport feminist nametags.

However, acknowledging that one is not separate from one's prejudices can be seen as necessary to the dynamics of exchange and engagement. As Joyce McCarl Nielsen (1990) explains, Hans-Georg Gadamer (1976) argued in Truth and Method that

> [O]ne's prejudgments, or prejudices, make one more open-minded than close-minded when one puts these prejudgments at risk, testing them through exposure to and encounter with others' prejudgments....[W]e should use prejudgments as essential building blocks or components for acquiring new knowledge. To know, one needs to be aware of one's own prejudices but one cannot, indeed, should not, try to transcend them. It is necessary to go back and forth between the old and new theories, paradigms, cultures, or worldviews, to create a new synthesis. (p. 28)

In Shards of Glass, Bronwyn Davies (1993) makes use of an interesting metaphor to illustrate the nature of the

relationship that can exist between the old and the new:

> **Palimpsest**...is a term to describe the way in which new writings on a parchment were written over or around old writings that were not fully erased. One writing interrupts the other, momentarily overriding, intermingling with the other; the old writing influences the interpretation of the imposed new writing and the new influences the interpretation of the old. But both still stand, albeit partially erased and interrupted. (p. 11)

Multiple points of connectedness are made and revealed collectively in such an ongoing process of layering and mingling the old and the new. However partial or interrupted, new interpretations emerge, created and discovered out of patterns of erasures, blank spaces, and words circling and lying upon words. This image conjures meanings as multiple, layered, sometimes contradictory, always shifting, interactive, partial, and historically located, all features that would compel the dualist to burn the parchment.

1. Dualism

In the history of Western thought [the] logic of identity has created a vast number of...mutually exclusive oppositions that structure whole philosophies: subject/object, mind/body, nature/culture. These dichotomies in Western discourse are structured by the dichotomy good/bad, pure/impure.

-Iris Young
Justice and the Politics of Difference

While I've spent many years arguing against male/female double standards, and fighting for women's equal rights, I've been seeking those equal standards and rights within the confines of binary thinking. I may have wanted the sides to 'balance', but I was still thinking in terms of a life divided, and my aim was to see privilege measured out equally on the scales. Dualism reflected life's true and only reality; it was natural and inevitable and could not be otherwise. I assumed that the logical, only, and human way to keep life in order was to carefully compartmentalize everything into either-or/pick A or B categories. Black or white: I tolerated no grey laundry or ideas, splitting everything, including my own identity, into opposite and unequal parts.

In doing so, I was operating by the rules of "reality" in Western elite culture, within which "oppositions issue from hierarchized polarities inhabiting language and structuring philosophical thought" (Meese, 1990:78). Of the lines dividing humanity into opposing, unequal sides in this culture, the gender line is one of the oldest, longest, and most elaborately camouflaged. Starting with himself as the positive, priviledged norm, man has defined all those who are not-man as less-than-man. In a world "naturally" dualistic, where everything is classified according to the premise that the male is the standard, normal human being, then the female is regarded as abnormal, deviate. In this scheme, man is ever the

controlling, autonomous Subject, and woman is the derivative Object, as Simone de Beauvoir (1952/1989) explains in The Second Sex: "She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute--she is the Other" (p. xxiii). Within this basic framework, finer distinctions are made along the plus/minus dividing line, locating man in his world and woman in her place: man's mind versus woman's body; man's reason versus woman's emotion; man's culture versus woman's nature; man's good versus woman's evil. Heather-jane Robertson (1992) calls this male-favored dualism "androcentric", and claims that "whether we are born male or female, the masculine paradigm dominates our cultural reality" (p. 45), obliging us "to reduce the world to some enduring and familiar themes: competition, hierarchical power, dominance, and conflict" (p. 43). Androcentrism, by giving dominant male values the status of eternal, universal themes of "we, the people", equates them with human values. What is important to males is what is important to the world; all else is trivial, impossible, bad.

When I was seeking women's equality while walking around inside this paradigm, I was looking to be up there, eyeball to eyeball, equal to the only really important people: the privileged men. In the 1970s, when the vast

majority of the young women with whom I graduated from university planned to teach at the primary-elementary level, one of the main reasons I decided to jump right into teaching high school was to show that I could teach the predominantly man-taught higher-level/higher status academic stuff just as well as any man. I was no fluffy female; I'd prove I was just as logical and hardheaded as any of them. Once I'd proven that I was just as good as a man, my male collegues would have to accept me as their equal. I'd be invited to jump the Binary Divide.

When I look back at the attitudes and aspirations I developed during those years I spent as a high school English teacher, I have to think of it as the greatest Binary Construction Period of my life, since I filled that time with building walls, barriers, moats, and personae in order to distinguish and separate my professional self not only from my students and fellow teachers, but also from my own personal self.

The school system, reflecting the norms and values of society at large, was a patriarchal institution in which conforming to the male-favoring rules for male-defined roles was the only path open to "success". To be considered a "true professional", I was required to shut away the private portions of myself from my public teaching self, which was to comprise certain highly-valued characteristics such as rationality, objectivity, and clarity.

It was considered to be fatally inappropriate to allow any private "underwear" to peep through or hang below one's painstakingly coordinated professional suit. In that suit, I regarded myself as a unified, cohesive, self-made individual, looking out upon an objective reality that operated according to certain immutable, fundamental truths. I thought that those truths could be discovered by following proper procedures and logical rules, best illustrated by the scientific method. I believed the universe to be a stable place that would provide simple, clear, and final answers to all questions, provided one had the keys. And I'd been practicing and preaching that one came into possession of those keys to wisdom through a proper education. As a teacher, it was my duty to hand out these "keys", this fundamental knowledge, in pre-determined sets for my students to copy in their notebooks. In the high school English classroom, the answers were to be found in the "key" texts: the classics of the Western literary tradition. The orderly transference of that information required the maintenance of a certain formal aesthetic distance between teacher and students.

Paulo Freire (1970) has called this transference of knowledge notion of a proper education "banking education" in which students are turned into "'containers', into 'receptacles' to be 'filled' by the teacher" (p. 53). They are divided by their roles as "Subject (the teacher) and

patient, listening objects (the students)" (p. 52).

This subject/object split, in which only the teacher is active in "making deposits" of static knowledge into passive students, projects "an absolute ignorance onto others, a characteristic of the ideology of oppression, [which] negates education and knowledge as processes of inquiry" (p. 53). Freire emphasizes that, "Implicit in the banking concept is the assumption of a dichotomy between human beings and the world: a person is merely in the world, not with the world or with others; the individual is spectator, not re-creator" (p. 56).

This splitscreen consciousness objectifies and dehumanizes those "others" "out there" in the world, which has deadly consequences according to Eric Fromm, whom Freire quotes on page 58 in Pedagogy of the Oppressed:

> While life is characterized by growth in a structured, functional manner, the necrophilous person loves all that does not grow, all that is mechanical. The necrophilous person is driven by the desire to transform the organic into the inorganic, to approach life mechanically, as if all living persons were things.... [H]aving, rather than being, is what counts. The necrophilous person can relate to an object--a flower or a person--only if he possesses it; hence a threat tc his possession is a threat to himself; if he loses possession he loses contact with the world....He loves control, and in the act of controlling he kills life.

Such murderous passion for control and domination, such ghoulish desire for possession of the best "things" naturally includes the most precious objects of our affection--our children.

Germaine Greer (1984), in Sex and Destiny, discusses the motives underlying our regard for children in this culture:

> The state's institutionalized desire for children is, obviously, a desire for productive adults, rather than for children themselves. This pressure is expressed through other institutions, those dealing with the production of these grade-A humans, and which are constantly struggling to improve the product by further sophistication of the technology. (p. 6)

Greer argues that the objectification and commodification of children, which involves the separating out of children from their parents and from adult life in general, "which has always characterized Northwestern Europe, has intensified with the development of consumer society" (p. 4). As one of the instrumental institutions in that consumer society, the school in the industrialized West has been built based upon the factory model, and can be used to warehouse and manufacture the ever-better "product" as its part in our culture's relentless drive toward perfectibility. In Class Warfare, Maude Barlow and Heather-jane Robertson (1994) note that "the commercialization of the classroom and the corporate

intrusion into the education system are working very well" (p. 85), corporate interests having successfully pressured schools "to train students into [a] corporate culture, indocrinating them in individual competitiveness and loyalty to company policy" (p. 89). Douglas Noble, "a highly respected New York-based education activist and writer" (p. 87), is quoted by Barlow and Robertson in the chapter entitled, "What Does Business Really Want?":

> Above all, high-tech corporate interest in education reform expects a school system that will utilize sophisticated performance measures and standards to sort students and to provide a reliable supply of such adaptable, flexible, loyal, mindful, expendable, 'trainable' workers for the twenty-first century. This, at bottom, underlies the corporate drive to retool education and retool human capital. (p. 89)

It is the splitting of consciousness that allows a human being to be regarded as a retoolable item; that allows "everything surrounding it [to be transformed] into an object of its domination. The earth, property, production, the creations of people, people themselves, time--everything is reduced to the status of objects at its disposal" (Freire, 1970:40). I have come to understand that in my role as a high school teacher, I reduced students to the status of things, to passive objects I could oppress as I "trained" them for the world, for the marketplace, for "their own good". In the

process, I maimed myself, cutting my identity into professional versus personal, rational versus emotional, and teacher versus learner "parts" in my attempts to better "fit" myself into the role of a traditional academic teacher in the dual-tracked patriarchal system. At the same time, students must have regarded me as their "other", the object over there, a teaching figure without a place in their "real" lives. Split consciousness harmed us all, dividing us both inside and out, automatically disconnecting any lines of communication we might have tried to set up.

Clues in Critical Pedagogy

Only beings who can reflect upon the fact that they are determined are capable of freeing themselves.
-Paulo Freire
Pedagogy of the Oppressed

Studying the theories and practices of critical pedagogy has given me a critical tool that has awakened me to the existence of dichotomous thinking that marks our culture, helped me to understand how dualism in its various manifestations is maintained, and allowed me to explore alternatives. That tool is critique, consciousness-raising critical inquiry that is central to critical pedagogy, as it is to all the critical discourses upon which it is theoretically founded, which, amongst others, includes Frankfurt School's negative critique, Gramsci's counter-hegemonic practice, and Freire's conscientization (Luke, 1992:28). Indeed, in its attempts to counter

"positivism and conservative politics that historically have characterized the modernist educational enterprise", contemporary critical pedagogy owes these critical discourses more than most of the power behind the punch of its "neo-marxist materialist and culturalist critique" (Luke, 1992: 28); each has made a "critical" contribution to the cause.

Critical pedagogy has derived from Frankfurt School's Marxist critical theory the tenets that reality is socially constructed and that inequities amongst people in society are first and foremost class-based distinctions. These are held in place not only by the highly visible manifestations of the economic, political, and cultural power of the dominant class, but also by what critical theorists call the "false consciousness" of the dominated classes, who unselfconsciously take up as their own the values and beliefs of the very ruling class that oppresses them. Frankfurt School theorists stress that there can be no liberation from oppression until false consciousness is shed through negative critique so that relations can be seen as they really are: historically located, culturally specific, and socially constructed rather than universal and natural (Chambers, 1993:2).

Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci has enriched critical theory by providing critical pedagogues with the concept of hegemony, the nature of which Michael Apple (1990) explains as follows:

> Hegemony acts to 'saturate' our very consciousness, so that the educational, economic and social world we see and interact with, and the commonsense interpretations we put on it, becomes the world tout court, the only world....[Hegemony] refers to an organized assemblage of meanings and practices, the central, effective and dominant system of meanings, values and actions which are lived. (p. 5)

Gramsci's concept of hegemony first influenced those critical pedagogues who, in the 1970s, were trying to shape a "third wave" new sociology of education by combining elements of the dichotomously opposed theories of the first-and second-wave new sociologists. Third-wave critical education theorists have focussed "on the need for a theory that will recognize both human agency and the production of knowledge and culture and will at the same time take into account the power of material and ideological structures", and, in many respects, Gramsci's concept of hegemony "is the richest source for a theoretical approach that can encompass both agency and structure" (Weiler, 1988:13).

Unlike the Frankfurt School theorists, who held out little hope that the masses could ever shed false consciousness, Gramsci maintained that counter-hegemonic practices can and do poke through the weak spots of an imperfect system:

> For Gramsci, while hegemonic control was powerful, diffuse and complex, it was not seamless. For critical pedagogy, this means that it is within the many small but potentially powerful spaces within institutions of social and ideological control that counter-hegemonic discourses and practices can be organized. (Luke, 1992:27)

The school is a key site for opportunities to organize and direct into counter-hegemonic practices the resistance that already exists within individuals in the system. The radical teacher can function counter-hegemonically by acting as what Gramsci called an "'organic intellectual', whose philosophy emerges [not from bourgeois abstractions but] from an understanding of the common sense world and the historical and economic forces which have shaped it" (Weiler, 1988:15).

Upon Gramsci's concept of hegemony, critical pedagogy has constructed its vision of the radical educator's role in a system that "is a matrix of institutional, personal, and social forces caught up in deeply contradictory tensions that are neither exclusively dominating nor liberating" (Giroux & Freire in Weiler, 1988:xi). Third-wave critical pedagogues have set positive goals for self-empowerment and critical agency in a critical democracy, their thesis "based on the assumption that if the 'text' and experience of schooling are changed (i.e., elimination of racism, sexism, classism), then students'

lives and hence, civil society will be changed for the better" (Luke, 1991:27). In this view, teachers need to help students develop the consciousness-transforming critical skills they need to work against oppression, because students have been prevented from seeing the nature of reality by the hegemonizing habits and routines of everyday life. Freireian pedagogy of concientization best describes the initial steps of the process.

Radical teachers first learn all they can about their students' world, then engage them in mutually instructive, egalitarian "horizontal dialogues" as a first step in the critical consciousness-raising process Freire calls "conscientization", encouraging individuals to "name, describe, and then analyze salient features of their world as they experience it" (Maher, 1987:93). In doing so, they are able to extract "from its habitual foundations the enveloping realm of the routine", and, by examining "familiar situations in an unfamiliar way, transcendent change becomes possible. Such an animation of consciousness can be formulated as extraordinarily re-experiencing the ordinary" (Shor, 1980:93). The process begins then, with their own lives, which they can re-view and re-invent through critical reflection. Next, students learn to question the "popular" or "commonsense" view of an idea, object, or practice by asking, "How does this function?" and "Whose interests does it serve?" (Chambers, 1993:4).

Dialectical modes of critique can be employed both to problematize taken-for-granted assumptions about what happens in schools, and to uncover and analyze the cultural and economic linkages between schools and society at large. Students become aware that "education is deeply implicated in the politics of culture", and is ever "caught up in the real world of shifting and unequal power relations" (Apple, 1990:viii). Recognizing that "the school curriculum is not neutral knowledge", students can begin to find out, "Whose knowledge is of most worth?" (Apple, 1992:4). Through critical inquiry, students are able to dig into the connections between "legitimated" knowledge and power in society. "In this view, critical self-determination will lead to a democratic transformation of schooling and society" (Luke, 1992:26).

Before going near any students to make those counter-hegemonic moves, however, the teacher must be transformed. Thus, the teacher must first embark on a critical, self-reflexive, eye-opening journey, during which s/he questions assumptions, engages in horizontal dialogues, reads life critically. In my own case, the "invisible" started to become "visible" during my dialogue with Deborah, allowing me to piece together after the fact that I had been hegemonized, accepting "legitimated" knowledge as my own.

I had been blithely promoting the literary canon of the dominant class as if it comprised the basic knowledge

of "our" culture that "everyone" should know because I had not developed my critical thinking skills enough to question anything more than the most superficial layer of my life, school, or society, much less what the connections amongst these elements might be. Once I began looking through the lens of critique, however, so-called objective reality with its measurable, neutral, and fixed truths becames blurred as society came into focus as value-laden, perspectival, and historically-situated.

As I "unmasked" my teacher-persona through reflection, dialogue, and critique, I began to realize that not only was dichotomous thinking a social construct that could be otherwise, it was a construct I wanted to work on making otherwise. Dualism excludes, degrades, objectifies, and oppresses people. Critical pedagogy's method of changing that version of reality in order to achieve freedom and equality for all is to use critique as the means to an integrated end: synthesize the contradictory elements of split consciousness by re-viewing dichotomous parts dialectically. Beginning with an attempt to heal my own split consciousness, I tried to re-view my liberal feminist beliefs reflectively and critically.

Seeing myself as one of an oppressed group in our patriarchal society working to end sexism was smugly myopic enough to blur the fact that my position as a white, middle-class, able-bodied, heterosexual, Western woman is a position of priviledge locating me at the

protected, comfortable, and prestigious "center" of society. "Much feminist theory emerges from privileged women who live at the center", bell hooks (1984) notes in Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center, from those "whose perspectives on reality rarely include knowledge and awareness of the lives of women and men who live in the margin" (Preface). I had not questioned "whether or not [my] perspective on women's reality [was] true to the lived experiences of women as a collective group", nor had I been "aware of the extent to which [my] perspectives reflected race and class biases" (p. 3). Self-righteously oblivious, I joined hands and marched along with other white, privileged women who "were able to make their interests the primary focus of feminist movement" (p. 6), interests which centre on achieving the bourgeois goal of "social equality with men of [our] class" (p. 7).

I began to see that in terms of race and class issues, I'd been living a conveniently unexamined life, having unquestioningly, "unself-consciously adopt[ed] the competitive, atomistic ideology of liberal individualism" (Eisenstein, 1981, in hooks:9), complete with all its exclusionary, repressive practices. For too long, I had managed to regard this ideology as an inevitable, inescapable "reality". I was simply one of the "middle class white people, who would just like to 'be', unconstrained by labels, by identities, by consignment to a group, [who] would prefer to ignore the fact that their

[/our] existence and social place are anything other than self-evident, natural, human" (Martin and Mohanty, 1987:206).

As Kari Dehli (1991) points out in "Leaving the Comforts of Home", one of a collection of essays comprising Unsettling Relations: The University as a Site of Feminist Struggles, "it still seems difficult for us to talk about our locations inside several sets of social relations and practices where we are dominant rather than dominated"; we would prefer to pretend that "our positions of power in relation to 'other' women (and some men) do not need to be reflected upon. Indeed, it can be taken for granted and 'left out' of feminist analysis" (p. 50). When white, middle-class feminists, desiring the "comfort" of "a stable and easily identifiable home or fixed truth within feminism" leave out "self-conscious and politically self-critical reflections", they deny the existence of the "many and shifting truths about women's experience" told in "personal and political stories of shifting locations...produced and lived through relations of power and difference" (p. 51).

Peggy McIntosh (1988), drawing parallels between the "pattern of assumptions" passed on to overprivileged men in a sexist culture and those passed on to her as an overprivileged white woman in a racist culture, notes that:

> In unpacking this invisible knapsack of white privilege, I have listed conditions of daily experience which I once took for granted, as neutral, normal, universally available to everybody, just as I once thought of a male-focussed curriculum as the neutral or accurate account which can speak for all (p. 10).

When I, too, began "unpacking" my "knapsack", out came parts and pieces that I'd managed to ignore until then. It may well be that I am oppressed and silenced in our sexist society, but at the same time, I oppress and silence others in our racist, classist society. As Andrea Dworkin (1974) points out, "This closely interwoven fabric of oppression...assured that wherever one stood, it was with at least one foot heavy on the belly of another human being" (p. 21).

Critical inquiry led me to the realization that hegemony allows people to ignore how many others they're stepping on while climbing up the dichotomous divide's hierarchy to reach or stay on top of the "better" side. As long as people only peer upwards, they won't see much going on around them in the world, or their complicity in it. Critique has had me look around and see that not only is the idea that there is a "good" side of the dichotomous divide to jump for caught inside dualistic thinking, so is the notion that there is a method of welding "opposite" sides together. Critical pedagogy's synthesis of

dichotomies has not so much challenged bipolar thinking as it has given it a new look: opposites merged into one through the power of that catalytic converter, dialectics.

Critical analysis of my feminist beliefs uncovered that the process of "merging" by whatever means silences and subsumes: I had found a comfortable "home" in my hegemonized white liberal feminism that sought to "merge" dialectically with white males of my class, and when I considered issues of class and race at all, I looked upon them as important but secondary concerns that could hook themselves up to the essential issue of male-female equality. In the same way, when racism and sexism are considered to be significant at all in any of critical pedagogy's analyses of oppression, they are seen only in relation to class oppression, welded onto that mainframe "fundamental" concern (Maher, 1987:92; Luke, 1992:25). Such thinking reinstates dualism, with favored "sides" and correct "stances".

Critical inquiry has allowed me to uncover my hegemonized and hegemonizing teaching behavior, and to consider the prospect of counter-hegemonic projects I can undertake in the system's "spaces". However, concerning the prospect of finding such "spaces", critical inquiry has also shown me that the dominant culture's bipolar mode of thinking infiltrates and shapes "counter"-cultural movements such as liberal feminism and critical pedagogy,

limiting their liberating possibilities. In practice, these discourses can perpetuate the very "relations of dominance" (Ellsworth, 1992:91) they are theoretically against, because underlying the sincere desire to "empower", to "free" others, is the belief that the "cure" for everyone has been found for all time, which splits people once again into unequally valued groups, privileging one over the other: the oppressors and the oppressed, the enlightened and the unenlightened. The final answers of totalizing theories push anyone disagreeing, not fitting, or outside that "proper" sphere to the position of "other", on the "wrong" side of that dichotomous divide. The Other must then be persuaded, ignored, denigrated or silenced.

I have taken much from critical pedagogy: that reality is socially constructed and can therefore be otherwise; that people both act and are acted upon in the construction of themselves in that reality; that people are for the most part unaware of these on-going constructions; that schools are intimately related to the larger culture's "reproductive" system, but they can also be sites of resistance and change. However, into its tidy dialectic solutions, the theory cannot incorporate a messy, unfinished person made up of more than two "sides", none of which are "complete" or knows anything finally or completely, all of which keep shifting into a variety of "positions".

2. Multiple "Selves"

There is no one I would ever tell this to, except Cordelia. But which Cordelia? The one I have conjured up, the one with the roll-top boots and the turned-up collar, or the one before, or the one after? There is never only one, of anyone.

-Margaret Atwood
Cat's Eye

It was about six a.m. on a May Sunday morning and I awoke with a question shaking my brain: 'Where are the eleven other Judiths?' It was not just the question that frightened me, rather the profound feeling of being one-twelfth of a whole, of being totally without a centre. The only common sensation I can compare it to is waking up in a strange bed and not remembering where you are for a very long minute. But this was much scarier. My head ached for the rest of the day, and I wondered if this was insanity. I looked into yoga classes, thinking they might calm me down, and I even saw a therapist, who suggested that my roles as writer, wife, mother, friend, daughter, etc.etc. were dividing me, and I needed to find the 'Mick Yagger' (she was Scandinavian) in me to pull them all together. I told her I would think about that, but when I did, I realized that these eleven others were not my various functions as a female person in this society, but me.

-Judith Thompson
"One Twelfth"

I assumed that taking up the rational practice of inquiring critically into problems of dualistic thinking would lead me to clear-cut, logical answers. Instead, I began to wonder whether "rational" thinking itself wasn't part of the problem, part of the dualism that pits "male" thinking, valued as rational, logical, objective, and scientific, against de-valued "female" thinking, considered illogical, irrational, subjective and emotional. Having spent a good part of my life attempting to build and arrange my mind into the more valued male mode of thinking, questioning that mode was devastating: it brought my certainties crashing down. No theory was to be trusted to provide any answers. Nothing was true. There were no unities or continuities in the world or in me: the mirror had cracked, and in it I saw a monstrous, fragmented being.

I regarded my multiple, partial "selves" with alarm and dismay; occupying so many different, contradictory places at once made me feel as if I'd awakened to find that I'd turned into the Hydra, the mythical many-headed monster. My seamless and singular life split open, and out popped all these hydraheads like so many snake babies. Immediately they began their cacaphonous wailing of contradictory slogans and stories so that it was impossible to tell whether any one was yelling a more "real" story than another, or whether they together comprised a fractured and fractious authentic "voice".

My first impulse was to hack off more than a few heads, but which ones? They were all parts of me, after all. And besides, if there's one thing I've learned from reading my Greek mythology, it's that if you chop off one hydrahead, two will sprout up in its place.

Clues in Postmodernism and Poststructuralism

Reading about aspects of and theories within postmodernism and poststructuralism has helped me to understand that a view of the world populated by autonomous, unified, and coherent individuals has been constructed inside modernism, considered by some theorists to be an outmoded vision of reality organized around "Enlightenment principles of Truth and Reason" (Smith, 1994:28) that no longer describes or reflects existence in the post-World War Two era. It is thought that the fundamental principles of modern philosophy, which most agree began with René Déscartes' (1596-1650) rationalism, have outlived their usefulness but nonetheless "pervade the modern world, implicitly and explicitly shaping the way people interpret experience and understand themselves" (Taylor, 1987:3). These principles stem from "the inward turn by which Déscartes identified truth with human self-consciousness" (p. 3), the certainty of which he crystalized in his famous maxim "I think, therefore I am". Taylor explains further:

> After Déscartes' meditations, modern philosophy becomes a philosophy of the subject....[This subject]

> relates only to what it constructs and it is, therefore, unaffected by anything that is finally other than, or radically different from, itself. (p. 3)

As Marxist critical theorists, feminists, and many others have done before and next door to them, postmodern theorists recognize the dualistic Cartesian subject as the first principle of modern philosophy (p. 3), and begin their critique of modernity upon it. However, unlike those who argue for revolution and outline a program for future change, postmodernists say that the paradigm has shifted, but that many people refuse to acknowledge that it has, and continue trying to live by the old rules that don't apply anymore. William Doll (1989) claims that the educational system is one such "cultural dinosaur" (Lather, 1991):

> Our vision of the universe [is] turning from the simple, stable, eternal one of Newtonian modernism to the complex, chaotic, finite one of post-modernism....My argument is that Newtonian thought is one of the foundations on which the present-day curriculum is based. (Introduction)

Such adherence to modernism is caused by hegemonized faith in those "old rules" of "old orthodoxies" such as humanism and Marxism, which have been called grand-, meta-, and master narratives ("grands recits", Lyotard, 1984:20) because they presume to tell "mankind's" whole, complete, and entire story--beginning, middle, and end--for

everyone, everywhere, for all time. Instead, grand narratives exclude and silence everyone except white, elite, Western, heterosexual, able-bodied males. Universalizing philosophies are regarded as inauthentic, arrogant, and destructive narratives of conquest and mastery in which the few inflict their story upon the many. Since aspiring to such totalities is "repressive and illusionary (and therefore doomed to be self-dissolving and self-defeating), we should not even try to engage in some global project" (Harvey, 1989:52). Those postmodernists attempting to describe and provide alternatives for the postmodern world see possiblities instead in many "small" stories, the local event, the micro-project: fragmentary and often conflicting, many voices, many stories, many worlds are in and around people, and the places to look for them are all close to home, starting with subjectivity.

Postmodernists claim that the displacement of the Western humanist tradition has already caused "a major shift in the concept of the human individual", disrupting "the notion of the self firmly rooted in the Cartesian cognito" (Gaggi, 1989:157). The modernist myth of the unified, stable individual, fixed in a subject-object relationship with the world, whose human 'essence' is rational consciousness, dissolves in the postmodern world into a "subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in

discourse each time we think or speak" (Weedon, 1987:33).

Operating inside or perhaps alongside postmodernism, poststructuralists, like critical theorists, regard reality as a construct, and consider people to be both constructed by sociocultural institutions, and at the same time to participate in their own construction. Poststructuralists, however, are particularly concerned with the central role of language in that construction: "All forms of poststructuralism assume that meaning is constituted within language" (Weedon, 1987:22). For poststructuralists, "the common factor in the analysis of social organization, social meanings, power and individual consciousness is **language**" and "it is also the place where our sense of ourselves, our subjectivity, is **constructed**" (p. 33). Poststructuralists challenge claims that "deep structures of language can be identified, which allow us to attach ultimate meanings to words;" instead, theorists "emphasize the contingency of meaning and the slipperiness of language" (Rust, 1991:611). Within a "slippery" language, many different discourses slide around, competing to determine the individual's day-to-day practices:

> Meanings do not exist prior to their articulation in language and language is not an abstract system, but is always socially and historically located in discourses. Discourses represent political interests and in consequence are constantly vying for status

> and power. The site of this battle for power is the subjectivity of the individual and it is a battle in which the individual is an active but not sovereign protagonist. (Weedon, 1987:41)

In their explanations of this relationship amongst language, social institutions, subjectivity, and power, not all poststructuralists have been equally helpful for pedagogy and feminism. It is impossible, for example, to ground any sort of politics or praxis upon "deconstruction", a practice of reading inspired by philosopher Jacques Derrida. While the theory points to much that is awry in essentialist thought, not the least of which is dualism, Derrida takes the arbitrariness of the relationship between language and reality to the nth degree, rejecting any search for meaning as pointless because meaning does not exist. In his ever-growing and "almost obsessively complex" number of books and articles, Derrida attempts to take apart or "deconstruct the truth claims of all the human sciences":

> Every interpretation--of a culture, or a literary text, of an object, of nature itself--is not only essentially provisional but is unstable as well, according to Derrida, forever inviting further, often contradictory, interpretations. (Solomon, 1990:233)

While many feminist pedagogues may share deconstructive poststructuralism's interest in revealing and nurturing a multiplicity of meanings, many would also share David

Jardine's (1994) sentiments when he says that "multiple interpretations cannot mean that any answer will do" (p. 11). While there is also a shared interest in the nature of linguistic and textual contradictions, as Carmen Luke (1992) points out, "Contradictory standpoints are not the same as pcsitions that float uncommitted on a sea of postmodern theoretical indeterminacy" (p. 48). Feminist theorists may agree with poststructuralists that the "universal" or "essential" subject must be rejected, but can't help wondering why the claims about the "end of man" are becoming "most vocal at this particular historical moment when colonized others struggle for and begin to acquire small spaces in which to write themselves":

> [W]e are not at all convinced that men are giving up their identity and authority, even as they speak a good postmodernist game of "multiple narratives" and "border crossings". As bell hooks (1990) points out, "It's easy to give up identity, when you got one". (Luke & Gore, 1992:6)

The feminist educator is not about to "erase" identity, nor forswear the temporal and cultural specificity of its construction. To avoid slipping into a relativism of endless difference, limits can be put on "difference, uncertainty, partiality, the local, and location" by committing to locating "perspective, experience, and knowledge in historical, political, and cultural contexts" (Luke, 1992:47).

In this endeavor, some of the work of French philosopher Michèl Foucault has been instructive. In his detailed historical analyses of the ways in which power in exercised and individuals controlled through various institutions and practices, Foucault (1976) focusses on what he terms a "genealogical search" (p. 83) for the modern subject, which is undertaken beginning at the local, "most basic" level, conducted as "an ascending analysis of power" (p. 99). This reverses the mode of analysis of established, institutionalized "scientific" regimes of thought that engage in "descending" analyses: Foucault talks instead of the reactivation of "subjugated knowledges", claiming that contemporary critical discourses have acquired their force by forming associations between such "particular, local, regional knowledge" which is "located low down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity" and "meticulous, erudite, exact historical knowledge", both of which have been "confined to the margins of knowledge" (p. 83).

In this search for "a genealogy of the modern subject", Foucault's vision of the self as a tool of power requires a theory of productive power. He argues against repressive theories of power which regard it entirely negatively, claiming that "[I]n fact, power produces; it produces reality; it produces domains of objects and rituals of truth. The individual and the knowledge that

may be gained of him belong to this production" (Foucault, 1977a:194). This productive power, then, is not to be viewed as a possession or a thing to be held or exchanged, but instead,

> must be analyzed as something which circulates, or rather, as something which only functions in the form of a chain. It is never localised here or there, never in anybody's hands, never appropriated as a commodity or piece of wealth. Power is employed and exercised through a net-like organization. And not only do individuals circulate between its threads; they are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power. (Foucault, 1980:98)

Thus, no person in a society is exempt from nor innocent of participation in a number of power relations. No single dominant culture sits hegemonically atop all less powerful sub-cultures; while power is certainly not evenly distributed amongst them, the resistant- counter- and sub-cultures also engage in power relations amongst and between themselves, as well as with those higher up in the hierarchy. In these relations, Foucault (1977b) explains, distinctions between 'the State' and 'Revolution' are ambiguous:

> [T]here are many different kinds of revolution, roughly speaking as many kinds as there are possible subversive recodifications of power relations, and...one can perfectly well conceive of revolutions

which leave essentially untouched the power relations which form the basis for the functioning of the State. (p. 123)

Regardless of actual similarities in the structuring of their power relations, different discourses set themselves dualistically in opposition to others, distinguishing themselves in the belief that theirs holds the monopoly on "truth". The more power weaving its way around in it, the more "truth-power" a discourse has in society: "'Truth' is linked in circular relation with systems of power which produce and sustain it, and to effects of power which it induces and which extend it" (Foucault in Gore, p. 63). The higher up the hierarchy, the greater the range of influence, but all, believing truth to be on their side, tend not to reflect upon "the potential dangers and normalizing tendencies of all discourses", including "those which aim to liberate" (Gore, 1992:63).

How a theory has translated itself into action must be examined in specific contexts. Where a discourse has become positioned within the power-knowledge apparatus must be analyzed in particular instances. What constitutes the actual practice of an individual must be the subject of ongoing self-scrutiny. Why particular choices amongst discourses have been and continue to be made in the construction of one's subjectivity must be reflected upon.

Here, I could reclaim purpose out of the midst of the aimless relativity I initially saw in multiple, partial, contradictory subjectivity. Now, I could look at my 'hydraheads' as subject positions informed by various language-created discourses, each one powered by its "regime of truth". There were limits to their proliferation into meaninglessness through analysis "from the ground up": looking around close to home at each discourse's actual impact on every small scene at a local level, in its grassroots historical and political context.

As environmentalist Wendell Berry (1989) points out, centralized, abstract "global" answers to human problems simply don't work: "[W]e are not smart enough or conscious enough or alert enough to work responsibly on a gigantic scale", and we must learn "to prefer small-scale elegance and generosity to large-scale greed, crudity, and glamour" (p. 22). He argues that we need to come up with new examples to follow, for without them our lives go on unchanged (p. 17). To begin, perhaps we must try to work in new ways, unearthing those buried, discounted local knowledges Foucault calls "subjugated", and start by listening to the voices from the margins, from underground, and from left field. Using such first-hand knowledges, the actual effects of a discourse's "regime of truth" upon the constitution of the individual could perhaps be examined, understood, and acted upon.

In the more specific terms of examining textual

impact upon the construction of the individual's subjectivity, I would have to consider that in poststructuralism, since all meaning is language-constructed within discourses by both the individual and cultural forces, then "reading-meaning" is one mode amongst many made interdependently, amongst individual, text, and context. What the individual takes from the text depends very much on what that reader brought to it in the first place. Other texts play upon those that were read before, the meaning and influence of which would depend on the individual's ongoing life experience. The shifting context from within which the work is presented to the individual would also be influential: from inside which discourse is it operating in what timeframe with what other players?

From this perspective, it would make little sense to "analyze" the "meaning" of words and sentences in texts divorced from the context in which they were read, and separate from the people who read them. However, without a vehicle such as feminism, poststructuralism tends to restrict itself to short, if fancy-footworked, strolls up and down the halls of academe, removed from people's day-to-day lives and unconcerned with the ways and means of implementing theory: praxis is not its strong suit. I needed a way "in", a way of connecting theories of the subject, power, discourse, and local knowledge with human beings engaged in everyday experience in actual contexts.

How to do it? Simply reading more books would not fully inform the meanings that could come from examining discourses where texts played into gendered subjectivities.

Yet that is all I seemed able to do.

3. BookWound

> I cannot live without books.
> -Thomas Jefferson

The time came for me to look up from my reading about theories and begin looking into literary discourses operating as constituting elements in people's lives, but my eyes remained rivetted to the page. I feared making any change that might jeopardize my umbilical connection to the very thing I love, for I must read as I must breathe. I am addicted: I must consume books. My passion for literature is a weakness, where I am vulnerable: the night of the conversation with Deborah, her "Of course" had poked its way uninvited into my consciousness, stabbing my assumptions. I just wanted to bandage the wound, and be left alone to get on with my reading.

Clues in Interpretive Inquiry

Luckily for me, the book I happened to be reading was David Jardine's (1992) Speaking With a Boneless Tongue, in which I read James Hillman's words that spoke of the site of weakness as just the place where I would most easily be wounded, given the right tool. That wound is no death blow, but rather, a vital opening, a portal which could

connect me to the tangled, ambiguous world of possibilities:

> Opportunities are not plain, clean gifts; they trail dark and chaotic attachments to their unknown backgrounds, luring us further....Since situations require this opportunistic knowing about where the openings are and when the time needs voice...in an encounter, the lacuna, the weak place...gives the opportunity. Perception of opportunities requires a sensitivity given through one's own wounds....The weak place serves to open us to what is in the air. (p. 42)

I was to take up the opportunity afforded me by this opening at my weak place to breathe in life deeply through it:

> This wound can be read, not as a sign of severance but as a sign of the interdependencies of all things, a pain, not of severance and isolation but of connection. (Jardine, 1992:44)

There was no question that maintaining such a condition, such openness to the world, would be hard and would hurt, but as James Hillman (1992) points out,

> Growth is always loss. Anytime you're gonna grow, you're gonna lose something. You're losing what you're hanging onto to keep you safe. You're losing the habits that you're comfortable with. You're losing familiarity. (p. 8)

Hillman reminded me that "[w]ounds and scars are the stuff of character", a word that "means, at root, 'marked or etched with sharp lines', like initiation cuts" (p. 29).

My "wound", however painful, was intended to remain open, taking in as well as sending out tendrils into the lifeworld, weaving me into its net. David Jardine (1992) alludes to a Buddhist tale related by Thich Nhat Hahn (1988) in The Sun My Heart to illustrate this interconnected life:

> In the Jewelled Net of Indra....the Earth is envisaged as a net, not a two dimensional one, but a system of countless nets interwoven in all directions in a multidimensional space. (p. 64)
>
> In each criss-cross of the net is a Jewel which, in each of its infinite facets, reflects all of the other Jewels and all of their facetted relations. (p. xiv)

Some of the strands weaving through such a wound would allow me to live the understanding that all things are related by freeing up texts from their one "pure", correct canonical interpretation and looking instead at the multiplicities and intertextualities of meanings that could be read out of them. My "wounded" opportunity to enrich my own life and understanding would be to apply Hans-Georg Gadamer's observation that, while "no one could come to the aid of the written word if it falls victim to misunderstanding, intentional or unintentional," here again, apparent weakness can be strength:

> What is fixed in writing has detached itself from the contingency of its origin and its author and made itself free for new relationships. (Gadamer in Jardine, p. xix)

Woven within an interconnected worldnet, multiplicity of textual meaning could be understood not as deconstructively relative but rather as interpretively relational. The particulars and the limits would be woven into the points of connection amongst the nets of those people sharing a lifeworld. In vibrant, ongoing conversations, our nets would criss-cross at certain points, creating and reflecting the particular shape of our shared interpretation of the "texts" comprising our lives:

> A text is not a book; neither is it, in any simple and straightforward sense, a passage in a book either. [Roland] Barthes reminds us of the etymological origin of the word--something woven out of separate strands. (Griffith, 1987:43)

None of us "makes meaning" alone, and no story makes sense with one player; we come to and grow in understanding interacting with other human beings.

It began to make sense to me that my research question had pierced through my protective layers during a conversation--before that, I had been tangled in my own strands--self-absorbed and self-contained. I needed a relational opening to shift from cocoon to web. Only after reaching out through that opening did I begin to realize

how mummifying self-containment can be:

> The aim of interpretation, it could be said, is not just another interpretation but human freedom, which finds its light, identity, and dignity in those few brief moments when one's lived burdens can be shown to have their source in too limited a view of things. (Smith, 1991:189)

View, reach, and voice could be expanded through the portal, and in calling out our small and fretful tales to one another, we could help make them meaningful by weaving them out into the world, onto a larger frame of connection:

> There are kin of yours out there in the world that you haven't met yet and who know family tales--tales of your family, tales of your family resemblances, tales of what winds and binds your words out into the flesh of the earth. (Jardine, 1992:11)

The stories that would mingle at these openings are Hermes' own border songs: "Hermes was worshipped at borders. Every wall and every weave presents its opening. Everything is porous" (Hillman in Jardine, p. 7). Hermes is, amongst other things, both God of the Wound, associated with lifecycles, and Messenger of the Gods, who keeps conversations going. These roles are of necessity interconnected, and just so does hermeneutic understanding require that there be border openings as points of exchange for conversation to be ongoing, where old and

young might eventually connect and tell their stories, balanced between traditions and new voices, each influencing the other: "[I]n the telling of tales, new members are brought in and these new members transfigure the tales" (Jardine, 1992:124). No participant at the borders would assume to have any final answers, nor know the end of any story, for "there are always 'new ones in our midst' and therefore the story is still going on and the whole truth is never just given... (Jardine, 1992:124). In the interweaving of tales at the border would be a pedagogic vitality and balance that would allow adults and children "a genuine life together [that] is made possible only in the context of an ongoing conversation which never ends and which must be sustained for life together to go on at all" (Smith, 1994:192).

However, before they can understand how "life is mediated through relations between old and young" (p. 195), adults must first weave themselves back into a sense of their own childhoods, finding their own border connections within themselves, to the earth, and between one another. Most of us can't tell our stories out into the world because we can't remember them, or didn't know we had any, or simply repeat stories we've been told are our own. How do teachers re-learn their own stories so that they can make real contact with the young, teaching "curriculum as a story, not just as a collection of trivia which seems to have no connection with anything but

itself" (p. 180)? In our language-created realities, what sorts of stories have we listened to and shaped into our own to narrate the patterns of our lives?

4. Hoary Stories

Once upon a time there was a wicked witch and her name was
Lilith
Eve
Hagar
Jezebel
Delilah
Pandora
Jahi
Tamar
and there was a wicked witch and she was also called goddess and her name was
Kali
Fatima
Artemis
Hera
Isis
Mary
Ishtar
and there was a wicked witch and she was also called queen and her name was
Bathsheba
Vashti
Helen
Salome
Elizabeth
Clytemnestra
Medea
and there was a wicked witch and she was also called witch and her name was
Joan
Circe
Morgan le Fay
Tiamat
Maria Leonza
Medusa
and they had this in common: that they were feared, hated, desired, and worshiped.

When one enters the world of fairy tale one seeks with difficulty for the actual place where legend and history part.
One wants to locate the precise moment when fiction penetrates into the psyche as reality, and history begins to mirror it. Or vice versa....In the personae of the fairy tale--the wicked witch, the beautiful princess, the

heroic prince--we find out what the culture would have us know about who we are.

The point is that we have not formed that ancient world--it has formed us. We ingested it as children whole, had its values and consciousness imprinted on our minds as cultural absolutes long before we were in fact men and women....Fairy tales are the primary information of the culture.

-Andrea Dworkin
Woman Hating

Let us agree on this: that we live our lives through texts. These may be read, or chanted, or experienced electronically, or come to us, like the murmurings of our mothers, telling us of what conventions demand. Whatever their form or medium, these stories are what have formed us all....

-Carolyn Heilbrun
Hamlet's Mother & Other Women

Omnipresent today in speech idioms, poetry, music, dance, painting, sculpture, drama, fiction and film are reworkings of archetypal myths and fairy tales (Kolbenschlag, 1988:4). From these ancient stories we derive the narrative material from which we structure the individual and collective meaning of our experience, constituting who we are and who we know how to be. This process takes place largely on an unconscious level: "Much of what we live by and attribute to nature or destiny is, in reality, a pervasive cultural mythology", and its narratives "mirror as well as model our existence" (Kolbenschlag, 1988:xiv).

Dale Spender (1980) argues that in our language-created patriarchal society, "it has been men who have named the world" (p. 165), and that "difficulty arises when one group holds a monopoly on naming and is able to enforce its own particular bias on everyone" (p. 164), perpetuating and strengthening the image of active

male supremacy and passive female inferiority: Man is the Namer, while woman is Named. The Namer tells the Story of Life in any culture, and Mary Daly (1973) claims that the power of naming has been stolen from women: "We have not been free to name ourselves, the world, or god" (p. 7-8). Carolyn Heilbrun (1990) notes that "the chief source of patriarchal power" is its embodiment "in unquestioned narratives" (p. 109). It follows that "in literature and out, through all recorded history, women have lived by a script they did not write":

> Their destiny was to be married, circulated; to be given by one man, the father, to another, the husband; to become mothers of men. Theirs has been the marriage plot, the erotic plot, the courtship plot, but never, as for men, the quest plot.... Within the quest plot, men might do anything: literature tells us all they have done. Within the marriage plot women might only wait to be desired, to be wed, to be forgotten. (p. 108)

The great mythic figure throughout all cultures, and for centuries, has been the hero: "the individual and separated self who at best is impregnable and impermeable, and who to prove himself often triumphs by slaying the monster" (Harris, 1988:33). That hero is inevitably male, and his reward for slaying the monster is very likely to be the beautiful princess, who has been waiting to be rescued:

> Woman is the Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Snow White, she who receives and submits. In song and story the young man is seen departing adventurously in search of a woman; he slays the dragon, he battles the giants; she is locked in a tower, a palace, a garden, a cave, she is chained to a rock, a captive, sound asleep: she waits. (de Beauvoir, 1952:291)

In the male-created myths of our culture, ideals of female perfection are dichotomously opposed to models of male perfection: the male is active, the female is passive; the male sphere is external and public, the female sphere is internal and private; the male is heroic and brave, the female is victim and afraid; the male is strong, the female is weak. Andrea Dworkin (1974) calls this female ideal "The Beauteous Lump of Ultimate Good":

> For a woman to be good, she must be dead, or as close to it as possible. Catatonia is the good woman's most winning quality....Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Snow-white, Rapunzel--all are characterized by passivity, beauty, innocence, and victimization. They are archetypal good women--victims by definition. They never think, act, initiate, confront, resist, challenge, feel, care, or question. Sometimes they are forced to do housework. (p. 42)

The good woman is desirable because she waits; she is beautiful in her comatose passivity. Conversely, the archetypal bad woman is evil because she acts:

> When she is bad she lives, or when she lives she is bad. She has one real function, motherhood. In that function, because it is active, she is characterized by overwhelming malice, devouring greed, uncontainable avarice. She is ruthless, brutal, ambitious, a danger to children and other living things. Whether called mother, queen, stepmother, or wicked witch, she is the wicked witch, the content of nightmare, the source of terror. (Dworkin, 1974:41)

When women are active and powerful in fairy tales, they are evil and must be destroyed: "She is the female protagonist, the nonmale source of power which must be defeated, obliterated, before male power can fully flower" (p. 48). The male character in fairy tales, whether father figure, enchanted beast, or heroic prince, is invariably good nomatter what he does, and "the truth of it is that he is powerful and good when contrasted with her. The badder she is, the better he is. The deader she is, the better he is. That is the moral of the story, the reason for dual role definition, and the shabby reality of the man as hero" (Dworkin, 1974:44). Promoting and reinforcing such dichotomies on a mythic scale allows men to justify all privileges on the one hand and authorize abuse on the other. Since much of what defines the hero is that he destroys the evil woman and possesses the good one, usurping their power, his motto could be: "Both must be nullified" (Dworkin, 1974:48).

For the show to go on, however, it is critical that women unquestioningly accept and identify with their mythic counterparts, good girls and bad, willingly playing their respective antagonistic roles, as Margaret Atwood (1993) illustrates by taking on the voice of the literary Evil Woman in "Unpopular Gals":

> The thing about those good daughters is, they're so good. Obedient and passive. Snivelling, I might add. No get-up-and-go. What would become of them if it weren't for me? Nothing, that's what. All they'd ever do is the housework, which seems to feature largely in these stories. They'd marry some peasant, have seventeen kids, and get 'A dutiful wife' engraved on their tombstones, if any. Big deal.
>
> I stir things up, I get things moving. 'Go play in the traffic,' I say to them. 'Put on this paper dress and look for strawberries in the snow.' It's perverse, but it works. All they have to do is smile and say hello and do a little more housework, for some gnomes or nice ladies or whatever, and bingo, they get the king's son and the palace, and no more dishpan hands.
>
> Whereas all I get is the blame.
>
> God knows all about it. No Devil, no Fall, no Redemption. Grade two arithmetic.
>
> You can wipe your feet on me, twist my motives around all you like, you can dump millstones on my

head and drown me in the river, but you can't get me out of the story. I'm the plot, babe, and don't ever forget it. (pps. 29-30)

In a companion piece, "Let Us Now Praise Stupid Women", Atwood, speaking now as story reader, identifies the (Stupid) Good Woman's place and function:

> No stories! No stories! Imagine a world without stories!
>
> But that's exactly what you would have, if all the women were wise....
>
> She talks with wolves, without knowing what sort of beasts they are:
>
> **Where have you been all my life?** they ask. **Where have I been all my life?** she replies.
>
> **Look out**, we shout at her silently, thinking of all the smart things we would do in her place.
>
> But trapped inside the white pages, she can't hear us, and goes prancing and warbling and lolloping innocently towards her doom.
>
> (Innocence! Perhaps that's the key to stupidity, we tell ourselves, who think we gave it up long ago.)
>
> If she escapes from anything, it's by sheer luck, or else the hero:
>
> this girl couldn't tear her way out of a paper bag....
>
> Let's face it, she's our inspiration! The Muse as fluffball!
>
> And the inspiration of men, as well! Why else were

the sagas of heroes,
of their godlike strength and superhuman exploits,
ever composed,
if not for the admiration of women thought stupid
enough to believe them?...
When lovely woman stoops or bungles her way into
folly,
pleading good intentions, her wish to please,
and is taken advantage of, especially by somebody
famous,
if stupid or smart enough, she gets caught, just as in
classic novels,
and makes her way into the tabloids, confused and
tearful,
and from there straight into our hearts.
We forgive you! we cry. We understand! Now do it
some more!
Hypocrite lecteuse! Ma semblable! Ma soeur!*
Let us now praise stupid women,
who have given us Literature. (pps.32-37)

In ironically sardonic voices, Atwood takes on the ambiguities and paradoxes of woman's dual positions in the archetypal stories that underlie the narratives of our

*I am a hypocritical reader! She's my mirror-image! My sister!

culture. Without both the Evil and the Good woman, there would of course be no stories as we know them, for their plotlines depend on polarities, and develop according to the male protagonist's relationship to and against these dual aspects of the Other. In a dualistic story in which the male must always be the winner, the Other must always be some type of loser, whether Evil or Good. However, as incentive to become the lesser loser, getting to be had by the hero is promoted as the Ultimate Prize, and for its attainment, Good and Bad Women are pitted against one another, evil plotting brains versus dumb inert virtue often describing the womanly conflict. As Margaret Atwood so aptly illustrates, a woman using her brains doesn't get anything but blame in this plot; after she serves her purpose by stirring up the action, she must be punished for doing so. It is the lobotomized Beauty who slept through it all who gets the prince, the castle, the works, all for the meagre price of her mind, her body, her own identity.

For women to believe that such a happy "sole/soul" ending is the stuff of which dreams are made, they must believe it is as Nature and God intended. They must be trained from the start to participate in the fiction that biology is destiny. They must be taught from infancy that their morally and physically weak beings need to be saved. They must learn to fear and hate the only role alternative in the plot: that of the Evil Other inevitably destroyed as the Devil's Tool on earth. Trouble is, the stories teach us

that nomatter what women do or do not do, they remain vessels of virue and vice. Within all, always, and forever lurk both evil darkness and entranced emptiness: the Wicked Witch and the Stupid Beauty are indeed sisters who hate one another and more: we see the Other in the mirror and hate ourselves.

The lines are drawn: the hero quest and romance myths in our patriarchal culture teach us that all women are Other, and all other women are the enemy in the competition for the Prince Prize; that Other Bad women are the enemy of Good women, who must ally themselves with Always Good men to destroy the bad; and that since the danger of badness lurks always inside even the Good Woman, she must become allied with men against herself. Simone de Beauvoir (1952) explains that for this interpretation to work, "it is necessary for the Other to be for itself an other, for its very subjectivity to be affected by its otherness; this consciousness which would be alienated as a consciousness..." (p. 259). The self-loathing, self-alienated Other, looking upon herself as an imperfect object defined by the needs of Man, abdicates responsibility for her own life and allows herself to be "sculpted, shaved, painted, plastered, pushed aside, pedastaled, pounded into a lifelike Galatea" (Kolbenschlag, 1988:13). Since she comes to mean something only in relation to a man, she learns to package herself better than the women around her so that she is the one chosen and consumed before her expiry date.

Woman's other-directedness toward the "man in her life" puts her in a single, exclusive relationship in which she, but not he, is expected to focus and invest all of her emotional energy, which is to bring her total fulfillment. He is to be her destiny, and she should need no other to complete herself. Her role is to be his personalized support system, living through and for him. Virginia Woolf observes in A Room of One's Own that women in fiction have been "not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex" (in Berknikow, 1980:2). The only ties we see are those binding her to her man.

Because her connection with a man must be seen to be of sole importance, as the only relationship worth aiming for, a woman's relationships with women, whether mother, sister, daughter, friend, or self, are presented in our culture in a negative light, subtley but consistently directing a woman to suspect, trivialize, demean, or avoid same-sex relationship. At the same time, the idealization of the romantic heterosexual couple that has been called the "archetypal dyad" of our cultural mythology, "implicitly denies the validity of other constellations" (Kolbenschlag, 1988:53), particularly those comprising females. In her resulting isolation within heterosexual coupledom, a woman lacks textual guides upon which to model same-sex friendships, including "making friends" with herself. Based on our cultural myths, one would have to conclude that women are rarely together without a man in

the picture, and if two of them do happen to end up in the same room alone with one another, they'll either claw each other's eyes out, or bore one another to death.

Overwhelmingly, literary works by men or women, filtered through a patriarchal sieve, look only to the male connection, through which the female characters are brought to life (Berknikow, 1980:8). These characters, inert in their life before man, constitute the "good" women, while those female characters who carry on outside man's domain are unnatural, evil creatures, presented in stories as freaks, madwomen, monsters, and cannibals, whether no man wants them, or they want no man. Old, ugly women off by themselves in the forest are commonplace figures, well-known for their diabolical cauldrons, spells, and ovens. Stepmothers, rid of their husbands, reveal themselves to be power-mad abominations. Young maidens, left to their own devices, go mad, are ruined, steal babies, commit suicide.

Groups of female figures rarely appear in song or story except as torturing, tempting, man-killing Sirens, Harpies, Amazons, witches, Fates or Furies, reflecting, perhaps, a "traditional male paranoia" (Kolbenschlag, 1988:52) about the power they believe women can conjure up together. For centuries, men have been obsessed by the idea that women "in league together" are plotting dark and evil deeds, specifically aimed at "the overthrow of the masculine" (Berknikow, 1980:10).

This fear of women together translates itself into monstrous mythic portrayals of all-female groups, which are contrasted with the beautiful and passionate romantic couple ideal. Negative characterizations of women outside the male-female dyad work not only to express and at the same time assuage male fear, but also to create and maintain in women fear and loathing of all that is associated with being man-less, alone or with other women.

Women-free boys and men, on the other hand, are presented as living boisterously and gleefully together, sailing off on adventures, tracking big game, fighting the enemy, discovering the treasure: literature "from the most remembered myths to the most current popular fiction [is] full of the passions and permutations of relations among men" (p. 7). From God and Adam to King Arthur and Lancelot, two males are often presented as sharing the perfect relationship, ruined only when and if some woman comes between them. There are stories of grave and great import about fathers and sons, about two and more brothers, about man alone, on a mountaintop, on a desert island, on a quest, chosen or imposed, searching out life's meaning.

The linear journey format of the male hero's search for enlightenment is taken to be a metaphorical expression of universal human experience temporal and spiritual, psychological and moral: "the heroic, androcentric bias of the traditional myths becomes the basis for models of the

human psyche as well as the life cycle" (Kolbenschlag, 1988:25). Carol Gilligan (1982), Nancy Chodorow (1989), Carol Tavris (1992), and others have argued that dominant theories of normal human psychological and moral development are expressed in terms of the myth of the atomistic male subject passing from one "stage" to another. From Kierkegaard to Freud to Piaget to Erikson, men have used as proof that women are less than fully human the fact that they do not fit the pattern: "Everyone was supposed to grow 'up', not sideways, down, or, God forbid, in circles....[E]veryone assumed that healthy adult development meant progress toward autonomy, independence, and separation" (Tavris, 1992:37). In the lifestories underlying such assumptions, female characters are depicted as spiritual and moral dwarfs playing peripheral, static roles: "typically, they end as they begin, or they go mad, or they simply perish" (Kolbenschlag, p. 24).

"Androcentric literature structures the reading experience differently depending on the gender of the reader" (Schweickart, 1986:41): how we read is inextricably linked to what we read. When a male reads a version of the hero-journey myth in any of its manifestations, he can confidently interpret it as a confirmation and enhancement of his status as a fully human being, reflecting his experience and place in the world: he is invited to validate the equation of maleness with humanity. (Schweickart, 1986:41) A female reading the same

androcentric literature is, on the other hand, constantly reminded that while she must in every way align and identify herself with the male, she must never forget that she is not a man, and therefore not fully human. Judith Fetterley (1978) describes the female reader's dilemma:

> Our literature neither leaves women alone nor allows them to participate. It insists on its universality at the same time that it defines that universality in specifically male terms....In such fictions the female reader is co-opted into participation in an experience from which she is explicitly excluded; she is asked to identify with a selfhood that defines itself in opposition to her; she is required to identify against herself. (p. xii)

Whether she attempts to fit the man-created stereotype of inert good woman, or tries to read herself "male", or attempts some sort of schizophrenic combination, the female reader is required to commit what Elizabeth Ermarth (1983) calls "psychic suicide" trying to maintain a "divorce between body and idea" (p. 15): the fictional representations have little to do with her day-to-day life and experience, but because the literary models have been privileged over her mundane existence, she discounts her own perceptions of her experience, and becomes unable to perceive its shape and authenticity (Showalter in Fetterley, 1978:xxi). Calling this process of using herself against herself the "immasculation" of woman,

Judith Fetterley argues that for the woman reading androcentric literature, "powerlessness is the subject and powerlessness is the experience" (p. xiii).

Women reading and writing within a patriarchal culture are immasculated in the Catch-22 relationship between literary canon and modes of reading: "The androcentric canon generates androcentric interpretive strategies, which in turn favor the canonization of androcentric texts and the marginalization of gynocentric ones" (Schweickart, 1986:45). In our schools, we are caught up in such a circle, since attempts to address the educational disadvantages girls experience have focussed on changing the textual content in the curriculum without critical consideration of the assumptions upon which language and literacy education is based (Gilbert, 1989:257), resulting in a perpetuation of androcentric readings regardless of content: "we must not assume that the elimination of sexist content in the literature we feed adolescents will significantly alter the attitudes that girls develop about what it means to be female" (Gilbert, 1983:26). The situation in the classroom remains one in which girls "speak from within the patriarchal discourses of literature, education and psychology, and adopt speaking positions which are necessarily involved in the construction of their own subordination and oppression" (Gilbert, 1989:262). Including more books by, references to, and perspectives of women in the curriculum is a

critically important step, but it amounts to a step forward on a wheel unless teachers become conscious of the manifold ways in which our interpretation of the world is steeped in androcentric mythology.

The unexamined nature of this interpretation is illustrated by the emphasis in curriculum on encouraging girls' and young women's enrollment and success in the higher-status "male" knowledge domains of Math, Science, and Technology, so that their future employment and financial security will be enhanced (Kenway and Modra, 1992:142). Here, curricular opportunities aimed at allowing girls and boys to be "not only 'equally human' (Blackburn, 1982), but equally free in the public and private sphere", are based upon "the implied message...that girls should be more like boys if they wish to get on" (p. 142). Not only is it the girls' "shortcomings" that have to be accommodated in "girl-friendly" modified courses, but it also remains their responsiblity to "fix themselves" so that they become better and more productive human beings. Gaskell, McLaren, and Novogrodsky (1989) identify this remedial approach to girls' education as a "deficit model" which suggests that the problem is located in girls' abilities and aspirations instead of in the curriculum and instruction in math and science courses. The assumption that the victim is to blame for her own educational "shortcomings" allows the institution to avoid criticism of its organization, function, or philosophy (Gaskell,

McLaren, & Novogrodsky, 1989:17). Untouched are the methods of measuring achievement; unquestioned is the privileging of "hard" scientific academic subjects over "soft" (and "easy") arts courses; unexamined are the societal values underlying such notions.

As well as shifting attention away from an analysis of the cultural mythology underlying sex stereotyping and gender bias, focussing solely on changing curriculum content "posit[s] a rather naive correspondence between the text (curriculum), its delivery by the teacher and its reception by the student" (Kenway and Modra, 1992:143). Both critical and poststructural textual theorists would argue that the reading of texts is a much more complicated, uncertain, and subjective process than a simple, unadulterated "transfer" of information from text to teacher to student.

That all participants bring an unconscious "curriculum" with them into the classroom is illustrated in Brownwyn Davies' 1989 study of preschool children and gender, Frogs and Snails and Feminist Tales. When Davies presents to the children Robert Munsch's The Paperbag Princess, a picturebook which attempts to disrupt the traditional fairytale storyline by featuring Elizabeth as a strong female protagonist who saves Prince Ronald from the dragon, some of the little boys, "unable to see Elizabeth as a genuine hero", try to make Ronald into the hero of the story, master of his own fate, "even at the point where he

was sailing through the air, held by a dragon by the seat of his pants" (p. 231). Having by ages four and five already internalized the "correct" binary plotline and the "proper" dichotomized roles, both the boys and the girls find it very difficult to consider anything but those stories that fit traditional patterns. Similarly, in We've All Got Scars: What Boys and Girls Learn in Elementary School, an account of four years of observation of a group of elementary-aged boys and girls, reading teacher Raphaela Best (1983) focusses on describing encounters that illustrate the power of what she calls "second curriculum" gender-role socialization to induce children to see the world through the distorting lens of stereotypes (p. 130), which compels them to ignore examples of situations and people all around them in their day-to-day lives that contradict the stereotypes.

More common, however, are studies conducted strictly as decontextualized textual critiques, such as the oft-cited 1972 and 1976 document analyses of basal readers by the American organization, Women on Words and Images, entitled Dick and Jane as Victims: Stereotyping in Children's Readers, and replication studies of these originals, such as Purcell and Stewart's (1990) "Dick and Jane in 1989", that try to determine what textual changes have been made since the last document analyses were conducted. At no time do the researchers set foot in the classroom to see what impact the textual changes have had

on what and how students learn.

The power of decontextualized text to "teacher-proof" teaching or "student-proof" learning are notions underlying these studies that should be questioned. Attention must be drawn to the processes through which knowledge is produced, given that no text is "neutral", and that teachers and students come to the educational project constructed and constructing within their multiple subjectivities. If one agrees with David Lusted's (1986) definition of pedagogy as that which addresses "the transformation of consciousness that takes place in the intersection of three agencies--the teacher, the learner and the knowledge they together produce" (p. 3), then according to his definition,

> pedagogy refuses to instrumentalize these relations, diminish their interactivity or value over one another. It, furthermore, denies the teacher as neutral transmitter, the student as passive, and knowledge as immutable material to impart.
> (Lather, 1991:15)

Clues In Feminist Literary Criticism

The point is not merely to interpret literature in various ways; the point is to change the world.

-Patrocinio Schweickart
"Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading"

Out of old tales, we must make new lives.

-Carolyn Heilbrun
Hamlet's Mother and Other Women

In her essay, "When We Dead Awaken: Writing As Re-Vision", Adrienne Rich (1979) likens women to zombies who have been walking around unconscious of the nature of their oppression until recently, when "the women's movement has drawn inescapable and illuminating connections between our sexual lives and our political institutions" (p. 35). For Rich, the awakening of consciousness to self-knowledge takes the shape of a feminist critique of literature:

> Re-vision--the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction--is for women more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival. Until we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves.... A change in the concept of sexual identity is essential if we are not going to see the old political order reassert itself in every new revolution. We need to know the writing of the past, and know it differently than we have ever known it; not to pass on a tradition but to break its hold over us. (p. 35)

Rich suggests that feminist literary criticism is a mode of praxis that can constitute both the first word and the ongoing text of a revolutionary dialogue. Literature can be recognized "as an important arena of political struggle, a crucial component of the project of interpreting the world in order to change it" (Schweickart, 1986:39). Judith Fetterley (1978) explains

that by creating a new understanding of literature, we change how that literature affects us, which in turn can change the culture that the literature reflects (p. xx). A feminist re-view of literature could thus make the power of naming reality available to women.

Two of the several interconnected consciousness-raising projects with which feminist literary criticism is concerned are pertinent to this research project: first, the critical study of women as writers, of the history, themes, genres and structures of literature written by women past and present, which Elaine Showalter has named 'gynocritics', and second, the critique of sexist literary ideology, which questions in works by men and women "the existing structures of power in the world which have been endorsed on the page" (Duncker, 1992:7). Informed by a consciousness that is radically different from the one that informs the literature, these feminist projects in different ways act to open up the closed androcentric literary canon by entering it "from a point of view which questions its values and assumptions and which has its investment in making available to consciousness precisely that which the literature wishes to keep hidden" (Fetterley, 1978:xx). Both of these branches of feminist criticism, in making visible the myths that have named women, aim to disrupt the dominant storylines through which their gender is held in place (Davies, 1993:1), which in turn can expose the

places for more and different subject positions, plots, and meanings.

To help prevent these disruptions from solidifying into feminism's own totalizing storyline, some theorists have looked to textual criticism, which keeps interpretations open by calling attention to the arbitrary nature of the relationship between language and meaning, and by viewing reading as an interactive creative process, thereby shifting considerable power from texts to readers, who "actively and continuously participate in the creation of meanings in texts by bringing their own life and literary experiences to bear upon the texts" (Godard, 1990:113). Because textual criticism is open to the expression of differentiated perceptions and views, it avoids positing a universal truth (Furman, 1980:52), so that once the cracks in the androcentric fiction appear, feminist criticism does not rush to plaster them over with its own essentialist cement.

Plowing the textual surface of the "one right story" so that other versions might emerge from it means that the storyline would be disrupted and opened, not destroyed or smoothed over. Women's versions would come up through openings in the very fictive ground they have tilled to make it more fertile. As Carolyn Heilbrun (1990) points out:

> One cannot make up stories: one can only retell in new ways the stories one has already heard....We

> cannot yet make wholly new fictions; we can only transform old tales, and recognize how women have transformed old tales in the past. (p. 109)

Clarissa Pinkola Estés (1992) says that "tales are, in their oldest sense, a healing art" (p. 462); the telling and re-telling of our stories can provide us with potent medicine to keep our minds and spirits healthy. "Dis-ease" in our stories, however, is a source of grave psychic sickness, as George Quasha explains in his preface to James Hillman's (1983) Healing Fiction:

> Our reality is created through our fictions; to be conscious of these fictions is to gain creative access to, and participation in, the poetics or making of our psyche or soul-life; the "sickness" of our lives has its source in our fictions; our fictions can be "healed" through willing participation, and, in this atmosphere of healing, they reclaim their intrinsic therapeutic function....
>
> Healing is not a procedure leading to a product, a concretized healthy person; healing is a life process that begins with our acceptance of our fictive realities and authorial roles within them....(p. x)

Re-interpreting the old myths to claim their healing powers in our lifestories would celebrate our conscious participation in creating ourselves. For example, once we shift our view from the static polarities of the hero's journey mythic model, which insists on the triumph of the

self-contained, individual "good" self over the evil monster, we could come to a different understanding of both the hero and the mythic monster. Maria Harris (1988) points out that, rather than being cast as strange and foreign creatures outside ourselves, monsters can be re-viewed as the parts of ourselves we find frightening because we have made them unfamiliar: "[T]hey are the parts of the total society which are reminders of what has been left out: women's stories, for example, or thinking with our bodies, as well as with our minds....In remembering them, we re-member ourselves" (p. 32). We might, for example, look again at the mythic figure of the Medusa, traditionally regarded as a monster so hideous, one glimpse of her would turn a man to stone. Harris suggests that the work of mythic re-membering is "gazing at what originally terrifies, and turning it into a symbol of hope and new life" (p. 34). In this case, if we look again and long enough at the Medusa's snake-haired glory, we may come to see the serpents as "the intertwined symbols of the caduceus, the sign of healing" (p. 34).

In re-visions, elements traditionally regarded as oppositional may shift positions, or connect in temporary combinations and ironic alignments, as illustrated in Donna Haraway's (1985) essay, "A Manifesto for Cyborgs: Science, Technology, and Socialist Feminism in the 1930s". Haraway's cyborg, "a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction", is the

image she has chosen to be at the centre of her ironic faith (p. 191). Irony in this myth-building exercise "is about contradictions that do not resolve into larger-wholes, even dialectically, about the tension of holding incompatible things together because both or all are necessary and true" (p. 190). A cyborg world "might be about lived social and bodily realities in which people are not afraid of...permanently partial identities and contradictory standpoints" (p. 196).

Haraway considers the writing of monstrous tales, using re-visioned images within re-told myths, to be a potent process:

> Cyborg writing is about the power to survive...on the basis of seizing tools to mark the world that has marked them as other. The tools are often stories, retold stories, versions that reverse and displace the hierarchical dualisms of naturalized identities. In retelling origin stories, cyborg authors subvert the central myths of origin of Western culture. (p. 217)

Feminist re-visions of these myths would be voiced in versions contextual, contradictory, ambiguous, and partial, amongst historically-located women bringing their lived experience to the tellings, founding their storytelling coalition on the basis of affinity, not identity (p. 197). Women connected on the basis of affinity are "related not by blood but by choice", acting together not in forced unison, but "on the basis of conscious coalition, of

affinity, of political kinship" (p. 198). Such relationships accommodate difference, expecting to connect only at certain points of affinity, understanding that "while we know some things about ourselves...we don't know and can't claim to know everything about each other. This is our undecidability, our situatedness in the politics of difference and location, our commitment to a historical standpoint" (Luke, 1992:48). Elizabeth Ellsworth (1992) suggests that we can use our recognition of our partial knowledge of each other's cultural and social narratives as an opportunity to create social and educational coalitions that regard difference as "different strengths" and as "forces for change" (p. 110).

Taking up such a politics of difference within and amongst our affinity groups, we learn and change by sharing our stories, constructed as they are of partial, provisional truths. As Patricia Duncker (1992) reminds us, feminism is grounded in storytelling, and this sharing of lifestories not only weaves the connective tissue of women's collective experience, but also teaches us to talk and listen across our differences, and find strength in our diversity (p. 7).

As teachers, our participation in such story-telling affinity groups would change our views of ourselves, thereby changing the interactive dynamics of knowledge production in our classrooms. And thereby change that world.

Having wound my way this far into the theoretical exposition of this story, I knew that the action was set to begin in the very next chapter: that's how the story goes. But how much could or should I orchestrate that action, intended to plot my approach to the question, "What does it mean to say that we are gendered by what and how we read as girls?" Recalling that none of us can make up new tales, but can re-work and re-view the ones we've got, I decided to try to find a story already being told that would serve as an exemplary model solid enough to use as a base for an approach, but at the same time flexible enough to allow for room to manouver. That alone was asking a great deal, but I was also expecting to find a research model that would accommodate the 'Harlequin look' of theoretical getups I'd taken to wearing. Not only that, I also wanted the model to give me specific steps to follow, like in a recipe, telling me exactly how to realize and organize my desire to pursue the question from within a consciousness-raising affinity group made up of co-researchers who would be expected not only to discuss remembrances of girlhood reading, but to write about them as well. And, I wanted to find an approach that would make the research experience itself a transformational experience for participants. Just how could I "structure" something like that?

Cynthia Chambers, who introduced me to an array of invaluable resources before, during, and after the graduate courses I took from her, pointed me to the research method

that I decided to use to approach my question. I had my first introduction when Dr. Chambers told the members of our research class about a book called Female Sexualization, in which a collective of German socialist feminists recount girlhood experiences using a collaborative autobiographical technique they developed called "memory-work" to invesigate the ways women are socialized through the sexualization of their bodies: how they are socially- and self-constructed into becoming "feminine" through the investment of specific parts of the female body with social and psychological significance.

When I first read the lumpily-translated English version of Female Sexualization, I found it fascinating, but thought that the process the authors describe would be far more demanding of participants' time and energy than I could hope to ask from anyone except me for my graduate research project. Even if such "wonderwomen" were to be found, I wondered how much any group could possibly accomplish, working as a collective for only a semester. I also worried about modifying the memory-work process: what were the implications of replacing the original collective's focus on "body projects" with a focus on girlhood reading?

I was doubtful that it could work until, in another course taught by Dr. Chambers, some of us attempted to incorporate elements of memory-work into our class journals and coursework. We discovered that not only did

participants make great strides forward in self-understanding in a semester's time, but also expressed a desire to continue with the work after the course was over. These dedicated and enthusiastic responses, as well as my own positive initial reaction to this method, convinced me that I should use collective memory-work as the approach for the BookMarks project.

III: RISING ACTION: THE APPROACH

If teaching is about our relations to the world, then we must let the world into our method. If the world we have comes to us through our relations to other people, then those relations as they appear in the transferences, ideologies, and systems of thought that shape our culture must be there too. Narrative is a form for inquiry that can contain both the world and the relations within which it becomes the focus for our attention, a locus of concern, a system of meanings, in short, our world.

-Madeleine Grumet
"On Daffodils That Come Before the Swallow Dares"

A. FLASHBACKS: Informing the Approach: A Description of the Original Research from Female Sexualization: A Collective Work of Memory

> Our aim is to change the world lovingly.
>
> -Frigga Haug et al.
> Female Sexualization

Over a two year period from 1981 to 1983, a group of twelve socialist feminists in what was then West Germany met on a regular basis to read, discuss, and critique each group member's written account of a specific girlhood memory having to do with a particular part of the body. They followed a format that the group had collectively worked out by trial and error as part of their two years of working together. Female Sexualization: A Collective Work of Memory (1987) "records a collective's attempt to analyse women's socialization by writing stories out of their own personal memories: stories within which socialization comes to appear as a process of sexualization of the female body" (p. 13).

The process, described as a "method for the unravelling of gender socialization" (p. 13) is summarized in the Forward by Erica Carter as follows:

> [Group members collectively choose] a theme connected with the body--legs, hair, stomach, height--and call on members of the group to write down their memories of past events that focus on this physical area....
>
> [Next] stories are circulated amongst the group, discussed, reassessed and rewritten....Rewritten in the light of collective critique, the final version

becomes a finely textured account of the process of production of the sexualized female body.

And finally, [the collective] examines the theoretical implications of a study in which women's 'sexuality' has been revealed as constructed within practices apparently quite separate from 'the sexual': walking across a hotel foyer, having a haircut, crossing legs demurely under the table. The problem of sexuality is 'displaced' here from the sexual act itself onto the practices of everyday life whereby girls learn to become women....Ultimately, then, the political project of the book becomes what one member of the collective terms 'moving the body into the world': extricating the female body from its constricting framework of sexual meanings, and relocating it within more fully 'socialized' areas of concern. (pps. 13-14)

Carter notes that the two most strikingly innovative aspects of the study are its systematic reading of memory and the submission of individual recollections to collective reading or critique: "No other feminist work has examined in such detail the means by which memory may be mobilized collectively to chart the progress of women through discourse, via their subjective experience of the body" (p. 14).

Bronwyn Davies (1993), in her discussion of her own adapation of 'memory-work' that the collective developed, explains it as:

> a process involving groups of adults working together on their remembered stories of some aspects of childhood....The purpose of such story-telling was not to reveal our private idiosyncratic selves, but to explore the very cultural/discursive threads revealed in our stories out of which we had become the gendered beings that we each were. (p. x)

In Getting Smart: Feminist Research and Pedagogy With/in the Postmodern, Patti Lather (1991), in her summary of the Haug et al. collective biography method, notes that it combines the consciousness-raising long central to feminist processes with an analysis of female sexualization through writing stories out of personal memories (p. 95). Lather goes on to emphasize the fact that members re-write their remembrances after subjecting them to group critique:

> Focusing on a particular body part, each woman wrote a story which was then analyzed collectively by tracing how initial opinions and judgments grew out of existent theories and popular knowledge, how, in essence, their reactions were colonized by dominant patterns of thought. Each woman rewrote "writing against the grain" (p. 60) of the way initial reactions were inscribed in dominant discourse. (p. 96)

The collective had discovered through trial and error that the first written versions of stories of their everyday lives might as well have been dictated to them, so closely did they adhere to socially acceptable, coherent plotlines.

On our own, we keep ourselves locked inside a prisonhouse of clichés, "ready-made assemblages of words":

> Language is not usually perceived as a malleable material in and through which we live our lives, a material which we mould, and through which we ourselves are moulded. From our earliest school days, we learn to write 'about' the world, rather than to find a language for the forms **within** which we live. (Haug et al, 1987:64)

The authors themselves describe their project and its aims:

> Our object in this book is women's capacity--or incapacity for action and for happiness. It involves a study of the structures, the relations, within which women live and the ways in which they gain a grip on them. We are interested in the process whereby individual women become part of society--the process usually defined as 'female socialization'....(p. 33)
>
> It is not simply some lack of information or technical facility that bars our route to fulfilment, but in some mysterious way, it is we ourselves, our bodies, our relationship to the world, that demands to be taken into account in relation to questions of human happiness, up to and including happiness in the sexual domain.
>
> What we formulated, then, as an empirical and lived question, was the question of how sexuality is constituted as a separate sphere of existence. What

> this led us to investigate was the process whereby our bodies become sexualized. We used our own memories to review the ways in which individual parts of the body are linked with sexuality, the way gender is expressed through the body, the routines that have drilled us in a particular relationship to our bodies, and the ways in which all of this is knotted into social structures and social relations between the sexes. (p. 34)

In their project on the body, the collective "attempted to work out how, in developing a relationship to our bodies, we work our way into and shore up the social order" (p. 248).

To this end, the authors, informed in part by the work of Michèl Foucault, argue against a definition of femininity as exclusively passive, and instead, see that "'women' may in fact be produced in a variety of contexts as the agents of historical processes, the holders of power" (p. 17). Yet at the same time "it is assumed by the authors that the social relations into which individuals are born are always pre-patterned in given ways; they are not the result of individual choice or self-determination" (p. 18). Social subjects, who possess the capacity for action yet who face "structural barriers to strivings for autonomy and liberation", often use the energy of their agency in "acting" to find ways of "living within their limitations, and thus escaping the dangers of deviance or breakdown" (p. 18). To capture the constituted yet

constituting nature of the female social subject, the authors came up with the image of the Arabian Nights slavegirl:

> She is by no means passive--on the contrary, she develops all manner of competences to seduce her master--yet the limits on her capacity for action are absolute. (p. 19)

This metaphor helped the group members to investigate and describe the paradoxical "how" of lived feminine practice (p. 33), and at the same time allowed for the hope that, once women have become conscious of the ways in which they participate in constituting themselves, they might use that same agency to liberate themselves: "No longer are our 'plusses' and 'minusses' to be determined by others: we are to determine our own value 'by ourselves', to decide our lives 'for ourselves'" (p. 249).

B. SETTING THE SCENE: Describing the Approach: Adapting the Memory-work Approach to the BookMarks Project

Qualitative researchers seek to make sense of personal stories and the ways in which they intersect.

-Corrine Glesne and Alan Peshkin
Becoming Qualitative Researchers

I designed the BookMarks interpretive inquiry into the question, "What does it mean to say we are gendered by what and how we read as girls?" upon the exemplary model of the collective memory-work project described in Female Sexualization, edited by Frigga Haug (1987). This mode of inquiry can best be described as "participatory research" in which "all research participants are co-researchers":

> Together a group of people investigate social problems of mutual concern....The investigation becomes an educational endeavor through analysis of the problems' structural causes. It then becomes a process of collective action aimed at social change.... [P]articipatory researchers regard research as "praxis", or reflection plus action. (Glesne and Peshkin, 1992:11)

My first step was to form a collective comprising six women, including me, all of whom are teachers. The women who made up the BookMarks collective are, like me, middle-aged (40s and early 50s), middle-class white women who are or have been married (five of six are currently married), and have children still living at home. We all

work, inside and outside our homes. As teachers, three of us specialized in elementary education, and three in high school, of whom two majored in Art and one in English. While not all of us would call ourselves feminists, we are all interested in and concerned about gender issues, particularly in education. Those of us who knew one another before the BookMarks association had met professionally, and none of us were on "intimate" terms. Our collective constituted what Donna Haraway (1985) calls an "affinity group", acting together by choice, "on the basis of conscious coalition" (p. 198). We were drawn together by our interest in one another as interesting women, and by our shared interest in the ways in which we might use collective consciousness-raising, reading, writing, and memory to inform our lives as teachers.

I invited the women to an organizational meeting, at which I provided them with an overview of the collective memory-work process, as well as the tenative schedule of meetings and the four themes we were to write about. The participants understood that they would be involved in all stages of the process: writing, reading, revising, critiquing, evaluating. That is, of course, except the "clerical" duties of collecting, photocopying, and distributing writings and arranging meeting times and places, which were my duties. I was also responsible for ensuring that members had access to the text, Female Sexualization.

After the organizational session, the collective met approximately every two weeks from September, 1994, to January, 1995 for eight "theme" meetings comprising one session for discussion and analysis of initial writings, and one for rewritten accounts for each of the four themes. We also went together to an art show we thought might be interesting and related to our work, since it consisted of the artist's collages of various women's "hair-story" memory-works, including the artist's own, which was fascinating. Also, we got together to celebrate the completion of our BookMarks work, and, finally, to discuss some of the overall themes that had emerged from our collective work.

Our task was to write about, share, discuss, and rewrite specific memories of girlhood reading, focussing on what we learned about being female from and through the experiences we recalled. Within the broad category of "girlhood reading", members were given four different themes that I chose as suggested ways "into" our memories, as places to start. Although it would have been ideal to have members of the collective develop the themes as part of our collective work, time restrictions demanded that I "jumpstart" the group with suggested topics so that we could begin writing almost immediately. However, I made it clear that no one had to use any or all themes if she didn't choose to, and that we could discuss alternatives at our meetings.

Writing the narratives was both an individual and a collaborative project: for each theme, we began on our own, writing down in narrative form a specific memory associated with it. These initial writings were circulated to all members several days before the collective met so that we all had an opportunity to read and reflect upon one another's work individually. Then, we met and talked about what we had written, looking for points of connection and common threads, as well as for silences, gaps, and "givens" in the stories, following Haug's directive to search for "absences in the text, internal contradictions, cliched formulations covering knots of emotional or painful detail" (p. 13). We used this approach because our tendency is, at first and on our own, to remember the past, to see the fabric of our lives, as a tidy, seamless narrative, with the bumps smoothed over and the gaps sewn closed. On our own, unselfconscious, we can't see the mending for looking. The collective element of memory-work is crucial to the consciousness-raising process, allowing us in conversation to discover the bumps and holes. It is important to find them because it is in the rupture between the contradictions, in the gap disconnecting the details, where we can look for ways of re-viewing our stories, for changing the static, plodding plotline.

After the meeting at which initial writings were discussed, members attempted to re-write their narratives in light of the remarks and questions raised by the

collective. This process of rewriting remembrances is a unique and crucial feature of memory-work: it is here that conscious re-view of one's "life fabric" may allow individuals "to find and perhaps unpick and restitch the invisible cultural/discursive threads" (Davies, 1993:xi).

In these rewrites, some members tried to dig beneath the surface of an oft-told family anecdote; others tried to bring a vague and generalized memory into focus by concentrating on bringing more concrete, sensory, and specific detail into the telling of it; and some tried getting inside and then viewing the story from a different perspective by shifting from first to third person point of view. Their attention was often drawn by group members to contradictory elements in the story, which they then "teased" out of their writing to explore ways of living with, or challenging them. In some cases, members decided that they needed to explore the gaps and silences in their first work; what they had left out of the telling was often more significant than what had been revealed in the first place. At different times, different members concentrated on the places where their account was interwoven with those of other women's.

In the ways and means of rewriting, no laws or immutable rules were handed down; memory-work is an evolving process, the particular workings of which are to be determined by the collective that undertakes the project. In our case, techniques aimed at disrupting

hegemonizing storylines were suggested for members to try, and then they contributed more.

Members submitted these rewritten accounts for distribution so that they could be read before the next meeting. At that meeting, versions were compared, changes or similarities noted, and again, points of intersection with others' narratives discussed. Then, with the insights of those writings and discussions in mind, we moved on to the next theme, repeating the process.

The suggested themes and timelines that I gave to participants are summarized on the next few pages. To help different individuals find memory "triggers" for each theme, I used an extensive list of questions for us to consider.

Suggested Theme 1: Preschool/Pre-Reading/Early Reading

Members may wish to consider:

Which fairytales, nursery rhymes, fables, picturebooks (and the experience of looking at the illustrations of any of the books you remember), storybooks, poems, favorite (or hated/most frightening/disturbing) 'classics' were read to you, or were those you 'pretended' to read, or recited/ memorized?

Who read to you? When? How often? Bedtime stories? Kindergarten? Sunday School? Any 'rituals'? Associations? Read to as reward/punishment? Instructional 'moral' tales? Particular 'favorite' characters with whom you identified?

What do you recall about parent/family 'regard' for reading/books? Attitudes?

If you learned to read before you began school, who taught you? First books you read on your own?

First books you chose to read: novels/series/comics/ magazines: Who influenced choice? Peers? Teachers? Parents? Reactions of others? Your 'passions'? (e.g. voracious consumer of Nancy Drew mysteries, comic books, non-fiction, etc.?)

Timeline:

September 15:	Submit initial writing on this theme
September 16:	Photocopies ready for pickup--to be read for
September 20:	MEETING: Initial writing discussed in collective
September 29:	Submit rewrites
September 30:	Photocopies ready for pickup--to be read for
October 4:	MEETING: Rewritten material submitted & discussed; "School Books" theme introduced.

Suggested Theme 2: School Books

Members may wish to consider:

Your recollections of being taught to read? Basal readers: content, characters, plots, themes; Reading aloud in 'groups' (Sparrows and Bluebirds and the like); school library visits?

Male/female teachers: did the sex of teacher make any difference to what/how you read? Your first male teacher? Which subject(s)? First male English teacher, if any?

Literary selections read to you by teachers? When? How often? What grades? What purpose? Silent reading periods?

Relationship between what you read at school and what, if anything, you were reading at home/on your own? Were you considered/ did you consider yourself to be a reader/non-reader outside of school-assigned texts?

Junior/senior high school English classes: literature assigned for study: types? authors? impact on you? Class discussions? Selection and treatment of the 'classics'? Did you enjoy/hate any/all of your English classes? Was English one of your 'good'/'bad' subjects?

Timeline

October 4: MEETING: Theme introduced, initial discussion
October 13: Submit initial writing on this theme
October 14: Photocopies ready for pickup--to be read for
October 18: MEETING: Initial "School Books" writings discussed
October 27: Submit rewrites
October 28: Photocopies ready for pickup--to be read for
November 1: MEETING: Rewrites discussed; "Hero(ines)" Theme introduced.

Suggested Theme 3: Hero(ines)

Members may wish to consider:

Narratives about girls and women that have had an impact on you that were written by men? Features? Traits? Treatment(s)?

Types of stories in which they appear? Influence of historical era in which they were written? What kind(s) of impact on you?

Narratives about girls and women written by women? Comparisons/contrasts with those written by men? Considerations of historical era and genre?

Any male literary heros with whom you identified? Written by woman or man? Distinctions? Problems?

Any hero/heroine upon whom you modelled behavior, set sights, acted out future possibilities in your life?

Timeline

November 1:	MEETING: "Hero(ines)" theme introduced/ discussed
November 9:	Submit initial writing on this theme
November 10:	Photocopies ready for pickup--to be read for
November 15:	MEETING: Initial "Hero(ines)" writing discussed
November 24:	Submit rewrites
November 25:	Photocopies ready for pickup--to be read for
November 29:	MEETING: Rewrites discussed; "Dangerous Stuff" theme introduced

Suggested Theme 4: Dangerous Stuff

Members may wish to consider:

"Dirty" Books: what constituted "dirty"? Anything with references to sex? Pictures? "Men's" magazines? National Geographic? Medical texts? "Sexy" novels? "Perversions"? What? Who said?

What did you see/know/make it your business to find (out)? Where did you go to find out? Libraries? Bookstores? Parent's books/magazines? Books passed around amongst your friends? Where did you go to read "dirty" books? With whom, if anyone?

"Bad" books: "bad" influence: Hippy/drug/counter-culture books and magazines? Political/radical books? Race? Religion? Ethnic/cultural values? Gender issues?

"Junk" books: comicbooks, serials, horror, science fiction, Harlequin romance forbidden in your house?

Timeline

November 29:	MEETING: "Dangerous Stuff" theme introduced
December 8:	Submit initial writing on this theme
December 10:	Photocopies ready for pickup--to be read for
December 13:	MEETING: Initial "Dangerous Stuff" writing discussed
January 10:	FINAL MEETING AND CELEBRATION: Bring rewrites for submission.

IV. CLIMAX: THE RESEARCH
Memory-Work of the BookMarks Collective

Existence is relationship.

-Krishnamurti

Existence is multiple.

-James Hillman

A. OUR TRAITS

Long ago, in the land of small metal curlers, of respectable white cotton garter-belts and panty-girdles with rubbery-smelling snap crotches, of stockings with seams, where condoms could not legally be displayed on pharmacy shelves, where we read Kotex ads to learn how to behave at proms and always wore our gloves when we went out, where cars had fins like fish and there was only one brand of tampon, women were told many things....We were told that there were certain "right", "normal" ways to be women, and other ways that were wrong. The right ways were limited in number. The wrong ways were endless.

-Margaret Atwood
"If You Can't Say Something Nice, Don't Say Anything At All"

The work of the BookMarks Collective began in September, 1994, when six of us "normal" middle-class, middle-aged teachers first met to discuss our written recollections of what and how we had read when we were girls. All of us had heard about, read about, or practiced some of the methods involved in memory-work, and had become interested in finding out more about its transformative possibilities for ourselves, to apply them in particular to our lives as women in education. Always on the lookout for methods, techniques, and appliances to make ourselves better and more effective, each of us had reached a point in mid-life and mid-career where it looked as if our own lives past and present were the only places we hadn't looked for answers to the question of how we should teach and live our lives.

We had grown up trying to do the right thing, good girls striving to please, with only the occasional sullen response, rebellious behaviour, or contrary thought marring the progress of our female socialization. In our adult

lives, we continued to strive obediently and earnestly to follow the rules and be so very normal and acceptable, yet it seemed many pieces were missing, and day-to-day existence too often left us feeling not only helpless but exhausted, confused, and just plain sad.

To find out what the trouble was individually would have led us in circles, because we are all so effectively caught in the hegemonous social patterns of our daily rituals. We needed the strengths and insights that a group could provide. Our brief and partial encounters with the memory-work approach had given us all the feeling that it might just possess the right combination of collective conversation and individual reflection, of speaking and writing, of theory and practice, to help us crack the veneer of our daily rituals and look at what was going on at deeper levels.

However, while we were all interested in the collective practice of autobiographical writing, most of us started out doubting the premise that what and how we had read as girls influenced any aspect of our lives, including our gendering. Some of us were doubtful because we considered ourselves to have been reluctant and disinterested, or random and indiscriminate readers of fiction who couldn't imagine that reading had made much of a difference in our lives at all, since we would have been just as happy to have read the back of a cereal box as read a children's classic. Another of us would have been just as happy to

have read nothing at all, having had about a million better things to do. Some of us who have always loved reading literature were also initially skeptical about its impact on our lives, because we viewed it simply a pleasant leisure-time activity which didn't have anything to do with our development as females in our culture. In fact, we didn't think we would even be able to remember very much of what we had read as girls.

Thus, it was with generally enthusiastic feelings about collectivity, and generally skeptical feelings about the influence of reading on the production of gender that we began our sessions, aiming to peel back the surface from the ways we had accommodated ourselves to pre-existing social structures. What we saw underneath the surface changed, the more layers we examined as our work progressed.

In the first meetings of the BookMarks Collective, we tended to examine our individual means of accommodating in terms of various family patterns determined by such factors as ethnic background, socio-economic level, parents' education, birth order, and family size. For example, two of us compared our first years of life spent mainly with our grandmothers, since we both had very young, socially and professionally active parents. Two of us shared memories of what it was like growing up having a parent who was a teacher. Those of us who grew up in two-parent, middle-class third-generation Canadian homes, the children

of professionals, noted the multiple strands of similarities woven through our experiences. In the same way, the two members who are the offspring of World War II immigrants from the Baltic region of Europe, whose parents lived in Displaced Persons camps, have a certain common "bank" of experiences from which to draw.

Further distinctions and points of contact were made within and across these groups as well, making for combinations that affected the particular ways in which each of us fit ourselves into our roles in society. Of the immigrants' children, for example, one had lived the immigrant experience herself along with her entire family, and had to learn a new language and culture as a child, while the other, a Canadian-born product of a "mixed" marriage between an immigrant father and a Canadian mother of British heritage, experienced none of that first-hand. Another factor that affected us was that one grew up with parents from working-class backgrounds, and the other with parents who had been upper-middle class professionals in Europe but who, as immigrants, had had to take on factory jobs.

We discussed memories of the shared experience of growing up with siblings, but we also looked at the effects that the varying size and configuration of the different families and our places in them had on each of us. In our interpretations of memories, we often grouped ourselves around these birth order distinctions, or saw in our

sibling relations a defining factor in our lives. One of us, for example, was made to live in the shadow of a youngest sibling and only brother, who defined the "family tragedy" when he emerged brain-damaged from a bout with meningitis. Another saw her life's major decisions as having been made according to her sister's example. Two felt always and still silenced by the "rapier wit" of our brothers.

These family traits and configurations, as well as others, such as how often and at what ages we moved when we were girls, or how and when we reached puberty, influenced what we wrote about, how we interacted with other group members, and why we decided to participate in this project in the first place. However, the longer we worked together, the more we could see that a seemingly "individual" story could be looked at as one variant of a set number of responses to having a particular sequence and frequency of sociocultural "buttons" pushed. For example, we started by examining our experiences from within the context of our individual families, and then looked at them again in our group in terms of the degree to which they had been limited and shaped by the nuclear family structure itself. We began by writing about the troubles and successes we had learning to read our Dick and Jane books, then found in our discussions the similarities of our experience across our differences, and began to re-view our reading as a practice indeed

saturated with cultural messages and meanings.

Approaching the examination of our memories in this way, we could talk about patterns and tendencies, and therefore, talk about some alternatives, not just for us, but for many. While our experiences are not to be held up as "standing for" the experiences of all, much of what we have uncovered as common ground amongst us will be territory familiar to others in our culture. All of us in that culture have worked to fit ourselves one way or another into the same pre-existing social structures. Put another way: not everyone who grew up in the 1950s and 60s wore those panty-girdles Margaret Atwood refers to, but females and males of all descriptions and convictions in that culture knew about, and were somehow "shaped" by them, one way or another. And the idea of panty-girdles is, of course, sewn up in the stories we tell ourselves.

By October, just as the group was beginning to find ways of operating effectively as a collective of six, one of our members had to leave our group because of changes in her work schedule. We had to "shift gears" to adjust: the woman who had to leave our group had been our youngest member, and she would often view our discussion topics from angles that the rest of us had either forgotten about or never knew!

After this major change, the group of five remained intact until the project ended in January, 1995. This number seemed to work out well for our purposes: the group

was small enough that we could discuss everyone's writing at each session, so that we could develop a comfortable connectedness amongst ourselves, yet it was large enough that we felt we did indeed constitute a group, comprising quite different yet compatible personalities.

Indeed, it struck me as I played back the cassette recordings I had made of our sessions just how much, how often, and how loudly we were laughing together. While we always discussed serious issues and deeply-felt emotions, we also shared much food and fun at the meetings, eventually considering them to be much-needed and looked-forward-to evenings together that helped all of us get along in our day-to-day lives as much by providing an intimate, dynamic support group as by providing the critical analysis of memory-work.

Initially, we were all nervous about the informal, unstructured aspect of our meetings, since we were so used to the direction and shape of a chaired, agenda-driven meeting format. It seemed we were not always "pushing ahead" through the material as quickly as we might, and that we were instead spending time "just visiting". However, it became evident that the "lifetalk" in which we engaged at every meeting was not superfluous, but intrinsic and essential to the development of our understanding of the memory-work in which we were engaged. To have cut off our talk about our relationships with our children and husbands, about our daily rituals and habits, about

encounters with our siblings and parents, about our schoolwork and students, in order to "get down to business", would have made us miss many vital links and gaps between the past and present in the fabric of our lives. To have cut off our talk to "get on with it" would have severed the bonds of intimacy growing amongst us that we needed in order to share and critique one another's memory-work stories. To have cut off our talk to "move along quickly now" would have meant we were reverting to the very dualistic, hierarchical order that this work was intended to resist. The sessions had to be allowed to meander, their pace determined both by the content of the memorywritings themselves, and by the their connections to and amongst members' present lives.

The intimacy that developed amongst the members contributed to their loyalty to the group and dedication to the project: no member missed more than one meeting, which were always at least three hours long; all wrote at least one substantial piece for each of the themes; all made it to rescheduled and extra meetings; all have remained interested in and supportive of one another; all have discussed maintaining or strengthening their commitment to using collective approaches in education.

Our commitment to the BookMarks project grew out of a sometimes vague and often disturbing sense of disconnection from ourselves and the world, from certainty and singular truth, that each of us experienced, out of which arose a

need to take a close look at many "fundamental" beliefs we thought we had been standing upon. When the foundations turned out to be built on shaky ground, it was impossible for each of us alone to regain our balance, and we turned to each other for support. Together, we began trying to design flexible bridges, trapezes, highwires, and perches, with the idea that we would use the common strands we shared as construction materials. This turned out to be heavy labour, faced as we were with contantly clearing away so much debris from our crumbling, but sharp and dangerous, fundamental assumptions.

First, we had to work hard to keep in mind that we are both constructed and construct ourselves into our social realities, which meant that we had to look not just outside and around, but also examine our own compliant and sometimes enthusiastic participation in our gendering. As Bronwyn Davies (1993) puts it, "How subtle, how invisible, and how much our own are the discursive mechanisms and structures through which we have learned to know our place and remain in it" (p. 8). By acknowledging that we have played a part in creating and maintaining our own situations, we were recognizing that we also had the ability to change the way we had been acting and reacting. In experimenting with aspects of the collective memory-work process itself, aimed in particular at a re-view of childhood memories associated with reading, we were attempting to make conscious our unconscious and

internalized behaviour patterns of compliance and resistance to the textual construction of our gender. We hoped to use that information as a first exploratory step toward understanding ways we might change ourselves and thus our circumstances, so that we might lead more informed, connected, and self-aware lives.

The second "load of debris" we carried throughout the project, was that we had been so well-trained to seek out and identify only single, final, and absolute truths. We were ever reminded of how much we needed one another to help in the difficult and frustrating job of juggling the multiple, partial, and often contradictory pieces of truths we began to uncover, because our culture offers us so many ways to pretend it ain't so. We had to keep trying to adjust to this new, multi-voiced, multi-focussed way of hearing, viewing, and perceiving.

Part of this process involved realizing that the information emerging from our memories in the course of the project did not and could not tell the whole story. At different stages, different emotional responses would emerge in each of us to memories that were surfacing, but those responses did not completely replace or efface how we felt before, nor was "the latest" to be our "final" and "complete" response forevermore. This was most confusing and messy, and we were not "finished" with our confusion by the end of the project.

The collective, however, helped us to carry on through

this confusion because we were starting to see in this spaghettish mess of memories some similar strands. In trying to discern some patterns in the writing strands, we most definitely influenced and affected one another, intimately and profoundly. Without that sort of deep connection, collectivity doesn't work at all; no one can even dig through the first superficial layer of sociability, and the group spins its wheels. But in our functioning collective, with the fragments of memory material that emerged, the members began the work of creating for themselves interpretations of their lives that would be most helpful and productive to them in taking on the living of their own lives. There is no question that these interpretations that emerged from BookMarks writings and dialogues were "constructed", and that the particular design of those constructions was affected by the time, the place, the people. The constructions were specific and contingent and local, which they needed to be in order to be of any use to any individual or group; re-instating "universals" would have silenced everyone's voice all over again. Taking on an open, dynamic, and self-generating notion of subject construction that is inherent in collective memorywork helped us deal with the difficulties we were having with the construction of reality and subjectivity in our culture, which were: that the nature of the construction was invisible to us, that we had no conscious participation in it, that gender definitions

within these constructions were limiting and oppressive, and that the construction was assumed to be singular, fixed, and final.

Related to these difficulties was a third major stumbling block: the ongoing danger of tripping and falling back into the Binary Divide. We had to contend with our feelings of discomfort about collectively comparing and critiquing what are labelled "personal", "private", and even "secret" stories in our dualistic society. We have been well-trained to abhor the "airing" of anyone's "dirty laundry"; we have learned well what are "appropriate" and "ladylike" topics of discussion. Thus, it took much ongoing discussion to understand that this bipolar public/private split has long silenced and isolated women, interfering with our ability to see the cultural patterns in the conditions of our lives, which has in turn interfered with our ability to seek alternatives.

Lifting the shroud of silence from memories we had been trained to forget naturally did not provoke in us fond nostalgia for the past: many of the memory-stories emerged full of anger, resentment, pain, and confusion. These memories cannot and should not be "prettied up"; indeed, one of the points of this exercise was to interrupt the kind of textual training we had grown up with that has allowed us to accept without question the notions about women wrapped up in such sayings as, "If you can't say something nice, don't say anything at all."

In writing and talking about our memory-stories, we began quite specifically trying not to "see things from the other guy's point of view", because that was the view we already knew very well; what we were looking for was information from our lost and hidden and submerged perspectives. In this endeavor, we collapsed the dualistic researcher-researched dichotomy, and used ourselves for ourselves: we were our research material. We realized that the only place to start was with ourselves, and in a sense, this research became a type of collective therapy: we were looking at ways to help ourselves to become healthier and stronger people.

The women of the BookMarks Collective were very much like the intersecting bubbles of the 3-D Venn diagram image with which I began this thesis (p. 9): while each of us has distinctive features and a different combination of traits, we found commonalities and points of intersection between and amongst us. Such interaction in a shared space strengthened and enlivened us all. That we engaged and exchanged at such openings amongst ourselves indicates that the system in which we operated was open and vital; "autocatalytic [and] transformational" (Doll, 1989:246).

The term, palimpsest, also introduced early in the thesis (p. 11), evokes an image that may help convey the effect that the individual and collective writing of our memories had upon us, because it vividly describes the way in which "one writing interrupts the other, momentarily

overriding, interminging with the other; the old writing influences the interpretation cf the imposed new writing and the new influences the interpretation of the old. But both still stand, albeit partially erased and interrupted" (Davies, 1993:11). A multiplicity of meanings that were partial, sometimes contradictory, interactive, and layered, emerged within each member's writing and connected several, and at times, all members' work. Such interactive interpretive work took on its own rhythm, like playing improvisational jazz, each and all of us listening carefully to the dynamics of the unfolding piece, creating and discovering at once, individually and collectively.

B. OUR TECHNIQUES

> The scene unfolds as I write, searching for the appropriate words; detail after detail surfaces out of the memories that still strive to find expression in language.
>
> -Frigga Haug
> Female Sexualization

The women of the collective are not professional nor practiced writers of narrative, and so we felt overwhelmed and intimidated by the task of writing out specific, detailed memory stories. Yet we had read in Female Sexualization that to break free of our cliché chains, and make the unconscious conscious, we were to study and try to emulate the methods fiction writers use to re-create and enliven storied experience.

To be more attentive to the ways in which we reconstruct social structures, we were to try to concentrate

on one particular situation at a time--immersing ourselves in its sounds, smells, emotions, and attitudes--and let the situation itself draw us back into the past, allowing us once again to become children living the experience. The goal was to "find ourselves discerning linkages never perceived before; forgotten traces, abandoned intentions, lost desires" (p. 47). The authors reminded us that "it is not so much a question of 'having a good memory', as of practicing it", referring to this practice as "a form of archeology. We discover fragments of an architecture which we then begin to reconstruct" (p. 48). As tools to dig beneath the petrified surfaces of our tales to discover those fragments, some of us tried timed writings, or stream-of-consciousness, while others made daily journal or diary entries. Some of us attempted to follow the suggestions outlined in Female Sexualization, and others tried out techniques and styles gleaned from novels and short stories.

1. Detail

The authors of Female Sexualization suggest that one way of getting past the limited vision allowed us by our cliche-ridden, smoothed-over tellings of past events is to try to write down a single episode as precisely as possible, and one of the ways of doing so is by bringing concrete details into a specific memory-story. The women of the BookMarks Collective experimented both with using sensory details and describing specific incidents in their writing.

a. Sensory Detail

In their memory-writings about books themselves, particularly in remembrances of preschool experiences, several women dwelt not so much on books' printed texts as on their texture: writers attempted to capture the appearance, weight, colour, and feel of those first books. Several examples are included here not only to introduce the range of styles and approaches used by different members, but also to indicate the touchpoints amongst them: to write of books sensorially was not "assigned" to anyone, and was not discussed, yet every woman wrote tender memories of early experiences, often associating those book memories with significant people in our lives. The following have been excerpted from the written memory-work of the BookMarks Collective members. In all the excerpts, the names of individuals mentioned have been changed.

#1

At the library, my father would take me downstairs to the children's section, pull a few books he thought I might be interested in, and leave me to my own devices while he went in search of his own reading material. I would either check out his selections or browse through the books. As an adult clothing shopper I have developed the habit of moving through departments touching the material as I go. The "hand" of the fabric is usually the thing that draws me to it. It drives my husband crazy. I suddenly have a memory of myself as a child wandering down an aisle touching the spines of books until one catches my attention. I would pull it out and read it there on the floor.

There were times when I needed my dad. I would go upstairs in search of him. This act was akin to walking into a room full of strangers to whom you have to present a speech. The reward was finding my father. He would sometimes let me carry his books. A tactile memory surfaces again. The weight of the texts, my selections and his, and the feel of the various bindings drew my hands.

#2

I seem to remember the Little Golden Books with the pictures of the little round-faced cherub children with rosy cheeks and innocent eyes. They still are very attractive to me and I am drawn to those books whenever I see them. I probably felt as though I could see myself in those dear little faces; many people told me I looked like one of the Campbell's Soup Kids.

#3

Trying to remember being read to is very difficult. Most of my memories are wrapped in the sensations or texures of our home, rather than the books or the act of being read to. What I remember about our home is the feeling of safety and comfort. The colors were not bright but a brown and grey muddiness and for some reason I associate books with these colors. Perhaps it is because illustrations were for the most part poor at this time or perhaps it is because we were not well off and our home was old and shabby.

#4

When I was five, one of the tales I memorized was Goldilocks and the Three Bears, using as my "text" the illustrations in a cheap, pasteboard-covered picturebook copy of the story that I'd probably inherited from my three-years-older sister. What drew my attention to this book in the first place was that it had been cut out in the shape of the Bears' house, and that its muddied-pastel-colored full-page illustrations gave the book the appearance of having come to me from a softly-hued, gingerbreadish "Victorian" era, which I'm sure I already believed to be an appealingly romantic time even if I couldn't have put a name to it. The pictures filled each page completely; the little text that there was had been printed within the illustrations.

What sustained my attention to the the book was Goldilocks herself: I loved the look of her empire-waisted, gossamer-layered daffodil-yellow frock, and of her dainty, glistening black shoes. But her most important feature was, of course, her shining golden hair, done up in bouncy-looking ringlets. I remember that Goldilocks was pictured from behind in the introductory illustration of her, obviously to emphasize that her head full of blonde curls was indeed her key feature, more important even that her facial features.

#5

During my Latvia pilgrimage in June, I kept a daily journal for my father, who was too frail to make the trip. I had left Latvia as a toddler during World War II, and so had no memories of Riga, yet I looked for links with my past, my birthplace, and my native language. As my cousins toured me through Old Riga, the historical part of the

capital, I browsed the bookshops looking for children's books that I remembered. I asked for Kriksis and Pikstite, children's animal stories that I cherished as much-read favorites. None of the stores had them; apparently, they were out of print, although everyone I asked had heard of them.

Finally I was on a week-end visit to a cousin's house in the country, and I mentioned my search to her. She started rummaging through her bookshelves, looking to see if she had kept any books she had read to her children, who are now teenagers. She found several thin volumes, most of them unfamiliar to me, but among them was Sprungulmuizas Gada Tirgus, which can be translated approximately to mean The Annual Fair at the Village. I vaguely recalled it as having been a favorite of mine before I was six years old, but when I opened it and started to read, I remembered it BY HEART and had such a rush of joy that it took my breath away. Summoning up the long-forgotton lines activated my memory, evoking an aural memory of my father reciting passages to us with expression and enthusiasm. My sister and I used to laugh about the adventures of the various animal characters, and when I read it to her when she arrived in Latvia, she recognized it immediately. We were transported back to being tiny children together, experiencing the first joys of language and humor. I must have memorized it from hearing it read and recited numerous times by my father.

#6

There was a special place in our home. It was a corner of the furnace room. In the centre of the house. One wall of this small space was a book shelf. My parents' old university texts and a set of encyclopedias were stored there. In front of this shelf was an old desk. This desk was always piled with mending and sewing projects. I used to crawl up on the desk, make a nest of whatever was available, and explore the books. I would examine my parents' signatures in their texts: my father's nearly indecipherable, my mother's artistic, flowing, in colourful inks. Who were these people? I read as a blind person does, moving my fingers across the pages.

I was, I think, a solitary child.

#7

With some faint recollection of the past, I purchased the book, The Saggy Baggy Elephant to read to my son when he was an infant. When I revisited this story it was not the text that I remembered so well, but the picture of Saggy Baggy floating in a pond, his round tummy like a giant beach ball keeping him afloat. That picture rekindled memories of curling up with my mother, who was rather round and very soft. I recalled memories of safety and mothering. Could it be that this was what I wanted for my son?

b. Specific People, Places, and Things

Often, thoughts of books and reading evoked vivid memories of associated events, individuals, objects, or locales that we all tried to describe in detail. Such descriptions are important because so much of the meaning of texts grows out of the contexts in which we remember them. Indeed, these evocative elements in themselves constitute much of the text and texture of our remembered lives in their own right. We wanted to make use of our memories to help us identify where and how we have complied with social norms, and when and how we've resisted. Concrete, specific description is a critical aspect of remembrance because the versions we have been told and that we have retold in the past have had all contradictions and disturbances omitted from them, so that they have become smooth and clichéd tellings. We knew that if we were going to find any information we could use in these memory-stories, it would come from having looked inside their gaps and silences. The words "book" or "reading" may well not appear in the stories having most to do with understanding their effects on us.

#1

The bus would drop him at the corner at about six o'clock. I would watch him walk down the street with Mr. Bingham and Mr. James. As each turned down his respective drive, my excitement would mount. His footsteps would crunch up the drive, stride purposefully along the walk, and finally into the front door. "I'm home."

My mother usually came hurriedly from the direction of the washroom where she had been freshening up. I held back, waiting to be noticed. He would nod in my direction, ask Mom to mix him a gin and tonic, and head to the bedroom to divest himself of his suit jacket and tie. A few minutes

later he would be ensconced in his chair. The big, old wing-back. It was brown, covered in nubby fabric, and was placed to the right of the fireplace. There was a table placed nearby which always held several of my father's current books, at least one deck of cards, and the daily mail, ready for my father's perusal. It now held the first of two G & Ts which were consumed before dinner.

#2

What I find incredible is that there were any books at all during those years, since we were living at a stark, subsistence level. I found some photos of us taken in that first Displaced Persons Camp (D.P. for short, which I understand became an insulting epithet here in Canada in the 1950s, but the refugees called themselves that as a form of black humor). What overwhelmed me as I looked at these photos was the extreme poverty, which was vividly communicated to me by the dresses we are wearing. For example, in the 1947 family photo, my mother is wearing a beautiful, long-sleeved wool dress, obviously from her Latvia life, which I remember being a rich red-brick color. In a 1948 picture it has been cut down to fit me, with all the detailing of collar and distinctive pockets left intact, so it is easily recognizable. I am three years old, grinning from ear to ear, wearing what is clearly a newly hand-sewn dress with a very thick hem so it can be let down as I grow. In a picture taken three years later, I have on that same dress with its balloon embroidery, now looking very skimpy and worn, but still functional. It appears that my mother was looking after these practicalities while my father perhaps had more energy and time for reading to us.

#3

Most of that year I was six and not in school I remember with pleasure: I remember having naps in the afternoon, taking ballet lessons at the Teen Hall, skating in our backyard (out of which my dad had made a pretty good-sized "rink"), sledding with my sisters, making a house out of refrigerator boxes, swinging and sliding at the park, clonking away on the piano, playing with cutouts, looking at picturebooks.

I recall spending more pleasant times with my mom than any other time of my life--she talked to me about her life when she was a girl, and showed me the covers of sheet music that she had made and illustrated with head and shoulder sketches of men and women gazing lovingly into one another's eyes. I thought she was a wonderful artist, but knew that there was something odd about her drawings. Later, I realized that the "oddness" I sensed was that my mother had based her drawings upon 1920s and 30s movie stars like Carole Lombard, Jeannette MacDonald, and Nelson Eddy, and their crimped hairstyles (both the male and female characters), red cupid's bow mouths, and skinny eyebrows contributed to an extremely artificial "set" look of "beauty" that was different from the white-lipsticked,

black-eyed, bouffant-haired look I saw in magazines. My mother was out of step even with the other mothers of the time, not only because she was a decade or more older than most of my friends' mothers, but also because she'd frozen herself in a time zone that she'd created before she'd been married--a highly stylized, romanticized "drawn" version of the "perfect" life that existed for her in the movies and popular music of the Depression era.

#4

The cement block above the door with the year 1912 chiseled out of it intrigues me...how could anything as old as that still be standing? Well, it hardly is. The wooden steps to the principal's office worn where thousands of little feet have trod; the ink stains on the wooden floors in the rooms where grade three-ers have been since 1912; the saloon-type doors into the cloakroom; and the endless little mice that are always into the teacher's desk or our recess snacks, all add to the distance I feel here. I dont fit in, I have too long a walk by myself beside a ravine where the Curswell Gang lives. I'm not old enough to go to a school that was built in 1912! I belong in the new school! Why aren't they finished it yet?

#5

In grade seven we had a dear older woman, I think she must have been in her early sixties, whom we of course called affectionately "Granny". Miss E. tried her hardest to motivate her "deadhead" grade seven literature class. She had a true love of literature but we were much more interested in the opposite sex, "who said what when" than in anything she had to teach us.

One day after reading the poem, The Highwayman, to us, Miss E. wanted to show us how the author had used a particular poetic metre to capture the rhythm of the highwayman's galloping horse. She mounted the yardstick and galloped around the room, passionately reciting The Highwayman. That certainly woke us up!

It is the only time that I can remember a teacher attempting to "turn us on" to literature and reading. To me, reading in school was a dead and boring subject. I remember hiding my free reading books on my lap and reading while the teacher was reading and teaching.

2. Shift in Perspective

Some of the authors of Female Sexualization highly recommend writing one's memories from the third person point of view: "By translating our own experiences into the third person, we were enabled to be more attentive to our selves"

(p. 46). They believe that it is difficult to write about past events without some sort of distancing device, which a change in point of view can provide. Some of us practiced telling our stories in the third person, while others attempted to shift "back in time" and relate events in present tense, as if from the perspective of the child.

a. Third Person Point of View

She lay on the squeaky bed, knees drawn up to her chest, arms tightly clenched around them, head bowed in an effort to block out the sound of her father's voice. She wondered hopelessly where he had found her comics and if he had waited purposely for this precise moment to read them aloud to her family. She imagined him striding around the cabin, waving the flimsy newsprint in the air as she heard him reading the dialogue aloud:

> "Scott: 'I love you, I have always loved you. The past is behind you now. We have a lifetime to look forward to.'
> Victoria: 'I am so lucky to have found you again. I love you passionately, but can you truly forget Melissa?'
> Scott: 'Look up at that beautiful starlit night. Did you see that falling star? It burned brightly for a few seconds and then, in a flash, it was gone. Melissa was like that star. Yes, it still hurts to remember your betrayal but I know that it is over. Our love...'"

She had returned only moments before, half an hour late for curfew, to find the family playing cards on the kitchen table. There had been some snide comments about "Jeff" and "Leaving the campfire when everyone knows what you went off to do". Having no recourse, she had retreated to her camp cot in the kids' bedroom to escape.

She had been remembering the feel of his hand on her breast while she planned their future home: "It'll be large, on the water, with corrals for the horses and..." when her father started.

Damn him anyway, she raged helplessly. Those are mine. Why does he have to make fun of me? What's wrong with being in love and saying so? I'm in love...but it is pretty funny when you look at it like that. Everyone else is laughing. I'd rather be out there than in here...

She got up and leaned against the door frame, tentatively weighing the possibilities. Her dad caught her eye and returned to the text with renewed vigor. Soon she was laughing with the rest of her family.

We see a girl sitting at a battered old wooden table with her parents and brothers who are now repeating snatches of the dialogue for effect. We hear the laughter that would seem to signal a happy family but wonder at the glistening of tears in the girl's eyes.

b. First Person Child's Point of View

My eyes snap open with the realization that the day is finally here, and I congratulate myself silently for being so organized that I don't even have to get dressed for the day--I did that before I went to bed. I grab my suitcase on my way through the door (it's been ready for several days) and just to make certain my brothers and sister won't hold us up, I move less than quietly down the hall towards the stairs. I review the plan in my mind, the one I practiced last night when I couldn't get to sleep: Yes, I'll be patient. Yes, I'll be helpful. No, I won't be in the way. No, I won't be noisy. But where is everyone? Why isn't the car packed? Who's going to carry all this stuff to the garage? Don't you know I'M READY TO GET TO THE LAKE? My summer is waiting and so are my friends. I have things to do, places to go...

I find Mom looking for boxes; I find Dad in the garage wondering how everything will fit in the car; I find the dog chewing on one of the lifejackets. This is not moving fast enough! I find the E.D.T. (Estimated Time of Departure) to be one and a half hours away! What a waste of my summer! I can't stand it! What to do...what to do...what to do...COMICS! Hmmm, now let me see...I know that one comic takes me fifteen minutes to read, and since I have to wait an hour and a half, that'd be four fifteen minutes for the hour, plus two more fifteen minutes for the half hour, which means I need six comics to get me through the whole thing. Archie and Veronica are always best because they are a bit more reading than Little LuLu or Casper the Friendly Ghost, so I'll get six of those and go and sit in the living room and read them. By the time I'm done, WE'LL BE OUTA HERE!

3. Using Images and Metaphors

Sometimes, members tried to convey with figures of speech the sense of particular situations and bring to life emotional responses. Vivifying our textual memories involves a great deal more than talking about what we read in books; indeed, that so-called "direct approach" that we have all been trained to believe will take us "straight to

the point", takes us, instead, in circles: these apparently "straightforward accounts" are the kinds of smoothed-over, cliché-ridden re-tellings of the same old culturally acceptable, uncontradictory tales that have cemented over what we need to know. In Female Sexualization, this practice is referred to as one of the "displacements of the problem", which keeps us gawking, for example, at the words in Dick and Jane books for clues, and keeps us from looking up and around at why and how Dick and Jane books were constructed in the first place, and why they had such an impact on us. To loosen the hold of such habits on us, we needed to shake loose the lids on our tightened-down stories by thinking up new connections between things, by looking at relationships between them differently.

The first example below was composed by a member using a technique called "flow writing", which requires the writer to simply begin describing the surroundings from a different perspective from the "usual" or "expected". In this case, she has focussed on a black felt pen that her daughter had left on the table.

#1

I don't like you. I don't like the fact that your tip is wide and loose. Your colour is fading. There is something disconcerting about the smell of licorice as I write. I am wondering if you might be a metaphor for me. I feel wide and loose, imprecise, damn it why can't I remember? Are there secret thoughts? I don't like myself. I feel past my prime. My hair colour, cheap, is turning orange. I badly need a good hair cut. I, too, am running out of ink.

I am committed to hand in a story on Thursday and though I have put some effort into the process I'm not much closer. I have made a personal commitment not to lie but I find myself swayed into writing fairy tales. Then I ask,

why not? I have given myself the dark past. Why not balance it with another perspective? Is it because I don't believe my father's memory? Is it because the knots, the spaces, the tension I feel in trying to recall the past would seem to signal the burial of my memory?
I would like a talisman from that time.

#2

Reading books was a folding in of myself, a Möbius strip, an endless circle.

#3.

The seed of my adolescent/adult love affair with the written word came from my father. It was planted by the need to investigate that which so clearly claimed my father's attention in our home. It was nurtured by the loneliness which drove me to look for alternatives in other worlds. It grew as I discovered that for minutes, hours, and days, I could escape into the pages of a book.

These examples illustrate that our collective, comprising two visual artists, two who have always wanted to be, one sometimes journal writer, and one self-identified "not literate, but experiential" learner, managed to be brave with words, trying very specific and difficult techniques unfamiliar to most of us to delve into topics uncomfortable and often painful for all of us. This sort of focussed story-telling, writing anything and everything about a particular event, helped us recognize how used to censoring and restricting imagination and memory we are. Subjecting our ways of "dealing" with the past to such scrutiny was not always pleasant and never easy. However, such writing practice used to cultivate this discomfort level was an important component of the memory-work process, intended to shake us out of our complacency, our comfortable assumptions, as a necessary step toward re-creation. It is noted in Female Sexualization that, while we are conditioned to use repression and rigorous "forgetting" to keep ourselves on a

"steady" course, our delving into the past forces us to question our habitual plastering over of unsettling memories. The process threatens our stability, and is therefore quite dangerous, but "in questioning the foundations of past images, in making conscious the material out of which we have made ourselves...we are creating conditions for a more resilient fabric for our lives" (p. 48).

The initial act of writing itself was a form of liberation for us, but few of us would have embarked upon it on our own, and none of us would have grasped its potential as a sustained form of resistance in the present and a means to re-view alternatives for the future without the conversations of the collective.

C. OUR TALK

> Re-making meanings is both an individual and a collective project. It cannot be done by one woman alone. It cannot be done once and for all.
>
> Patricial Duncker
> Sisters and Strangers

During one of our meetings in mid-December, I was called to the phone, and when I came back to the rest of the women, who were by now laughing uproariously, one was loudly pronouncing, " And if I see one more women's magazine with a perfect fucking Christmas turkey dinner on the cover, I swear I'm going to throw up right there on the magazine rack!"

Another woman, nodding vigorously, said, "No kidding...I dread this time of year..."

Another: "I'm so tired already..."

And another: "I don't know how I'll get the Christmas cards out in time this year..."

Then I broke in, wailing, "You guuuyyyyys! How can you be saying all this stuff? I love Christmas, don't you?"

The women stared at me in disbelief, then burst into raucous laughter. After they regained their composure, they asked me: "Who gets to do most of the gift-shopping in your house? Who does the wrapping? Who decorates the inside of the house, including the Christmas tree? Who has to shop for the big dinner, invite everyone to it, cook for it, clean up after it? Who gets to take the kids to see Santa? Drive them to Christmas concert practices? Who writes and mails all the Christmas cards?

AAAAnnd, after flopping into bed exhausted after each day and night of preparation, who can't sleep for fear she's forgotten something? Whose stomach churns all day, knowing she can't attain that magazine picture-perfect Victorian Christmas nomatter how many shortbread cookies and mince pies she bakes? Who feels GUILTY for failing to make Christmas feel and taste and look the way it's SUPPOSED TO? JUST WHOSE FAULT IS IT?"

It was about then that I had to admit that I had actually apologized to my children when it didn't snow one Christmas Eve. I remembered dying the One Thousand Deaths of The Failed Hostess when friends came to visit bearing Christmas gifts, and I had none to give in return. It was

my oversight, my thoughtlessness, my job. Then I recalled how often I had eaten my Christmas dinner of a bit of cold dressing and some mashed potatos while standing in the kitchen cutting pie for everyone else's dessert, feeling guilty because I resented this situation. Yet I "loved" it. I must.

I had been filled with mass media-created memories of Christmases I'd never had, and a desire to "re-create" such fantasytimes for my family. When I'd fail to attain this unattainable goal, I'd feel guilty and inadequate, but then there was always next year....

Outside a group context such as the BookMarks Collective, I may have complained about the exhausting load of duties associated with preparing for Christmas, but I would not have questioned the duties themselves, nor my reasons for "buying into" performing them. Such silence, such lack of critical dialogue, tends to validate and perpetuate the unconscious performance of value-laden rituals. We scurry about mindlessly, believing that everyone but us can pull off the hitchless sit-down meal for twenty-five; we sigh deeply with false nostalgia as we gaze at soft-focussed pictures of The Whole Family singing Christmas carols around the fireplace after dinner. We participate in making such Hallmark-manufactured "perfection" into goals we strive for, overspending and overtiring ourselves into frazzled maniacs by Christmas Day in the process. Setting ourselves up for failure, and then

feeling enormously guilty and depressed by Boxing Day. What we could have, should have, would have done, if only....

At our meeting that night, the issue of Women's Christmas Burdens evolved into a more general discussion of our own and society's expectations of the female as the selfless, sacrificing Angel of House and Hearth, and what we could do to combat the negative effects of those expectations. In the collective context, the "word became flesh": we could move from a critique of our own actions to applied theoretical discussions, to conversations about alternatives to this debilitating behaviour we could use in our day-to-day lives. To carry out and carry on with such changes requires some on-going support and feedback from one or more others with whom we can talk on a regular basis, not as a project, but as a way to live our lives.

The "I love Christmas" episode occurred after the collective had already written, shared, then rewritten a number of memorystories, so we were able tc apply some of the techniques we had learned when this topic came up. However, knowing we couldn't count on important topics randomly and conveniently "arriving" for our demystification, we continued to work through all the steps of the memory-work process, from initial writing, to collective critique, to rewriting. Everyone at some time or another during the project gained insights from group critique of her work. Members of the collective were able to see contradictions, silences, and blockages in someone's

writing that she was not aware of, at least not consciously. Three examples of the "after" effects of group discussion of memory-stories are presented in this section, to give some indication of the impact the collective had upon the individual's re-view of her past.

In the first example, the writer had focussed throughout her initial story on the sole influence of her mother in developing her love of reading, mentioning her father only when drawing a parallel between him and her husband at the end of her story.

#1
Excerpt from Initial Writing

As a mother I have now assumed the role of reader in our home and my son and I have included reading in his bedtime ritual. I find it interesting that my husband, who loves books himself, hasn't become more involved in this area. However, when I think back to my own childhood, it is my mother about whom I have strong memories of reading, not my father. I feel sad that my dad wasn't more involved with me in this area and I fear that my husband is missing out on a tremendous bonding experience with our son.

When our group met, we wondered aloud at what was "inside" this information that seemed tacked on to the end of a piece about her mother, and this writer chose to delve into this "mere mention" of a father who was a powerful, well-known figure who had "cast a large shadow" in the world as well as in his daughter's life.

#1
Excerpt from Rewrite

Paradoxically, although my father had very high expectations of me scholatically, he seemed to resent the time I spent reading. It was almost like a control issue for him since it was an area where I could go and he couldn't follow or influence me. Initially, my dad encouraged my reading habits by buying me books and lending me his own collection of boyhood tomes. However, as time passed and I spent more and more hours with my nose buried

in a book, my father's support began to wane, and he became increasingly threatened by my preoccupation with books.

Every spare minute was spent lying on my bed as I devoured books, completely lost in another world. Oblivious to reality, including my family, I used books to travel to other, much more interesting realities. The web of enchantment that books cast over me was all-consuming and impossible to resist.

My dad began to complain that I wasn't spending enough time with the family and soon my reading became a real power struggle/issue between us. The more time I spent reading, the more angry my father became. Looking back, I can see how controlling my father was but as a child I was confused and hurt by his attitude. The more my father tried to enforce his will on me, the more I rebelled, relying on books as an escape hatch from my father's disapproval.

It is ironic that my dad, as an educator, would have been so afraid of the effect books had on me. On the other hand, if I take into consideration my father's controlling nature, it's not that surprising. Books liberate one's mind and open you up to many different viewpoints/orientations. Perhaps my father was afraid that his influence/power over me would be diminished if I became too "aware".

In our discussion of this rewritten material, the collective noted the ironic shift in the story, from a description of reading as a "web of enchantment" in which the reader is "oblivious to reality", to a consideration of books as mind-expanding, as liberating. Also interesting is the dual role that reading plays as both the source of contention between her and her father, and her solace and escape from his disapproval of her reading. The writer considered that indeed books and reading had played these contradictory roles both at the same time, the complexity of which she was beginning to view as a reason for their ongoing appeal and central importance in her life. We extended this to a discussion of the complicated mix of contradictory emotions of love, resentment, admiration, desire to please, and resistance to control we have all

experienced in parent/child relationships, both in our roles as children and as parents. As was always the case with everyone's rewritten stories, this work opened up further spaces to be investigated, and other possibilities to explore.

In the second example, the writer is taken aback by the realization that she has unconsciously left out of her initial writing crucial aspects of her first school experience after having come from Europe to the United States as an eight-year-old child.

#2

This memory stuff is treacherous. It is as if I have a very sneaky censor who slips in and helps me delete the more "disturbing" bits from my writing. When I mentioned my first American school experience, this is what I left out:

> School was a travesty. The first "teacher" sat me in the back of the room and totally ignored me, the gave me Cs for grades. Even as a child I know that she was "marking" me so that it would appear as if she were interacting with me. It was a small two-room country school in rural Indiana, and by the luck of the draw I got this gutless wonder as my first American teacher.

The first thing I see in this is the anger that has stayed with me for forty three years. I can't remember her name, something with an "E", BUT I can remember her pinchy face, salt and pepper grey hair and rimless glasses. I also recall sitting at the back of that room just seething, feeling isolated, as if behind glass, because of the lack of language, but even more so because she was physically isolating me in the seating arrangement, and emotionally by ignoring me, not acknowledging my needs.

Also, in all previous learning situations I had been rewarded for my quick mind, early reading prowess, eagerness to co-operate and excel. In the last Displaced Persons Camp, hadn't I been the one who got a special doll from the Red Cross package for being the "best" student? There was even a picture commemorating this. And now the humiliation of being a nobody know-nothing. BOY WAS I MAD. I can still see it in my mind. Everyone but me in the class playing a math game--just simple problems--adding and subtraction stuff (this was grade three), while I already knew my multiplication tables and could do long division! But nobody asked me, and a litte curly-haired

girl got all the praise for easy correct answers while I sat there, in the back of the room, mute.

Is this the origin of my always wanting to sit in the front of the room, even now? Also, I think it focussed my already competitive spirit and channeled it into academics. I was never going to allow myself to be in that situation again. Better yet, I would put myself in charge of the situation....was this really one of the reasons I went into teaching? Now that IS a disturbing thought, since I have always supposed that my motivations were idealistic, positive, and altruistic.

In our discussions of both this member's initial writing and her rewrite on this topic, we were interested in what had been left out of the tellings, what "silencing" had gone on. We discussed how very early we learn what display of emotions is appropriate and acceptable for each sex, and focussed on the ways in which we learned as girls to suppress and to deny our anger in particular. The "displacement" or "misplacement" of anger so often serves to re-cycle us into the system: we sit, silently seething, until we learn the rules, and then manipulate them to be as much in our favor as possible, unconsciously supporting the status quo. For years, this member avoided examining her reasons for channelling herself into the competitive "stream". Again, however, when she did look at this aspect of her past, she was somewhat dismayed that her "motives" were not "purely" for the benefit of others, as they were supposedly supposed to be. We talked of our unwillingness to blindly accept the either/or split between the competitor and the sacrificer.

The powerlessness of the ignored and silenced child in our culture was another topic of discussion, brought into focus by another member of the collective who had spent her

first year of school in a huge split grade 1/2 class, ignored at the back of the room, coloring mimeographed pictures of duckies and bunnies. While she had not suffered from the language and cultural barriers that the other member had, she'd been just as effectively silenced. Her response was to raise her hand and volunteer "Know what, Teacher?" stories that became more complicated and outlandish. After a while, the teacher would not acknowledge her raised hand. This member told us with great passion that she became a grade one teacher so she could save some children from ever having to experience such rejection. She also told us that to this day, she is a great storyteller.

In the third example, the writer, suffering from a memory-block of her preschool reading experiences, decided to ask her father to tell her his recollections of that time. Initially, the writer was reluctant to examine his tellings, tempted to accept the recollections unquestioningly, wanting his stories to be the whole story.

#3
Excerpt from Initial Writing

My writing and thinking to this point had left me with a lot of unanswered questions. I wrote them down and phoned my Dad. We talked for about an hour. His responses are paraphrased in the next paragraphs.

Notes from the phone call:

"I read to you from the time you were an infant. It seemed to calm you--didn't matter what. It was the flow, my voice that soothed you. I read Plato, Uspensky, Fitzgerald and Hemingway. Sometimes I would just grab one of my old university texts. I don't remember having any children's books around although when you were older we would go to the library.

"After work I needed to unwind. I never read the paper. That was for your mother. I preferred, still do, a

book. You would climb up into my lap and I would read aloud. Your mother needed some time, too. You didn't interrupt much. I could read for half an hour or more while your mother fixed dinner and you would sit contentedly in the chair. When you got bigger you used to sit on the floor and page through books, pretend to read as I read.

"I always thought that the important thing was to have books lying around the house, not put away carefully but just lying around. I thought that if books were around and if people were reading, it would just evolve.

"Your Mom was never much of a reader. The newspaper, a few magazines. She was the one who helped with your reading homework. I never could stand Dick and Jane. Useless bloody stuff."

#3

Excerpt from the Rewriting

I once wrote a personal memoir called "Tale of a Spoiled Identity". In this story the heroine, as part of her therapy, writes a letter to her parents. A portion of that letter follows:

> We used to have a thing in our house that we did not spank the kids. I used to think that was a great thing. That hitting a kid was a terrible breach of trust. I now see it as an extension of our not touching at all. Not in anger or in love.

When I now juxtapose these memories of the emotional minefield that was my home, and my father's recently expressed ideas about nurturing my love of books, I see a similar pattern.

He tells me, "I read to you from the time you were an infant. Didn't matter what. It was the flow, my voice, that soothed you. I read Plato, Uspensky, Fitzgerald and Hemingway. Sometimes I would just grab one of my old university texts. We didn't have kid's books around." Why the hell not? I was three years old, for heaven's sake.

Later in the conversation, he said, "After work I needed to unwind....You would climb up into my lap and I would read aloud. Your mother needed some time too. You didn't interrupt much. I could read for half an hour or more and you would just sit in the chair." I would just sit in the chair, no interruptions for a fucking half hour. Sure he was reading, but strictly on his terms. That's how it was in our house, his way or the highway. When I was young I would acquiesce. In my teens I rebelled. But despite this rebellion, my early ways of knowing continue to surface to this day. I have spent years believing that my needs were unrealistic, that my instincts were misguided, and that my accomplishments didn't count.

At first, I was attracted to my father's stories. I liked the idea of being read to by Plato, etc. The warmth of my father's lap felt foreign yet secure. I've talked with a friend about it in a tone of voice conveying that same smug authority with which I used to say, "We were

never spanked in our house". Then gradually, I began to see that here again, I had been duped.

In the collective's discussions of this writer's initial writing, we had talked about the degree to which we are willing to take on as our own others' versions of our lives, because so often we cannot remember being allowed or asked for or encouraged to have our own. The point we talked about here, was not whose version was "correct", because we were becoming increasingly aware in our work of the subjective, fragmentary, and multi-voiced nature of such knowledge. This point was that this writer had had not even a partial "version" of her own to add to the picture. She had had to go to her father for "reminders" of the "details". Members of the collective had only to ask what and how this writer would like to respond to his remembrances, and that invitation provoked a very charged rewriting--it was as if the years of repressing her "forgotten" part in and of the story erupted out of her like a volcano; that many of these remembrances are, at least initially, resentful, even raging, did not seem surprising to us. This type of remembrance was not the "whole" story, nor did it constitute the writer's only feeling toward, or singular understanding of her father, but this "piece" of the fabric was a part the writer had not been permitted, nor had permitted herself, to remember. In it, she is the needy, dependent, adoring child of an aloof, self-absorbed father, fitting herself into his life in any way she can, settling for emotional

scraps. We talked about our sense that anger is directed toward both her father and herself for unconsciously having permitted it to go on unchanged.

In the rewritten work, this writer has tried not only to re-call some of her own versions and interpretations of events, but has also begun to think in terms of re-viewing rebellious times--in her case, the teen years--because some elements could be reshaped into present-day tools of resistance. The group reflected upon the fact that while in our initial tellings of our lifestories, we seem to present ourselves as uniformly passive and accepting throughout the past, in discussion and rewriting, we can recall at least a few periods of open rebellion or passive resistance. Again, it seems critical to live our lives collectively, to support us through the recollection of such resistent selves, and help us to explore ways of productively applying that knowledge in our present and future lives.

This writer's response to her father's version of the past also provoked in other members childhood memories of life as "spare luggage", as "appendages" of our parents; we agreed that at the time we were growing up, the "personhood" of children was certainly not an issue. We very much had to fit in and fit around adults' interests, schedules, and ambitions. While as Baby Boomers, we may well have been the self-absorbed products of indulgent parents in upwardly-mobile post-war homes, we were also the

children of self-absorbed parents who thought of us as their "things".

We considered that the major myths of the perfect middle class life promoted after World War Two had to do with Getting Stuff: the successful businessman must live in that suburban rancher with two cars in the attached garage, and every sparkling new appliance in kitchen for the Little Woman. Each and every family isolated in its rancher, in Suburbia, with its Stuff. We were born into the beginning of an era of incredible competitive consumerism, which we felt set the mood in our home and school lives as children, had much to do with what we tried to reject as teenagers, and has now cast its credit card-shaped shadow over us all.

In myths of high-stakes dualism, much is about appearances, about looking good and keeping up; about grabbing onto what you need, using it, then tossing it out. We have learned to live up against, rather than within the world. For all the warnings of environmentalists, we have yet to figure our way out of that one: having already damaged or destroyed so much of our environment and the people in it, we carry on in our isolated, self-interested, dog-eat-dog rat-race you-versus-me lives. Too much and too often, we pass it along, telling those stories intact and unexamined, at home and at school.

Breaking into or out of such deeply-ingrained patterns of behavior requires an intervention of some kind, interrupting the patterns themselves long enough to take a

look at them, to see what you can change about what is wrong. To interrupt and to keep on interrupting requires a group effort. In our collective, we decided that one of the main reasons we were experimenting with memory-work was to see if it could be used to help us learn and work in such a dynamically interruptive way.

D. OUR TEXTS

> If we are to advance down the pathway of liberation, we have to study the ways in which we have set traps for ourselves, as well as identify the means we have used to sweep aside obstacles in the past. Individual modes of appropriation of the social are frequently conceived as personally unique; in our view, this involves an underestimation of the sociality of human beings.
>
> -Frigga Haug et al.
> Female Sexualization

> As Tillie Olsen has said: "Every woman who writes is a survivor".
>
> -Adrienne Rich
> "Anne Sexton: 1928-1974"

As we wrote and discussed our memory-stories about our girlhood reading experiences, our definition of "reading" widened and deepened, as did our sense of what "text" means. Our stories were not just about reading words on a page, but about "reading", or interpreting, the con/"text"/ured environments we found we had been woven into. While each of us lay claim to her own quirks, much of what and how we had read as girls followed a design patterned by the time and place of our shared social fabric. We were fascinated by the crossings and crossovers of our stories, recognizing that these "points of affinity"

comprise the material we might unravel and use to spin ourselves some re-newed tales.

The stories are presented here within three age groupings: three to seven, eight to twelve, and thirteen to fifteen. Remembrances tended to "fall" into one or another category not only because the themes chosen for the collective were ordered in a generally chronological fashion, but also because the social structures in which we find and "place" ourselves retrospectively are also organized in linear, "time-line" fashion. We tend to look back on a life as if it is a segmented earthworm, each "section" representing an "age" or "stage" of development. The members of the collective were more than a little directed, then, toward writing an age-related "sequence" of vignettes.

However, their effect on us as we worked together was quite different: one member suggested that taken together, our texts were like a spiralling inward and outward at the same time--we were finding the experience to be coiling inside us, taking us into a deeper understanding of ourselves, and at the same time, spinning us ever outward into the "world". Such a spiral image connected us to and within that world. Such an image also moves away from the idea of life's "timeline" of experiences as a linear march forward, or as a single-stroke Bell Curve: here we go, trudging up to our "peak", only to stumble and limp down the other side, toward The End of the Line. We "read" our

histories instead as spirals, overlapping bubbles, collages, and layered transparencies, as does Elaine Risley, the protagonist in Margaret Atwood's novel, Cat's Eye:

> But I began then to think of time as having a shape, something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another. You don't look back along time but down through it, like water. Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing. Nothing goes away. (p. 3)

The experiences of our different ages are to be read as covering and uncovering our parts, partly; as leaking and dribbling into one another; and as sometimes scrawled in lemon juice, decipherable only under flame.

1. Three to Seven

a. Daddy Stories

#1

I sit here with my copy of the thin book, twenty-eight pages of rhymes which relate comic animal adventures for children, which I brought back from Latvia as an icon of my younger self. I rediscovered it with joy, and, I thought, an unqualified happiness, but after our group sharing last night I am re-approaching the task of sorting through awakening memories with trepidation, wanting to keep them intact, to shield myself from delving too deeply in search of the true meaning of those childhood interactions. I want to leave undisturbed and unexamined my early reading and learning relationship with Tetis. We children always called him Tetis, which is simply one word for father in the Latvian language, but for us it was exclusively reserved for him.

Tetis was a gifted storyteller and my sister and I were the perfect adoring audience. It was a type of escape for us all from the reality of the cramped single room which housed our family of four in the refugee camp. He was and is an enthusiastic talker and himself enjoys

reading and has eclectic interests. I think reading and interacting with us was a natural activity for him: he knew intuitively how to catch and hold our interest, and he must have gone to some lengths to GET books in that abnormal setting. When I encountered the concept of the "Renaissance Man", I felt that Tetis fit that multi-faceted definition. He would have made the ideal Trivial Pursuit game partner; his mind seemed to be the repository of a plethora of facts and theories. I remember my overwhelming conviction that he knew all and we could ask him anything and he would have the answer. He was a larger-than-life figure in my eyes which I know from readings in child psychology is a fairly typical phase for young girls.

It was from my father I learned the rhymes in this book before me. One thing that strikes me now, upon browsing through the book, is that all the main characters are male. Even when the poem refers to a family group as in the adventures of a small boy mouse, Mikis, it starts with "Mouse father with his children....". There is no mother mentioned and in the illustrations for that particular rhyme, of the five children, only one is a girl and she is barely visible in the drawing behind a larger figure, and is never mentioned in the story. There are female figures scattered through the illustrations but they are part of the setting only. This beloved book of mine depicts and legitimizes a patriarchal order, yet that was invisible to me as a young listener. Only through a year of becoming sensitized to such issues can I see it, the lack of female characters in the writing of this very respected Latvian author. Yet even now I want to make excuses for him, to defend the book as a typical one "of its time", to go back to the illusion of safety that it and my father spun for me as we sat together all those years ago, in an oasis of our own creation.

#2

The living room was divided from the dining room and farther back the kitchen by a long couch. Here I would sit, legs dangling, or I would huddle into a corner of it. Perhaps I even crouched behind this couch, waiting for some signal. My father would peruse the mail, shout occasional comments to Mom, who was in the kitchen fixing supper, sip his drink, and then finally open his book. I was sensitive to his need for space, or I had been told as much in no uncertain terms by my mother, who was extremely fond of broad, sweeping statements like, "Don't be so selfish and spoiled. Your father just got home from work. He needs time alone." It was probably the latter. In our home we didn't celebrate intuition or sensitivity. We were told how to behave.

At some point, on some nights, I think I would finally be invited up on my father's lap. There I would be content to have my father read aloud to me from his book. The words must have held little meaning. I was so starved for attention and approval that I would accept, embrace, even this meagre offering.

#3

One of the reasons I liked Goldilocks and the Three Bears was that my father told me I looked just like the pictures of Goldilocks in the book. Until I was about seven, my hair was a light enough shade of brown that my parents called it "blonde", but which I would call "tan": a flat, mousey, blend-into-your-face nondescript color. Now, my older sister had inherited my mother's glossy almost-blue black Welsh hair, and my younger sister had genetically lucked into my maternal grandmother's chestnut-colored hair. My drab, light locks had apparently come my way paternalistically.

One of the treasures my father had kept tucked away when he came to Canada as a teenaged D. P. after World War Two was a reverence for the tall, blond, blue-eyed so-called "Nordic" (or so-called "Germanic", so called "Aryan") ideal of beauty promoted so vigorously by (dark little) Hitler and the boys. That my father happens to be tall, blue-eyed, light-skinned-and-haired must have (amongst other things) made it quite easy for him to buy into and then promote other features of the FascistRacist package: that this "type" of individual was racially "pure" and "superior" to other so-called "racial" groups. Not to mention that these notions fit in perfectly with those of the long line of pro-militaristic, pro-industrialistic anti-Bolshevistic pro-blond anti-Semites from which he is descended.

That my mother happens to be a tiny, black-haired Welsh Druid may also have had something to do with my father's loud and frequent declarations of his belief in the natural superiority of the Big Blond(e).

That blonde-ness has a long-standing (Western tradition) association with goodness, beauty, purity, and that stuff, must also be hooked up with this (and with my sad feeling of attractiveness and innocence lost when my almost-blonde hair grew to be definitely brown. I think of how many adults I know, particularly women, who are anxious to tell you that they were "Soooo blonde as kids--white-blonde, in fact!").

That I am a middle child, who, according to the "experts", supposedly needs something to mark me unique, an individual, may also have played a part in my remembering of this particular fairytale about a carefree, self-indulgent, adventurous, so-pretty little girl about my age (not either of my sisters' ages), who just happened to have lovely golden curls (not like my older sister's shining sheets of black or my younger sister's mane of redbrown but yellow hair) "just like you", says Daddy.

I must have stared and stared at the illustrations, talking aloud to myself, doing the voices of all the characters. An my father, overhearing me reciting the story more than once, decides one day to talk about how brilliantly I read. How very, very smart I am.

"Pretty and smart, mymymy. Look at that shining gold

hair on that smartsmart head. Do you hear that, Mother? Do you hear your daughter reading? Reading with such expression! At her age! She gets it from me. As you know I speak four languages, read five. Look at her. Beautiful."

Now, my mother probably sighed and rolled her eyes at this ridiculousness, but it is unlikely that he'd have noticed at this stage. Once one of my father's notions makes it out of him in spoken wordform, it shimmers in the air before (for) his eyes, a vision. He has a way of speaking his truths into dazzling (shimmering, shifting) existence.

As for me, I had mixed feelings. I did like how impressed he was with me. And I thought I was doing a kind of reading, just like I considered the loops and swirls I made on paper comprised a kind of "writing" that was very real, very necessary and meaning-ful. But private. And certainly not the same kind of reading aloud that my older sister could do. I wasn't mixed up about that (was I?). But I felt myself begin to worry that maybe my father was mixed up about that. Mixed up, or, like my mother was always saying, making things up. (How could a person talk about any of this stuff?). I was also fretting that any minute my mom would accuse me of purposely hiding the fact that I could not read, wilfully committing the sin of omission by not mentioning it, and I wondered, my stomach flipflopping, what Dad would do to us all if she made a scene, drew attention. (Was it my mother who held the reins of the truth of things? Or did I suspect that she simply lacked a certain imaginative flair when it came to seeing and telling "what happened"? Well, she certainly used her truths for creative punishments, if nothing else).

Next thing (I was soon to find out), my father began telling a few friends and workmates about his daughter, the five-year-old reading prodigy. One of these fellows, Mr. Erhardt, happened to have a big reel-to-reel tape recorder, which was not a commonplace item in the late 1950s; not for us, anyway (we didn't even own a T.V. set). He offered to come over to our house and tape record the little whizkid. I wonder now if this Mr. Erhardt had been trying to catch my father in one of his lies, or whether he was just trying to find things to tape-record, playing with his new toy, or whether he thought he was doing my father a favor/honor of some kind. Maybe some of all three, a combopack.

When Mr. Erhardt came over, and my father was telling me what to do, I could see the sweatbeads on his forehead as he leaned over, gripping my arm and eyeballing me. (Where was my mother, I wonder now?) This was serious business. I had better do a good job. Do my best for Daddy. Mr. Erhardt didn't have all night. I would only have one chance. So I had better do it right.

I listened to him very, very carefully. I nodded. I performed, flutters in my stomach, but under control (panicking was a grave sin--being "hysterical"), and then

forgotten as I lost myself in the recitation. After, I remember Mr. Erhardt clapping, and my father hugging me. I don't remember ever hearing that recitation on tape, though. And I don't remember ever "reading" it aloud to myself again, either.

The members of the collective were quite surprised to find that for four of six of us, our fathers figured so prominently in the stories we recalled about the development of our textual lives as children. We had all assumed that for these early years in particular, everybody would end up writing about mothers, thinking that they would have played the central roles in our early reading remembrances. However, while we did write or talk about our mothers as well, they played, at most, secondary roles in our stories. It was suggested at our meetings that the chosen focus of our tellings may well have had nothing to do with who spent the time reading and telling stories to us, for we could recall vague, pleasant sensations associated with mothers' lap-told tales. The mother and her storytelling, at least in these cases, may well have constituted such a constant and relied-upon presence that it need not be remarked upon; it was a "given", the commonplace air of childhood. The father, on the other hand, was the rare, valued, and elusive object of desire, whose opinions and feelings were to be most carefully attended to, when and if he chose to pay the slightest attention to his admirers, who waited upon his favor.

In the homes in which these writers grew up, the fathers were most definitely the family patriarchs, setting the rules, the tone, the schedules, the dinner hour for the

entire household. They exuded privilege and power; they counted most, and everyone knew it. The rest of the family had to bend to their needs. Fathers were served first, and they got the biggest piece. Fathers went out into the mysterious and exciting world, and when they returned, they were fussed over and catered to by our mothers, clearly indicating to us as small children the "order" of things.

Yet, while fathers were desirable, it was clear that they were not very interested in us as children. As one woman sighed, "I felt like I'd died and gone to heaven just having my dad in the same room with me, but that hardly ever happened."

To receive the slightest attention from Daddy was a wondrous thing, but the desire for that attention and the delight when and if he gave it were accompanied by the humiliation of being ignored, the degradation of "performing" in order to be noticed, and the hurt of being deemed worthy of so little of it. Even after we had learned to be cute and adoring, quiet and docile, tractable and flattering in order to capture Dad's attention and his love, they still seemed ever so fleeting and conditional. We were supposed to "read" his moods and his silences, learn to anticipate his needs. Even then, what we had to offer might not be good enough. We could still be ignored or rejected.

The collective noted that the nature and impact of these father-daughter relationships are so potent, that as

adults, those of us who wrote "Daddy" stories seem to spend an inordinate amount of time trying to work out our ambivalent, often contradictory feelings about the "meaning" of ourselves in relation to our fathers. Several of us continue to feel belittled, ignored, and dismissed by them. Yet, while fuming inwardly at their selfish, self-serving, self-absorbed selves, we continue to seek their advice, approval, and notice.

b. Mommy Stories

#1

My longing to be a princess stems in part from my mother. She was a liberated woman. She taught school and shared the household chores with my father. (In fact, my father taught my brothers how to iron, having mastered that chore in boot camp).

She was a matriarch, from a family raised by a matriarch. My two aunts are also matriarchs. They are all strong almost domineering women and they expected their daughters to be the same.

My mother was a no-nonsense woman when it came to "princess" things such as hair, nails, makeup, pretty dresses, and sewing. She had neither the time nor the interest and hence I was gypped out of my chance to be the princess in the house. (I considered this to be my right because I was the youngest of three and my two older siblings are male).

Because my mother was not interested in lace, frilly dresses and long, curly hair, she assumed that I was not either. My hair was cut short and I was dressed in no-fuss clothes. Having two older brothers, my "hand-me-downs" were usually jeans and boys' hockey skates. I recall having only two "princess" dresses when I was in elementary school. One was a hand-me-down and the other was a beautiful Christmas dress made especially for me. I can visualize every detail of that dress so it must have been very important to me.

I must say, however, that I don't recall my mother ever discouraging me from fantasy "princess" play with my dolls and cutouts. Perhaps she knew how much this structured my thoughts and expectations. She wanted me to be a strong person like her but I escaped into a world of fantasy. I didn't want to be like her. I wanted to be a princess and to live happily ever after with my prince.

#2

In the afternoons, while my little sister is napping, my mom talks to me while she rolls out pie dough, or she takes out her old photo album, and we sit in front of the fireplace while she shows me pictures of herself in different outfits she liked when she was young, or she tells me a story. I love these times in a way, because my mom is not telling me to go play, but treating me like a grown-up, and telling me her feelings about things, and what happened to her when she was a girl. But something feels wrong, too, because so often she is telling me bad things my father did and said, and about my grandmother, too. And I don't say anything, just nod, or sit there quietly, but I don't know if it matters, because it's like my mom is talking to herself or something, and I just happen to be there so she won't feel queer talking out loud to herself. I know that once or twice I started to ask something, and she looked at me, frowning, like she was mad, or like she forgot I was there; whatever it was, she stopped talking then, and told me to go away.

So my job is to be quiet, just listen. She talks about what she thought her life was going to turn out to be like, which is a lot like the endings in those old movie musicals we went to see together. She tells me that nothing is the way it should be in her life, nothing has ever turned out the way she dreamed it would. She tells me of the hours she spent, playing and imagining when she was a girl, and it's as if it's the imagined world she wants to live in, even now. She sure doesn't remember very many good things happening in her life anytime at all, and her disappointments include having us kids, she's told us all enough times. The good times she tells me about are the times she spent reading fantasy and fairy stories, and playing dolls and cutouts by herself. All those things I like best, too. Thinking this gives me a jumbled feeling.

Of the two examples of "Mommy" stories presented here, the first one indicated to the collective members that parental power and influence seemed not entirely a gender-, but also a role-related issue, and when the matriarchal figure is defined as powerful and central, then the mother can exert a great deal of control and authority, often having as much or more power within the family unit as the father.

However, because we live in a patriarchal culture, the nature and effects of the matriarch's power are different

from those of the patriarch. In this writer's family, the mother seems to have associated "strong" with what our culture has deemed "masculine": short hair, no-fuss, plain clothing, and a focus on "reality" and "practicality". Meanwhile, everything else in the daughter's life--friends, books, advertisements--promoted the equation of prettiness and attractiveness with a passive, dainty long-haired girl in frills and lace. To be "strong" was to be masculine, not feminine. Different ways of being strong were not acknowledged. The daughter "read" the cultural mythology, the "prince and princess" stories, and wished to fit into that model. She wished to be like all the other pretty, dressed-up girls, so that she might be adored and treasured just like the books said she would be. As a child, the writer couldn't have known that no princes were riding to the rescue of the long-haired lovelies in frilly dresses, either. She could only resent her mother for interfering with her chances for ultimate happiness.

Unlike those of us who longed for a few words and a little time from our fathers, idolizing and trying to please them, this writer openly rejected her mother's ways of being, dreaming of being everything her mother was not, favouring the predominant cultural model of femininity. The strong father figure was adored and admired, while a strong mother figure was rebelled against. While this writer told us that her mother was "not unconventional enough to be interesting", she was nonetheless

unconventional enough to be considered unconventional by the cultural norms of the time, as a working mother, a woman whose household duties were shared by her husband, and a plain-speaking, plain-dressing woman actively ignoring the insistent messages telling her to stay home, take pride in her ironing, and get herself some lipstick and a girdle.

While the mother resisted those messages, they were certainly powerful enough in the child's life to override her impulse to "be just like my Mommy". Since we have few, if any, cultural myths of the matriarch, we not only do not honor her as a role model, we do not acknowledge her existence at all. The collective members wondered, then, how the mother, her sisters, and their mother had managed. It was suggested that before and during World War Two, perhaps more variety in ways of being "feminine" may actually have been allowed, even encouraged. As examples, we thought of the necessity of the strong, central figure of the matriarch in farming families, of the honored and powerful position of the mother in many ethnic communities, of the countless women who worked in factories during the war, and of the role models of strong, single women presented in 1930s and 40s movies. After the war, however, it seemed there was a big media push promoting a uniformly frilly, passive and dependent image of femininity, probably because of society's desire to get women out of the workforce, and send them back home to make pies and babies:

Rosie the Rivetter was to become the nameless "Lady of the House", vacuuming in her high heels. At least in the ads.

On the other hand, many of us consider our lipsticked, high-heeled mothers to be powerful figures in their own right, and to some degree, we questioned whether the shorn, plain model promoted by this writer's mother was entirely necessary for a "strong" female to emerge. In the context of the times, such a model seemed to have been honoring and promoting what was considered male while at the same time denying and even denegrating what was considered "female". The implication might be that you couldn't hope to be strong unless you took on more male-connected traits and gave up some female-designated ones. The writer told us that while her mother constantly reminded her that she was a "Plain Jane" and had better accept it, she would wax rhapsodic about what beautiful babies her sons had been, what gorgeous, curly hair they both had as little boys, what long and silken eyelashes. In one way, it seemed the mother felt she had to harden her daughter to the "realities" of being a tough woman in our culture in ways she didn't have to harden her sons. But in another way, the mother allowed for, and even indulged her daughter's fantasies: it was she who had the handmade Christmas dress made; it was she who purchased many of the ballerina and princess books her daughter so loved. Such indulgences, however, are presented by the daughter in her memory-story as her mother's giving in to her fantasy "weakness". We

discussed the fact that this writer had simply recognized that she could not look to gain social recognition through accomplishments, intelligence, bravery, or strength; the only route available to "specialness" she could see was through attaining the princess look, which she had access to only in fantasy books and play.

The notion of fantasy play, and "fantasy" life versus "reality" are featured in both "Mommy Stories". Often in our BookMarks meetings, the topic of our culture's binary notion of fantasy versus fact came up in our discussions of the writings: reading fiction is often regarded as an escape into another world, a kind of dreamy, even cowardly "hiding out" in a made-up world of fantasy, to avoid facing up to the factual world of reality in which we "really" live. At some point or another in our girlhoods, five out of six of us were "accused" of such rampant reading escapism. We read "too much", were "day-dreamers", and were in danger of confusing the "happy endings" of fiction with the "harsh facts" of real life. Interestingly, none of us could recall our brothers being worried about in this way, no matter how many superhero comic books they read; indeed, some were praised if they picked up a "real" hardcover book of any description.

Only we girls, apparently, were in danger of becoming "lost" forever in a fictional world. We talked of having internalized such judgements, and worrying to this day that we read too many "trashy" books, that we read too much

without reflection, simply "devouring" books, that we read too often to turn our brains "off" rather than "on", that we read to "escape" from our real lives. One member called her reading "a mind-numbing drug", and others agreed that was a good description of it. What is it about our lives, we wondered, that we feel we need such regular psychic escape from it? No one answered at this point.

The second of the "Mommy Stories" in particular brought into focus how ambivalent our own feelings are about our "addiction" to reading fiction. We noted that the daughter in this story seemed confused and disturbed by the idea that because she loved to read and play by herself, she could be like her mother, and end up "alive" only in a fantasy world. This struck us all as a scary thought, since the mother seemed a deeply unhappy and lonely woman, who didn't "confuse" reality and fiction so much as live in a strictly bipolar universe in which everything in "real" life was equated with meaningless misery, while in the end, everything in storylife turned our to be perfect and meaningful. The discrepancy between the kind of life "promised" in those books and what grown-up life turned out to be like apparently proved too disturbing for this mother to cope with, which may say a great deal about both the content of the books and the content of her life.

While the mother of the first story wanted to "toughen" her daughter to the realities of the world by

dismissing the fripperies of the "princess" fantasies, the mother of the second story seemed to be warning her daughter about the same "harsh" world, having found her only solace living "inside" the fantasy world. In different ways, both mothers were telling the daughters that the life of girls in storybooks had little to do with the day-to-day life of women the world. Yet, while the fairytale world seemed to be a place of escape from everyday life, lodged within the fairytales' motifs were ideals or models upon which to base expectations, beliefs, and attitudes in our everyday lives. On the one hand, we were being warned that life wasn't at all like it was in the stories: we weren't to really believe in fairy godmothers, handsome princes, and happily-ever-after endings. On the other hand, we were being told that much of our lives could be like the fairy tale, if we behaved and looked and thought the right way: how many little girls, the collective members wondered, watched actress Grace Kelly's wedding to Prince Rainier and believed the "dream" could come true for them also? But if in the end that dream did not come true, then it must be the girl's own fault: she must not have behaved or looked or thought the right way. And if the girl had spend so much of her girlhood striving to "match" the ideals of beauty, passivity, and goodness that were presented as necessities for her to be swept away by the prince, what stories to live by were then available to her when the Cinderella

fairytale dissolved before her eyes? But after all, what did she expect? How naive could she be? Had she not been warned that life was not a fairytale?

It seemed that in the fairytale/life split, a woman was offered a lose/lose proposition: believe in the fairytales that saturate our white middle-class cultural reality, model yourself on their female ideal, and you set yourself up not only for grown-up disappointment, but also for grown-up incompetence: what did Cinderella know how to do, besides obediently clean, look pretty, and dance? And once the fairytale rug was pulled out from beneath you, what then? Clean, look pretty, and serve? For wife and mother, the model focus shifted to serving others and giving of herself, until she disappeared. The edible woman.

If the girl managed to find a way to reject the feminine role options presented to her in the prevailing cultural myths at the time, what then? She could not be expected to make up some "new" feminine being. Our dichotomous culture allowed her the option of acting like a boy, taking up the role of what is still called a "tomboy" (why, we wondered, not "tomgirl", or "bettyboy"?) A not uncommon movie and novel scenario at the time presented the tough and freckled girl with her pigtails tucked up under her baseball cap. One version focussed on her transformation into an ultra-feminine beauty gliding down the stairs in a long, white gown toward the shocked but

delighted Young Man who had provided the catalyst for the girl's transformation: Romantic Love was the cure. In another version, the tomboy character was used as a foil to emphasize the ultra-femininity of the central female character, and in this case, the tomboy remained a pathetic or comic figure whom others treated with contempt and derision. The "mannish" teenaged girl or woman would be shown chasing after men, but being avoided like a plague. If presented as a wife, the "mannish" woman was depicted as a huge and ever-bellowing creature married to a little "Yes, my dearest" meek (womanish?) husband whom she bullied and bashed with her purse. Such a "role-reversal" was "perversely" funny. The cultural message was clear: while it was understandable that a girl would crave to be a boy, since boys do have the favoured position in life, and are the "better half" of the male/female dichotomy, tomboy behaviour would only be tolerated in prepubescent young girls, not in women.

Another option seemed to have been taken up by the mother in the second memory-story: she went through the motions of living her day-to-day life, unsatisfied and unfulfilled, making her "escape" from that world on a regular basis, drifting into the fantasies of the stories she had learned as a child, keeping them alive in her imagination. In a sense, they seemed to have kept her "alive", too, with a collection of petrified hopes. But this kept her teetering between worlds, ensuring that her

life would remain a static limbo. However, as a woman alone, isolated, depressed, and repressed, unhappy in her marriage and disappointed in her role as mother, where should, or could, she have looked to make a change? To help herself?

Or: should she have been happy with her "lot"? People were starving in the world, after all. Many probably would have been happy to have a home and stay in it, be taken care of. Most women would have thought having a husband and children was perfect. She made her bed, didn't she? If she was so unhappy, why didn't she get a job? Leave her husband? Get a life?

In our discussion of the unhappy mother, we were becoming more and more angry and agitated. When we looked into what was happening, it emerged that more that one member considered her mother to have been deeply unhappy, and that, while as adults we could understand all the social and emotional reasons for that female "condition", since we continue to suffer with many of its symptoms, we were at the same time furious with those mothers for their remote helplessness, for their lack of action on their own behalf. Even when we couldn't think of a thing they could have reasonably done at the time, we still wanted them to have handled things differently.

There was silence. Then one woman said that she was convinced her mother's unhappiness hastened her to her premature death. Another woman nodded, saying that she was

sure her mother's bitterness and frustration ate away at her like a poison, and she too, died a painful, slow, and untimely death. All three of us wanted our mothers to have saved themselves.

It seemed appropriate then not to speak, but to listen to the words of Adrienne Rich (1974), written in memory of Anne Sexton, poet, a suicide at forty-five:

> I would like to list, in Anne's honor and memory, some of the ways in which we destroy ourselves. Self-trivialization is one. Believing the lie that women are not capable of major creations. Not taking ourselves or our work seriously enough; always finding the needs of others more demanding that our own. Being content to produce intellectual or artistic work in which we imitate men, in which we lie to ourselves and each other, in which we fail to give the attention and hard work we would give to a child or a lover. Horizontal hostility--contempt for women--is another; the fear and mistrust of other women, because other women <u>are</u> ourselves. The conviction that "women are never really going to do anything", that women's self-determination and survival are secondary to the "real" revolution made by men, that "our worst enemies are women". We become our own worst enemies when we allow our inculcated self-hatred to turn such shallow projections on each other. Another kind of destructiveness is misplaced compassion. A woman I

know was recently raped; her first--and typical--instinct was to feel sorry for the rapist, who had held her at knife-point. When we begin to feel compassion for ourselves and each other instead of for our rapists, we will begin to be immune to suicide. A fourth way is addiction. Addiction to "Love"--to the idea of selfless, sacrificial love as somehow redemptive, a female career; to sex as a junkie-trip, a way of self-blurring or self-immolation. Addiction to depression--the most acceptable was of living out a female existence, since the depressed cannot be held responsible, doctors will prescribe us pills, alcohol offer its blanket of blankness. Addiction to male approval: as long as you can find a man to vouch for you, sexually or intellectually, you must be somehow all right, your existence vindicated, whatever price you pay.

Self-trivialization, contempt for women, misplaced compassion, addiction: if we could purge ourselves of this quadruple poison, we would have minds and bodies more poised for the act of survival and rebuilding.

I think of Anne Sexton as a sister whose work tells us what we have to fight, in ourselves and in the images patriarchy has held up to us. Her poetry is a guide to the ruins, from which we learn what women have lived and what we must refuse to live any longer. (pps. 122-123)

c. Sister Stories

Since both of the following were written by the same member of the collective, I am labelling them "A" and "B" rather than "1" and "2". I am also "stretching" the age category to include the second story here, since the writer would have been at least nine in it.

A

We had an "encyclopedia" of fairy tales and children's stories that I remember very clearly. There were twelve volumes arranged in ever-deeper shades of green and blue, with the lighter-colored beginning volumes for small children, and the more deeply-colored "higher" volumes for older ones. I make connections between these books and my older sister, perhaps because she read them a lot. She has the books now and I have asked her to find them and I will bring them home to look at.

I don't think I was close to books when I was young, nor do I remember being particularly interested in them. I was exposed to the usual Bambi, Snow White, Cinderella, Red Riding Hood, Three Bears. Hansel and Gretel I found to be particularly intriguing and somewhat frightful--separation from mother, being alone, being lost.

I admired (envied?) my sister for her reading. I think she read all the time--Bobsey Twins, Nancy Drew, Hardy Boys--she would get lost in them for hours.

I don't remember being at the public library at all...!

B

Dinner's nearly ready but I'm starving! I wish I had something to do....Where's Lynn? Rats!--She's in our room again, reading. Okay, maybe I'll read, too. What's Lynn reading, anyway? Nancy Drew. I'll pick this Nancy Drew, no, maybe this one, or how about this one? Well, it doesn't really matter, so just choose one! I'll sit here in our room and keep my sister company:

> "There were three other kids from our school who went to camp that summer; there was only one of them I could trust..."

I wonder what it'd be like to go to camp. Which of my friends do I trust, anyway? Well, today it would be Carol and Susan, but I didn't trust Carol the other day when she told Don that I thought he was cute. But, he is pretty cute, and so shy. Maybe he'll be playing baseball at the park after school tomorrow. I'm glad Dad had those bases made for us to use--they really help and we have such a good time. Boy, Lynn sure is enjoying her book. I think she wouldn't even notice if I was here or not. I wish I

could enjoy reading as much as she does. I should be able to...so I'll try again:

> "There were three other kids from our school who went to camp that summer; there was only one of them that I could trust..."

"DINNER!"
Finally!
"Lynn. Lynn! LYNN! Put your book away, dinner's ready!"

Well, if her dinner gets cold because she just has to finish the chapter, that'll be her problem. She must be reading a more interesting Nancy Drew book than the one I picked.

While this writer was the only one of the collective members to have written about a sibling in relation to reading habits and patterns, her written remembrances opened the memory floodgates for the rest of us. However, that this member had written about this topic twice, when the rest of the group had not written about it at all, indicated to us that she was more interested and concerned about the "text" of this relationship than the rest of us were in our siblings' influence on our textually gendered lives.

In this writer's family, her elder sister had taken on and taken up the role as the "reader", which meant that the younger sibling could never really compete in that department; she would always lag behind, feeling incompetent. Try as she might to model herself upon her adored and admired elder sister, this writer couldn't get herself to like reading that much; she couldn't understand her sister's absorption in such an activity. That she would of course dislike the very thing that interested her sister apparently much more than she did; that she would have trouble reading the same books her older and more

experienced sister, did not occur to the child. Instead, she became convinced she wasn't interested in reading, and that her sister was "better" and "smarter" because reading was her "thing". She would try to find other things that she would be good at, but still, throughout her life, she assumed that her sister's choices and opinions must be good ones, since she was ever older and smarter and good at important things, and therefore, followed her lead.

After this writer had shared with the collective some of her experiences with and feelings about her older sister, another member, looking somewhat guilty, said that her younger sister had apparently told her many times that she had "bullied" her about her reading skills and choices, but she had brushed off the sister's concern. Another member, an eldest child of four, noted that her younger siblings claimed to have become non-readers after having witnessed how much trouble she had gotten into with her father concerning her "addiction" to reading. Still another thought how often her younger sister reminded her of the times she had crawled into the older sister's bed when she was scared or couldn't sleep, and had the older one tell her stories she had read, one after another, until they both fell asleep together. The older sister hadn't bothered to consider before why that was the memory the younger one would bring up so often, as if it were most representative of their childhood relationship.

Being able to read first, being good at it, and loving

it to the point of "obsession" were traits the elder or eldest sisters of the group had in common. Three of us have younger sisters, all of whom have told us ways in which our reading abilities and habits have affected and influenced them, for good or ill. But in the past, we hadn't cared to listen. We never did pay much attention to what they had to say. We were reminded that we hadn't even mentioned these sisters in any of our stories.

Those elder sisters who had also written "Daddy Stories" saw that there were some parallels between our feelings about our fathers, and our sisters' feelings toward us. What the writer of the "Sister Stories" had brought to the table was a reminder that we are never just "hapless victims"; we act both as oppressed and oppressors, particularly within an hierarchically-arranged nuclear family. The family member with less overt power and control, such as the younger sister, is not only much more interested in, and aware of, the habits and preferences of the elder, but has to work harder and longer thinking up more creative ways of getting and keeping attention, and finding ways they, too, can be "good" at something.

Our parents often helped us along in these endeavours, having few qualms about comparing siblings' skills and abilities, sometimes setting up lifetime rivalries and resentments about many things, including what we read and how we feel about our reading. Also,

most of our parents seemed to think nothing of labelling us as one thing or another. Constant reminders that "You're the bookworm and you're the athelete" certainly influenced the course of the interests we pursued. One member recalled her parents actually designating her as the "smart" one, and her sister as the "pretty" one.

d. Moral Tales

#1

I remember only two bedtime stories. One story concerned a little girl who pulled wings from flies, legs from spiders, and generally tortured other defenceless critters. She was very pretty and pampered and much admired for her beautiful red shoes.

One day she was asked to go to the store for a loaf of bread. After some pursuasion she agreed. On the return journey, a freak storm erupted and filled the streets with water and pot-holes. Faced with crossing a large pot-hole, she chose to sacrifice the bread to save her shoes. She placed the bread in the middle of the puddle and prepared to use it as a stepping stone. When her shoes touched the bread, however, she began to sink into the hole. She was unable to move. When we next saw her (the story was enriched at this point by a vivid book plate), she was permanently lashed to the loaf of bread which had assumed the weight of a stone. She was trapped in an underground cavern where her only company were the critters she had tortured in the past. They are pictured climbing all over her. Her final act of selfishness doomed her to this fate for eternity.

Counterpoint to this story is the one about the little match girl who selflessly perished in the snow one winter trying to make a few pennies to help her impoverished family. Clearly, I didn't measure up to this child, so by a process of elimination I must be the spoiled, selfish one.

#2

My mom and I both like stories that make us cry. We like "The Little Match Girl". We like "The Little Mermaid". The endings are "happysad" because the girl child characters may die, but they go to a better place, to Heaven, to the arms of Jesus. Well, maybe not in "The Little Mermaid", but she makes us cry because she Loved so <u>much</u>, so <u>deeply</u>, that she sacrificed herself! We like stories about sacrifice and giving, because that is the <u>most</u> good thing, like that stone-hearted selfish statue of a prince learned from the little bird: to give, give, give all of himself for the good of others. I want to be good, extraordinarily <u>good</u>.

My perfect self would be like those characters. My favorite movie right now is Song of Bernadette, about a French girl who sees Virgin Mary. Lourdes is the place where she sees and talks to her "Lady", where people have been going ever since for miracle healings in the waters. Not that the waters help Bernadette, who ends up getting tuberculosis or cancer in her legs and who has to suffer terrible pain before she dies. But she's happy to suffer, and happy to be dying and going to God.

We aren't Catholic but I wish we were. I want to be a nun. Mom says there are no nuns in the United Church. But my dad used to be Catholic so I know you don't have to be born into it. I could turn Catholic and I will. I will practice sacrificing.

From what we recall of our childhood "instructional" story experiences, female characters were most often deemed "good" when they exemplified selfless, passive, sacrificial behavior. The only male sacrificial character we could recall being told to model our behaviour on was Jesus. However, we recalled most clearly not stories of the Crucified Christ, but stories of Jesus as the little child's friend, presented to us as an invisible but everpresent, gentle but powerful, wise but humble Friend who would hear our prayers. He was anything but passive or powerless, unlike the female characters is stories made up especially to illustrate ideal behaviour for girls, who tended to have no important characteristics other than their selflessness. As the flip side of this dualistic moral instruction, we remembered only girls as central characters in stories illustrating the penalties of being selfish rather than selfless. They were the ones used to personify vanity and avarice as well. Not counting all the evil witches...

While it could be that our parents were actively

choosing those moral tales featuring girls because they were aiming to shape the behavior of their girl children, the lessons to be learned from them were frighteningly clear: a girl must be taught the dangers of ever focussing on herself; she must realize that such self-concern would make her like the self-absorbed, pretty girl in the "Red Shoes" story, who thinks of nothing and no one but herself, and is apparently therefore capable of acts not only of dreadful cruelty but supreme self-absorption: her ultimate crime is using the family's food for her own vain needs.

What the girl is encouraged to be like instead is the pathetic, helpless, and unthinking match girl, who does not act wisely on her own behalf, who does not use good sense or action to fight for her own life, because somehow, it has been decided that she would be better off dead. She is an "ideal" figure who comes up with not one good idea, but simply gives up and give in to her "fate".

Some of us could reconcile ourselves to such messages only by taking up a zealous, if skewed, religious view of things. Taking up self-sacrifice passionately at least makes it less passive: one is doing, rather than being done to. While not all group members were exposed to such "moral" tales as youngsters, all of us recalled knowing at least one young girl when we were growing up who threw herself into a religious passion. Such martyr-ish bliss and "next-world" focus helped some of us accept for a time

the otherwise self-destructive moral lessons: "Crave nothing for yourself. Do nothing for yourself. Learn to live for and through others."

e. Grade One

#1

Since my birthday is January 1st and my parents either thought I was brilliant or wanted me out from underfoot, I started school at the age of five. I could not attend the local elementary school because of age restrictions. My parents chose to send me to a Catholic day school instead. My father would drop me at school in the morning. To say I left him reluctantly would be an understatement. I was often hauled into the school, protesting loudly, and plunked in my seat. My teacher, Sister Agnes, believed in the adage, "Spare the rod, spoil the child". I never actually felt the sting of the pointer, but I imagined it vividly. Anthony Kilpatrick, who sat next to me for a time, was forever having the damn thing smashed down on his desk.

The one thing that really set Sister off was messy printing. In an attempt to avoid notice, I developed a bizarre style of script. I would print my letters as small as possible. They turned into a tiny, little spider scrawl. It didn't work. My books were forever being waved around as a example of what wasn't acceptable.

I don't remember any books in the classroom except a text for Bible study. I never got my hands on one of those because I was exempted from that portion of the curriculum.

The next year, I began grade two at our local school. I was in this classroom for only a short time when my parents and I were invited to a conference. Maybe I wasn't invited but I was there. Amid tears from my mom and blustering from my dad, I heard that I was ill-prepared for the program and was being returned to grade one, where the fat, old grey-haired grade two teacher, whom I disliked intensely, felt I would be much happier. I wasn't sorry to leave her, but I did feel that I had let the folks down.

The next day, I was introduced to my new grade one classmates. Here we began again. This time, some of it must have made sense, or I became more adept at playing the school game, for I was soon reading with the Bluebird group. The name had a musical lilt. You knew just by the tone of this teacher's voice that she liked being with this group. Whoever this teacher was (I've forgotten her name), she had a fixation on "Blue" as a prefix for her reading groups. We had the Bluebirds, the Bluejays, the Bluebills, and the Crows. (Can this really be?)

Amanda, cute little, smart little Amanda was, of course, in the Bluebirds. Not only was Amanda perfect on

the outside, she had the good fortune to have a hole in her heart. This was discussed at length at the start of each school year. We had to be careful of Amanda. One year she even had time off to get it repaired. We had to make her cards once a week until she got better. I didn't like Amanda or many of the other "bluebloods" much, although I chose/happened to be in their group for reading. I much preferred the Crows. Neil, Debbie, and Emile were the sole members of this group. None of these three kids made it out of that group in school.

In our reading group, we used to sit around in a circle on hard metal chairs. Teacher would sit in the circle beside a blackboard of some kind. We would be taught words in isolation first. "Cat", "mother", "Puff", and "cousin" for example. Then we were expected to read them in the text. We did this in round robin fashion. It was important to keep your place.

The Dick and Jane reading series, taught to me by a succession of well-meaning but forgotten female teachers, followed me through my elementary school career. Just how far this lunacy extended I can't recall. I don't remember being repelled by them. In fact, I think I wanted a family like theirs, where life was so simply stated.

#2

In grades one and two, I did not have a clue what long and short vowels were. I clearly remember thinking what a dumb guessing game the workbooks were. There appeared to be no rules for finding the correct answer. I remember guessing whether the vowel was long or short, then waiting in a long line to have it marked, then returning to my desk, changing the wrong answers to the correct ones, and then waiting in line again to have it checked. Always there were only two choices so how difficult could it be and why did I always guess the wrong one? I failed to make any connection between the workbook drill and actual reading, which I loved. Nobody ever questioned why I was having so much trouble with phonics. In fairness to my teachers, however, I must mention that during my elementary school years there were at least thirty-four students in every class - the Baby Boom years.

Because of my difficulties with phonics and the resulting difficulty with spelling, I always felt dumb. Anyone who was a good speller was a brain in my eyes. I know now that I wasn't a poor student; in fact, I won a silver dollar for being the top math student in both grades one and two. That, however, didn't make me feel smart, because to me, math was fun. I liked to imagine that each number had a personality. Nobody liked seven because he was pointy and hard to add to other numbers. Nine was the big shot and easy to add to - always one less that the number you were adding. Thinking back to this I can see now that I had an ability to see the patterns in math but couldn't hear the differences between the long and short vowels.

#3

Miss Bainbridge scares me. She isn't that old, but she has silver in her front teeth, and she has a hunched-up shoulder and curvy back. Her voice is up in her nose, and scrawky! She never smiles, but seems always to be yelling at us. We are not a good class, she says. We are not learning the rules quickly enough. We don't line up in an orderly fashion. We can't tie our own shoelaces. We are Babies, she tells us. Just when are we going to learn?

I am very nervous and edgey in school. I am worried that I will never get the things Miss Bainbridge is telling us. I want her to like me, as she seems to like some of the other girls in the class, but I just seem to get on her nerves. I am not one of the children who came to school already knowing how to read. She tells me that she is surprised at me, since I'm one of the oldest in the class. I should also be better at my numbers. I try to concentrate on counting the bundles of sticks, but I end up playing with them, and that gets Miss Bainbridge <u>really</u> mad.
She calls me a daydreamer and a dawdler, which are very bad things to be in her class.

I am in the "middle" reading group, which Mom says must mean I'm doing fine, but it doesn't feel fine. I have memorized what words go with what pages and pictures, just like I have done before, but the squiggles that are "words" are still mysterious to me, although I know the "shapes" of the ones in the book we are working on. I am just fooling along. When Miss Bainbridge finds out, she will hate me even more. She won't even put me into the "Low" reading group; she'll put me outside! She'll take me down to the principal's office!

I pay very close attention to the pictures in the books we are learning. I listen very carefully when the teacher says the words and when other children read. I think I am the only child in the class who must do this; everyone else can read "normally" already! This is my dirty secret.

I can write my name now, at the top of my worksheets! This is not pretend! I can write the letters, and it means me!

But Miss Bainbridge crosses out my work and prints my "proper name" above it, because she says I have printed a nickname, a babyname, not my real name. It is the only name anybody has ever called me at home.

Not one of the six members of the collective had fond memories to share about her grade one experience, and that poor beginning didn't blossom into anything better for most of us for the rest of our school years. We

considered that perhaps we were inspired to become teachers, not because we all loved school so much, and had such wonderful teachers, but rather, like some children of alcoholics, because of our bad beginnings, we "married" into the system with reform in mind!

Each of us who had had trouble of some kind associated with learning to read, or learning to adjust to school, thought she'd be the Only One. Each assumed that all the others in the collective would say they had regarded themselves and had been regarded as good or excellent students from the very beginning. In fact, in these early grades, all of us had either felt we were "dumb" or that the teacher had treated us as if we were. Even those who had been categorized as good readers found the class size, teaching methods, and teacher attitudes to be less that positive and encouraging. Our teachers were either forgettable or memorable only for their creative mean streaks. We wanted to feel some sort of generational professional empathy for these women, knowing that they had been stuck with huge classes of children, with few resources, with changing expectations and curricula. Knowing all that, we still failed to understand the need for some of their tactics. Too many, it seemed, were convinced that their job was to whip the grade one children into "shape" through humiliation and drill--kind of an educational boot camp mentality. Mainly, we learned institutional compliance.

Who were these women, we wondered, hoping to help one another generate some specifics--to recall names, even. However, for most of us, our primary teachers are lumped together in our minds like so much grey dough. One of the members noted that in those days, primary school seemed to be a kind of single female teacher's ghetto, comprising women who didn't appear to like the work or the kids much: boys or girls. The one act of "favoritism" that stuck in our minds was that the teacher's "pet" had always been a little girl. Also, those of us who had particular trouble with reading got to know quite a few boys in the class, since there seemed to have been more boys than girls in the "Low" reading groups.

School reading was not to be confused with enjoyment. It was to be associated with boredom, drill, humiliation, groupings and grades. Not that any of us "minded" the Dick and Jane books themselves, but we didn't confuse the contents of such readers with the fairy tale and storybooks we had at home, which were "real" books. To this day, many of us do not believe that specific school instruction in reading had much to do with us learning to read, and one member believes that the reading group experiences actually delayed her reading.

The tortured or simply boring reading group sessions with the grey lumpen women introduced several of us to the fork in the Reading Road: One direction lead us to the reading we love, and the other lead down the path of

school reading. What and how we read as girls even in these early days was shaping itself up to be split into "academic" and "pleasure" categories, and we are all grateful that, unlike so many, we had the "pleasure" category to keep us reading when it wasn't "assigned".

2. Eight to Twelve

a. Horse Stories

#1

I liked horse stories such as The Black Stallion, and would read other action stories. My love of horses was especially strong during the years I was eleven and twelve. I drew horses, I collected horse pictures, and read about them at every opportunity. We also owned a few horses by then, so I learned how to ride and of course had to do barn chores, but even that did not dampen my enthusiasm. I continued to do horse sculptures well into my teens. This fascination with horses is a well-documented phenomenon and some experts link it to sexuality. I just remember that my girl-drawing phase evolved into a horse-drawing obsession and it was linked to enjoyment of horse stories.

#2

By the time I was in grade six, I had read every horse book in the public library. What did I get from Misty of Chincouteague, The Black Stallion, etc.? It may have been the notion of triumph over adversity. The central character was usually down and out for some reason. Good fortune inevitably wins the day. I am still attracted to these kinds of plots although I am less inclined to believe in happily ever after. I wonder why young girls are so attracted to horse stories. It is a well-documented phenomenon. Could it be that we want to experience caring for something? It this a bizarre extension of the mothering phenomenon? A lot of the stories have a heavy emphasis on feeding, grooming, and caring for the horse. We might also think about the sexual connections that riding is seen to have. Or are girls like myself just trying to reach out and communicate with another animal?

The women of the collective had either been "horse" girls, were related to one, knew a friend who had been one, or gave birth to one. While a few of these girls had been interested strictly in riding and caring for the horse

itself, most also passionately drew and read and talked about horses. In fact, some were as interested in the rituals and equipment surrounding horse riding and care as they were in "real" horses. Just as some of the women had spent hours as girls drawing what they called "beauty girls", which exaggerated every "ideal" feature from big eyes to big hair into a figure of almost cartoonish proportions, so some had spent hours drawing and reading about idealized horses. In some instances, the girl apparently did not think of the literary horse as an animal at all, but as a person, as for example, when reading Black Beauty. The desire seemed to be to develop passionate (not only or necessarily sexual) connectedness with the Horse. One former "horse" girl likened the collecting of horse gear to the ritual giving of baby paraphernalia at showers for first-time mothers: in both cases, the equipment comprises the "tools of the trade" for taking "care", which marks and acknowledges that the individual is entrusted with the job, in charge of the relationship.

The many facets of the relationship between the preadolescent girl and her horse, apparently so "studied" for sexual content (where, we couldn't help but wonder, are the studies to ferret out the sexual import of the mysterious relationship between the cowboy and his horse? The boy and his dog? The man and his remote control?), seemed to us to be explained by the fact that there are so few socially-sanctioned ways for the girl to express any

passion, including but not only sexual passion, to demonstrate her prowess in a demanding, highly skilled, and very physical sport, or to take on enormous responsibility, with its own related procedures, skills, and ritual knowledge. We thought of how much an unquestioned rite of passage it was for a boy to get and care for and fix up and drive his first car. Even boys who don't have cars read about their care and feeding, and look at idealized versions of them, in car books. They tend to anthropomorphize the car, giving it often female traits: it is a powerful creature they control. They fuss and goggle over accessories, and have ritualized notions about what brands and types of tools and equipment are the best for their "baby". This behaviour is apparently too normal and expected to be the stuff of scientific studies.

b. Girl Stories: Hero(ines)

Various women in the collective, when asked to write memory-stories about literary heroines and heroes, opened their work with such comments as:

"Heroines--were there any? Then why can't I remember them?"

"Since I can't even remember the names of the novels, it's impossible for me to recall heroes/heroines which peopled them."

"Well, I'm trying and trying...there simply are no heroes or heroines that enter my mind."

"There were no hero(ines) in the stories that I read

as an upper elementary/junior high student!"

Not exactly an auspicious beginning. While the lack of positive literary role models for girls was and is a serious issue, to investigate the meanings of our textual gendering, we needed to dig into what we had admired, and what had been promoted as ideals for girls to follow, rather than consider what should have been promoted. Perhaps the phrase, "contemporary role models" would have been better than "hero(ines)" for this search. With this "re-alignment" of time zones in mind, group members did recall the types and kinds of models and ideals promoted in various kinds of texts.

i. Serials

In upper elementary school, I was in my Little House on the Prairie, Nancy Drew, Trixie Belden stage. What I remember clearly about Trixie Belden is that she had a neat name and I pictured her as looking like Sally in the Dick and Jane series. I didn't find her as believable (maybe not as competent) as Nancy Drew, whom I always thought of as very mature and "with it". I believe I looked up to Nancy as the older sister I never had, whereas Trixie was relegated to the same position, and therefore capabilities, as I was (I was the youngest, having two older brothers). Nancy, I was sure, had dark hair, while Trixie was a blonde. Dark hair meant "totally competent". Blonde meant beautiful. When my girlfriends and I played cheerleaders, or singers, we always fought over who got to be "Tina" and "Trixie". We all, of course, pretended to have long, blonde hair, and were totally gorgeous. Unusual names and long, blonde hair were exotic. I can remember envying girls who had either. In junior and senior high, having either seemed to propel one instantly into the "in group". In high school, I recall a new girl whose name was Micky being thought of as the "neatest" thing going because of her name. She also had long, blonde hair.

ii. Comics

#1

The character that I admired most as a young girl was probably Katy Keene, in the comics (Archie comics, I think). She was the most beautiful "thing" that I had

ever seen--very slim, very tall, blue-black hair (curly and long and BIG); also very wealthy (where the money came from was never mentioned, didn't seem to matter), and had several men always at her disposal, panting after and beside her. Her clothes were miraculous: glittery, sexy, coodinated right down to the shoes (always with high heels, of course). She always had an air about her, an air of aloofness, superiority. And interestingly enough, there was rarely a story to go along with her--simply a page of her and her clothes. I hadn't thought of the significance of that before.

Other heroines were Veronica and Betty, of course. I usually admired Veronica more than Betty. She was the rich one, the spoiled one, the one who got the boys.

Romance comics provided another source of women to admire. The image of the close-up of a woman's face with her beautiful long lashes, seductive lips, and tearful eyes comes to mind--of course she had been hurt by her lover...but oh was she beautiful! If she suffered long enough and hard enough and remained true, she would eventually get her man back. He would "come to his senses"--he usually did and came back begging for forgiveness. Of course, she would welcome him back with open arms. This is an interesting revelation when I look over some of my past relationships--I think these women were a greater influence on me than I would care to admit--heroines every one!

#2

When I was in upper elementary school, I loved to read the English comics that my cousins sent us, even though the lives of the characters in any one of the storylines was foreign to any life I knew. I should make clear that by "comics" I just mean that these were boxed series of drawings with captions beneath each (sometimes the captions were several sentences long--if anyone has read Rupert the bear, or Noddy books you know what I mean); any given "comic" might have eight different serialized stories in it, each one to four pages in length, in a newspaper-sized format. The illustrations were very "realistic" and not "cartoonish" at all. One storyline I recall concerned the ongoing adventures of a private girls' school field hockey team. I recall that one central character was "Big Bertha", a very butch-looking, huge girl who was nonetheless the "hero" in many games, either scoring that winning goal, or preventing the opposition from scoring--I'm not sure which. Another favorite of mine was the ongoing story of four students--two girls, two boys--who made up their school's competitive scholars "team", who would match wits with the "brains" of other schools from other cities on TV programs such as our "Reach for the Top", but much bigger. I remember that several panels of the comic would always be devoted to the question/answer challenge on a given program, and I would be fascinated by the kinds of

questions that the moderator would ask. If you're wondering, conflicts would arise when bad guys on other teams would try to sabotage "our" team by waylaying them at a train station, or by swiping their luggage with their study notes in it or some such thing, or when the team members were consulted about an arcane bit of info. to help solve a mystery of some kind. I am killing myself laughing, now, thinking just how dorky this sounds, but my oh my, how I looked forward to getting a big roll of those comics from our cousins!

iii. Novels

#1

The overwhelming favorite book when I was eleven and twelve was Gone With the Wind. My sister and I read it so many times that we referred to it as our "Bible". My father must have bought us our own copy. The book was a medium blue color and very thick (about 2 inches) and I think we actually wore out two copies of it. I identified with Scarlett totally, her spunk and independence, one-upmanship, and her courage in the face of adversity. It did not occur to me then that she was struggling for survival, against all odds, in a stifling patriarchy. I was caught up in the drama of the narrative, the romance of the story, and the vivid descriptions of the dresses.

#2

The sole novel I recall reading at this time whose central character was a heroine to me was The Witch of Blackbird Pond, set in Puritan New England in about 1650. The main character is sixteen year old Kit, who had grown up as the indulged granddaughter of a Barbados plantation owner. When her grandfather dies, Kit has to go and live with her dour Puritan aunt and uncle and their daughters. Kit is a spirited, adventurous , brave, headstrong girl who doesn't have to ultimately "give up" these traits in order to find love and a life for herself. Here, I was perhaps for the first time identifying with a female character who was not a martyr, and who was quite capable of having heart-thumping adventures. It was (as usual for me) set in a bygone era, but in this case that didn't mean the females had to be "rescued" or sacrifice themselves. And the story also features a strong, wise, old woman, Hannah, which is not the "norm". Old females are so often wicked, evil things in literature. The other appeal of the book for me lay in the "witch-hunting" mentality that is central to the action of the story. The prejudice and hysteria that "caught" like flame and burned so many. What had warrented just a passing mention in the encyclopedia was a horror, and reading the novel helped me to feel something of what it must really have been like. Since about that age, I've always tried to find novels about historical events and people, because the treatment seems more "real" to me than in a textbook. At this time, it began to occur to me that history wasn't about dates

and battles, but about people. I think it also made me start to think about the sorts of constraints that culture/society places on any individual.

iv. Movie Stars and Public Figures

#1

The female characters in books were just too distant--location or plot wise--to seem real. What connection did they have to ME? I think I looked to more recent contemporary feminine images in the process of sorting out what a female role should "look like", although it certainly wasn't a conscious process at the time.

The first American magazine I remember is Photoplay. A male family friend bought my sister and I a subscription for Christmas one year when we were still on the farm. We were probably ten and twelve at the time. I think our fascination was partly just having a magazine of our own at all, plus it had pictures of all these attractive people, and also we knew we were supposed to be interested. It was the "girl" thing to do. We did pick "favorite" stars, and mine were John Derek and Jane Russell and I can't remember why. They are both brunettes, I see, and I do recall that I thought Marilyn Monroe was stupid and unattractive. Everyone was expected to have an opinion about her since she was all the rage at that time. It was only much later, when all the revelations about her life and death appeared, that I saw her as a tragic figure.

#2

Here's a Special Edition of LIFE magazine published after Kennedy's assassination in November, 1963. I am looking at this magazine six months after the fact, not for the first or last time. I'm eleven. I stare especially long and hard at photos of Jacqueline (aka "Jackie" but not here, not now) in her blood&brainbesmirched pink poodle-wool suit, cradling President Kennedy's (aka "Jack" but not here, not now) noble (what beautiful hair he has, my mother always said, and the profile of a king, surely!) head (broken, like Jack's in the nursury rhyme) in her lap, crawling (still astonishingly ladylike, full of grace, or somesuch says the caption) across the trunk of the convertible, and posing for the media (here, admiring comments beneath the photo regarding her refusal to change out of her suit; she has insisted upon wearing the evidence, the sign of evil done to her husband).

I'm staring at pictures of this woman, who before the assassination was to me a less-than-impressive figure, not at all a proper wife for President Kennedy. I saw her as a weak-looking beaky thing with sharp sticky-outy little teeth, google eyes, and a goose neck. I didn't go for her simpering, blinky, head-ducking manner that was so often described by the press as "charming". Instead, I considered Jackie to be a real "pill" (does anyone know of or use that expression besides my mother? It means a kind of pained and painful wimp; a simp; a limp, sighing drip).

At any rate, it was No Wonder to me that she took to wearing those pillbox hats.

Jack and Marilyn, now, I thought that was a much better match. I pictured them together, big, toothy, fleshy and lush, a rollicking, smooching, panting couple. But I didn't dare say anything about that out loud, since my mother considered Marilyn Monroe to be not much better than a street slut, a homewrecking sexpot. My mother is violently against sexpotism, as evidenced by her reaction to a magazine pin-up of Christine Keeler (made notorious via the role she played in the Profumo sex/spy scandal) that my sister had taped up next to her poster of Natalie Wood, thinking Christine to be a pretty model of some kind, unaware of her politisexconnections. When my mother saw Christine up on the wall, she ripped her down, shredded her (and some innocent bystanding posters as she rampaged), and tossed her bit by bit into the garbage, smacking my sister around all the while, furious that her daughter would or could even think of putting up such a picture of such a woman. My sister kept asking what was wrong? What'd she do? but my mother wouldn't say, yelling instead, "Don't talk to me! You know very well!" After that, of course, we did make it our business to find out.

Now that she's the noble, courageous Widow, I stare, hypnotized, at the glossy LIFE photos of Mrs. Kennedy, trying to figure out what they tell me about what ends up being admired in a woman. Whatever she did, however she seemed to "be" during and immediately after the assassination, has lifted her from the status of Fashionplate Debutante Wife, to Most Admirable/Admired Woman in the World.

I'm trying to get it out of some real event, some actual woman in the world, but instead, I'm having a hard time just distinguishing these phctos from the ones I've seen printed up in LIFE as promotional movie stills. They look as real or as artificial as the photos of Sal Mineo and Paul Newman and Eva Marie-Saint in stills from the movie, Exodus, that I've just been looking at in another copy of LIFE. Even the bloodstains on Mrs. Kennedy's suit look fake (or perhaps the ones in the movie stills are too "realistic"), not too much or too little, perfectly "placed" so as not to ruin the alignment of the outfit. She is unwrinkled both in brow and skirt. What do these words mean, then, "poise" and "grace"? How do they show themselves? I try to see it, to get it from her expressions, her posture, her words. Still, she is jumbled in my mind with the character played by Eva Marie-Saint, who to me is a blonde version of Jackie Kennedy: high (thin, whiney) voice, pronounced forehead and cheekbones, wide-set eyes, little pointy teeth, tall, thin, willowy model's body with bony wrists and long, expressive fingers.

Blood may be spattered and spilt all around them, these austere, admired figures. But they themselves, in my version of them, are bloodless. They are pale and

sexless as pictures of saints. They are like the figures painted by El Greco that I have stared at in the Childcraft art book: elongated, emaciated, enervated. They are Still. Corpse-like. Vampires, with their little pointy teeth and pale complexions. Wearing mansblood, sopping it up, a fashion statement, Jackie Kennedy is not admired for how she acts but how she reacts--no, not even that, but how she appears to react. What a passive, accepting, and stoic look she wears. At age eleven, I don't say these words, but I'm learning their meanings. How far off the mark I am.

At our first "Hero(ines)" meeting, after some discussion, two women mentioned that they should have written more about the fact that at this age, they had read a number of biographies and autobiographies of women like Helen Keller, Florence Nightingale, and Madame Curie. One had read The Diary of Anne Frank, and said that she had been deeply moved by this incredible girl's telling of her story. Another member then recalled that her grandmother had read Latvian folk tales and heroic epics and sagas to her and her sister regularly, which she had only touched upon briefly in her writing. We were all a bit taken aback by such apparent "omissions": why had almost all said that there were no literary heros or heroines, and then, when we "found" some, why had we focussed almost exclusively on the mass-marketed figures from comics and serials?

One problem seemed to be that, initially, we didn't connect the stories of real and folk hero(ines) as literary figures; our first view was to the fictional characters we could remember, or to contemporary public figures. Secondly, it appeared that, much as we may have been moved by the other works, we were almost constantly and often unconsciously exposed to the real or fictional figures from

popular culture, and they therefore tended to have had a more lasting and pervasive impact on our notions about what constituted the "ideal" woman, what was to be admired and copied. That information seeped in through our pores, maybe even when we were sleeping. To have had such works as biographies or epic sagas "sink in", and actually counteract or replace some of the popular culture's ideals, we would have had to consciously talk about them, and, at the same time, to consciously talk about the effects that mass media was having on us. Only one of the women of the group remembers ever discussing books on a regular basis with any of her friends. For everyone else, that was unheard of.

c. Upper Elementary

#1

By the summer of grade four, I had established an academic pattern which would characterize my public school life. I picture a huge stamp on the report cards of this time. It reads **Not Working To Potential.** This is not surprising given what we now know about self-esteem, but it caused endless grief for my well-educated and upwardly-mobile family. They, in turn, insisted that the school fix me. Over the course of that summer, I was tested by a psychologist who felt that I was bored. He told the school that I should be placed in an accelerated class, so that I might rejoin the group I had left and move into grade seven with them in a year's time.

Mr. Fuller was the teacher who had been chosen to work with this group. He was the first real teacher I had encountered. He read poetry, Newsweek, the paper, short stories, and novels to us. He insisted that we could listen, that we could think, and that we could write. I'd like to tell you that Mr. Fuller turned me around. He didn't. My defiance was too well-rooted, but he did give me some glimmers of how it might have been.

I remember one assignment which involved writing a short descriptive paragraph. I did not usually do my homework, but for some reason, this project attracted me. The words flowed. Before I knew it, I had created a ramshackle cottage on the beach. This cottage presented a bleak and battered exterior, yet held the promise of

comfort within. The short assignment grew to be a story. The next morning, Mr. Fuller asked if anyone would like to share their assignment. I had no intention of sharing and was busy chatting with a friend. Mr. Fuller called on me more as a disciplinary measure than with an expectation. I stood, read my piece, and sat down. There was silence in the room. Then, to their credit, my teacher and classmates gave me lots of praise and encouragement. I was asked to read my story at a parents' night some weeks later. Unfortunately, Petra Burka was skating in town the same night. I chose to watch her instead. The next year I was in grade six. The experiment with acceleration had failed.

#2

In upper elementary I remember that reading was boring and confined to the basal readers which we dutifully read together in class and then answered the questions at the end of the story. By this time we were streamed into three classes, strong, average, and poor. Although I was in the strong group I still hated to read the stories together and wait as others stumbled and stuttered their way through their assigned paragraphs. Like most of the kids, I'm sure, I always read ahead, dreading having to answer the dumb questions at the end "in your best handwriting".

Another aspect of reading and literature that had to be endured was the S.R.A. series. It was an individualized silent reading program which consisted of color-coded boxed sets of cards, each noting a story to be read, and listing a number of multiple choice questions to be answered after the student had read it. There was no discussion. No passion for literature was passed on from teacher to student - just students reading to themselves, answering questions, moving up the colored cards, marking their own work, silently comparing their progress to the "brain" of the class.

#3

Male characters in story books: these are the figures I remember best from my "middle" reading years. Swashbuckling adventure tales, high drama, epic storylines, great quests--I loved the Greek myths, the Arthurian romances, the stories of the Crusades and the Knights Templar; Robin Hood and Richard the Lionhearted. I did identify completely with the male central character, right down to the adoring of the perfect, unattainable female part, when applicable. This seemed more a religious than a sexual adoration (Woman as Grail?), which fit in quite well with my continuing sacrificing-religious yearnings.

My grades five and six teachers were very important in this reading development of mine: Mrs. Klaudt and Mr. Hunter in particular. In both these years, I was in a grade 5-6 split class, and so had the same "core" teachers both years. This was significant, I think: these teachers had us for two years, and that obviously gave them a greater influence over us. Many times in the junior and

senior high years, teachers mentioned that the three groups of students who had gone through this experimental split class business were "different" -- now, part of that was also due to the times: we were the first wave of hippy-influenced kids they'd seen also -- but we were also different because our upper elementary core teachers had been, for two years running, quite a wonderful mix of art/drama/literature-loving teachers full of pizzaz and spunk. In Language Arts, I remember writing long, involved stories in groups that we then had an opportunity to act out in class. One "group developed" play we came up with we performed at the then-new public library theatre before an audience of younger kids and their parents. It was a participation play, a parody of Cinderella. Everyone in the class had a part, some had more than one. It was great fun and not the hassle-filled type of "production" I think of whenever "school play" is mentioned.

In Social Studies, we took up the Greek myths with a passion, making large murals of the different Greek gods and a scale model of the Parthenon. Mr. Hunter, in his deep, British school-trained voice, read excerpts from The Odyssey and The Iliad aloud to us.

And so it is that I romanticize this time, and I hold dear the novels that I read then. I began to be "rewarded" and recognized in school for my creative writing, many a plot and setting for which had been derived from the adventure novels I was reading. I was also getting positive feedback for what were called "artistic skills"--that I could copy those Greek profiles in Social class quite accurately was considered valuable. And in art class, we had the only "real" art teacher I was ever to know--Mrs. Klaudt actually is an artist: a sculptor and painter and teacher of art therapy now. Then, she was a young and incredibly vibrant woman in her first year of teaching, an inspired and inspiring teacher who combined art, drama, literature, creative writing, choral music, and not a few life skills in her teaching. (The Clouds that somewhat obscured my sunny skies then were named Science & Math, taught by Principal Nesbitt, a quite deaf, quite enormous, very old bellowing man who scared me half to death).

Despite the S&M, for the first and last time of my life, I loved school. Interestingly enough, so did most of the other kids in that bunch, who possessed a range of interests and abilities. It seemed that our core teachers' enthusiasm was quite contagious, and we all benefitted. I think I "learned" to read at that time--I mean, to read deeply, to engross myself in a story. Before that, it had all been just mechanics.

In neither our meetings concerning the younger or the older ages did the collective talk about the development of school-related textuality as much as we did during our

discussions surrounding this eight to twelve year old period. This seemed a "make it or break it" period for most of us as far as formal schooling opportunities to influence our attitudes toward reading were concerned. The pre-pubescent period for girls seemed to us to be the time when girls can and do form life-long interests, abilities, and friendships that could be lifesavers for them through the teenage years and beyond. Most of the women in the collective had their fondest memories of girlhood located in this period of their lives.

3. Thirteen to Fifteen

a. T.V. Heroines

While I have difficulty recalling texts, I can recall television shows from this period clearly. Two that were family favorites were Bewitched and I Dream of Jeannie. Isn't that curious that these very popular shows had as their central characters women with great power who were being controlled by men?

Samantha had chosen to give up her life as a witch for the love of bumbling Darren. She couldn't even use her power for simple tasks like housecleaning because witchcraft made Darren uncomfortable. What would the neighbours think? We empathized with "Sam", allowed her her little subterfuges, but basically believed that Darren had the right, because he loved her, to tell her how to live her life.

Jeannie's predicament was even more blatant. She was trapped in a bottle until Larry Hagman wanted her. Once free, she was bound to fulfill his wishes. This character with so much strength and power was protrayed by a simpering, giggling blonde in a harem suit. I wanted to be her.

b. Bulk Reading

#1

I was an uncritical, totally accepting reader. Give me anything printed and I would read. This included cereal boxes, advertisements, recipes...if it were in print, I was compelled to read it.

Reflecting on this, I believe that my obsession for reading is simply to find out what happens. To read and read until the end and simply put the book aside and...begin

another. This provides an escape, an opportunity to let my mind be totally absorbed in something other that the mind talk that goes on, and on, and on.

When I am reading is the only time that the mind talk voices are silent. I use reading as a form of relaxation - a brain deadener.

#2

Why did I read so much? Yes, I enjoyed the process and the content, but it was also a means of escape from boredom and from home, from having to interact with my family.

So what did I read? I think just about everything, which is perhaps why I have so much trouble recalling specific titles. I read a great deal of historical fiction, family sagas such as Lantern in Her Hand, all of Mary Renault's novels, once I discovered her, The Arch of Triumph, and all the others by Eric Marie Remarque. I also read the Leatherstocking Tales, Northwest Passage, medieval romances, and British royal intrigues and romance. What an incredible hodge-podge it was....The selection process was totally random. However, the books I did select were MY choices, and I think that feeling of ownership was very important. I don't recall anyone--librarian, teacher, or parent, making any effort to direct my recreational reading.

c. Pulp Romance

#1

The book was hidden in the bottom drawer, under the collection of nighties that Mom had insisted on buying each September in preparation for the new school year. One in blue, one in pink, one with small little rose-buds embossed on the white flannel. All huge, prim, and terribly uncomfortable to sleep in. She had taken to saying her good-nights, doing her nightly bathroom rituals, and then firmly shutting her door. She would then don an old T-shirt which she had rescued from the thrift shop collection, get her book, check the door once again, and climb into bed.

The book had been stolen from the box which Auntie Shirley had dropped off yesterday. It was called Dark Paradise. The cover promised, "This year's most dangerously erotic novel!" It was 1967 and she was fifteen.

Page 1, murder: this isn't what I want. Page 5, friendship: well, yes, but. Page 10: Expensive house in the woods...this sounds promising. Page 12:....aaaah yes!

> "He caught her from behind, one had grabbing hold of her vest and T-shirt. He hauled her backward, banding his other arm around her waists and pulling her into the rock wall that was his body.
>
> 'Hold still! Listen to me,' J.D. ordered sharply. Then he gentled his tone as skill from other parts of his life kicked in. 'Easy now!' He loosened his grip, but still held her firmly against him.

Marcy craned her neck around to get a look at his eyes...She relaxed marginally and he rewarded her by easing her down so that her feet touched the floor. Air rushed back into her lungs and she sucked it in greedily, trying not to lean back on him for support. She was already too aware of his body, the size and strength of it, the heat of it. His left hand encircling her upper arm, the knuckles just brushing the outer swell of her breast..."

"Kathryn, do you know where...What is that you're trying to hide under the covers? Let me see that! For heaven's sake! This is garbage. Why do you want to waste your time with junk like this? And I see you're wearing that awful shirt again. Get up and get something decent on." Mother turns and leaves the room, still muttering to herself as she thumbs the pages of the novel.

The next day while using the phone in the bedroom, Kathryn finds Dark Paradise stashed under the mattress on her mother's side of the bed.

#2

The only reading material I would have considered "forbidden" when I was a girl were books containing sexual material. These were not overtly forbidden, since my parents rarely verbalized those sorts of things; my perception was that they simply reacted in a way that made me feel guilty. Was the guilt actually imposed on me by them, or was it the effects of the culture in which I lived that caused me to project the guilt creation onto my parents, the icons of authority, and, as my kids would say, "funsuckers"?

The little bungalow several blocks away from my family home, where I used to babysit two little kids, comes to mind as I think about an early encounter with a forbidden book. I don't recall that I was actually searching for "forbidden" reading material intentionally (but I must have been); perhaps Peyton Place leapt off the shelf into my hands quite on its own (but I doubt it). I could tell by the cover illustration (can't picture it now, other than oranges, reds, and browns: skin, embraces, and something I wanted to know more about). I did (do) have such a drive to learn about life and, in those days, particularly learning about my changing body, emotions, and feelings. What I read on the back cover suggested that I would learn something about something that no one ever talked about but was on my mind. Peyton Place was a book to read not for the overall story but for the specific sexual detail: information (no one is telling me what I need/want to know!) and thrills. The trick was to read for key words and phrases such as: "breathless", "breasts, "melons, "stirring" and the like. The specific quote I remember clearly from this book was, "his hand found that dark triangle of warmth he had been searching for all evening". Now that had an impact on me! I had never considered that anyone would be searching for that but the thought created

a sensation deep within me that I wanted to learn more about.

I did feel that even the handling of this book was something I shouldn't be doing; I would be embarrassed if caught, not proud of the fact I was interested. My parents might be told or find out, so it was necessary to replace it very carefully, just as I had found it. Where did/does this guilt come from? The secrecy surrounding something so integral to growing up? I did look forward to returning to that house to babysit the next few times--eventually, that particular book lost its effect and was no longer thrilling.

Was it important that I not be seen by my parents as growing up? That would change my relationship with them. Did they want me to stay the way I was? Did I want to stay the way I was? Perhaps if I grew up I would have to compete with my older sister; was it my place to be the little girl?

#3

By early adolescence, I had read widely from available children's books. I now moved on to the fiction that my parents favored, which contained many sexually explicit passages. I found these to be terribly attractive during puberty. As it happens, I also fell in love at this time. Michael, who was also intellectually precocious, had apparently been reading, too. We decided to experiment. For some reason, it never turned out quite like it appeared in the stories we read. On second thought, one aspect was the same because after we decided to do "it", we never talked about "it" again. As I think back, this seems characteristic of the lovemaking which was portrayed. So much was assumed. Our love affair ended in a predictable fashion. He dumped me for a beautiful blonde. I haven't forgiven him to this day.

d. Medical and Reference Texts

#1

Once my sexuality had become tickled and I was more familiar with some of the words and feelings that went with it, I wanted to know more about such an exciting but hidden topic. Surely I was the only one who didn't know about such matters; my friends must have been born with that knowledge or were certainly much smarter and more grown-up than I am. We didn't talk about it amongst ourselves either. I wasn't going to admit to anyone how stupid I was, yet I needed to find out what I could. It simply was not something that could be discussed, so I did some research, and where else would a well-trained schoolgirl think to look for information but in the dictionary? It was quite acceptable, even encouraged, to be reading a dictionary. What I was able to find there, however, was quite unsatisfactory - much too brief and far too superficial and clinical.

As I grew older and more independent, the public

library became the center of exploration. It did offer a greater selection of factual books, particularly in the health and medical sections, but once again, I was unable to find anything that touched on the powerful feelings in me. On hindsight, I think about how much more might have been accessible to me, had I had a yearning to devour fiction, for it was more within the covers of novels that there lay some of the understandings for which I was searching. I wonder if anyone has thought of cateloging fiction books according to the amount of passion and sexuality they contain.

A thought came to my mind about books that I might now consider to be forbidden. Again, my sister comes into the picture. I wouldn't let her catch me reading books on spirituality or feminism because of her possible comments or body language about my choice of books. My perception is that I would feel pretentious, intimidated, and guilty if she knew what sort of "stuff" I was reading. A similar feeling to being caught by my parents reading a trashy paperback.

#2

Neither sex nor bodily functions were talked about in school, in the magazines, or by my parents. In fact, I can remember that when one of my girlfriends was sent to the drugstore to get sanitary pads for her mother, she would come back with a box wrapped in brown paper. This is how the boxes were displayed on the shelves. Thank goodness I wasn't expected to do that for my mother. I never saw her boxes of sanitary pads. I can remember sneaking a peek at the ads for Kotex in Chatelaine magazine. How furtive my peeks, how red my cheeks. This was pretty racy stuff!

One particular activity that I enjoyed at this time was "phone sitting" for a doctor. This gave me access to his library of medical books and the interesting pictures. I looked up, of course, "penises", and "breasts", but was most fascinated by the medical abnormalities. Unfortunately, there were no pictures of the abnormally large penises that we read about in pulp fiction!

It seems to me that at that time of my life I accepted that I was a sex object. That I was and should be concerned about my figure, my dress, my make up. It never occurred to me to put males under the same scrutiny that we were put under. I wonder why this was. My mother certainly had no use for this type of nonsense. She would criticize me for my consuming interest in boys, clothes, make up, etc., but didn't give me the tools necessary to look at these practices with a critical eye. Although she herself was liberated, she didn't see the need to help liberate me.

e. Men's Mags

#1

Christmas morning, the stockings were inspected on Mom and Dad's bed. On this occasion, mine contained a potato, an onion, an orange, a pink plastic tray of at least sixteen shades of eyeshadow, a set of lipsticks which stacked on top of one another to a length of about a foot, a "book" of Lifesavers, assorted chocolate coins and nuts, and a set of "Days of the Week" panties. These had been arriving with regularity for the last three Christmases, which was baffling because they were poorly cut and hence uncomfortable. I never wore them. Last year's set was still languishing in a bottom drawer, unopened. The previous year's had been remodelled as cunning "Days of the Week" cape affairs for Barbie. Nomatter, it's the thought that counts, and in a family of six, it's the cost that counts. Knowing my mother, she may have stocked up on the damn things at some long ago sale and then stashed them for future use.

I can't always remember what was in anyone else's stocking except Dad's. He always opened his last. There, at the very top, was the Christmas edition of Playboy. Now, by this time, I knew just who was in charge at this time of year, so I regarded this ritual as sanctioning the exploitation of naked women. I know that this is an adult description of what I was feeling, but I can honestly remember feeling that this must be O.K. In fact, I thought that this must be how it is. This is fun. When will I look like this, and even, someday, I would like to be a Playboy Bunny. Dad would act surprised and then leaf through it, surreptitiously pretending to be appalled as he eyeballed the centrefold. We watched eagerly, enjoying the fun. The magazine was then stashed in his bedside table with great flourish. We were told that it was "off limits, for men only, really trashy stuff" wink wink. I can remember thinking that I couldn't wait to get my hands on it.

Sometime over the course of the holiday break, I would in fact steal into the bedroom and spirit it away. I would pour over the entire magazine, revelling in the life story of the model, which always began with her measurements. I was titillated by all that naked flesh and would often find myself masturbating as a result. I found that fact quite kinky and would not have considered discussing this aspect of my enjoyment with anyone.

What really got to me, though, was an advice column entitled "Dear Madam", which was written by somebody by the name of Xaviera Hollander. She professed to be a literate former prostitute/madam. Readers wrote in with questions about technique or attitude and she would respond to two or three selections each issue. One which sticks out in my mind was written by a woman who had two problems. The first was that her partner wanted her to fellate him when he was driving in heavy traffic. She was somewhat reluctant but essentially open to the idea. It was what

her man wanted. Her big problem (no pun intended) was the size of his penis. He was enormous as she described it. She had a small mouth and was worried that "he" would not be satisfied because she was unable to "take him all in". Xaviera went on to assure this woman that rush hour traffic blow jobs were relatively common and that she should not be put off by the prospect of the individuals in the car/truck/van/bus next door catching a bit of the action. She went on to describe in detail how this woman might bring her man to climax despite her handicap.

This was hair raising stuff.

At that time, I had "necked" but never "petted". One time, though, Brian Tulley had lain on top of me at Linda Best's and I had felt his erection. It felt more like a little pencil. I certainly hadn't considered even remotely the prospect of touching "it", although I had heard that Melissa Wilson "did". Yet here I was avidly storing up this Playboy "information" for future use. It was no wonder that my friends and I, who enjoyed similar upbringings in which Playboy and Penthouse were much a part of our young lives, were making forays into sexual experimentation which escalated at a premature age. Nor is it a surprise that it has taken me years to learn to shed these early lessons which taught me to please my man and grab my satisfaction as an occasional, pleasant by-product.

#2

On one of my Saturday walk-in closet cleaning occasions, during which I mostly sat on the floor reading back issues of magazines stacked beside the pickles and canned peaches, I found an Other One: a "men's" magazine with a cover not all cutesy and glossy like the issues of Playboy I occasionally found there and read with great interest, but a "men's life" or "men's adventure" or "for men only" cover featuring a luridly-colored drawing of a grimy, weatherbeaten, fortyish man dress in 1800s cowboy duds, climbing a cliff after a young but voluptuous girl of fourteen or thereabouts (thereabouts my age), whose gown is torn and tattered so as to expose most of her breasts and legs. He's leering at her as he reaches out for her with one huge gnarled hand, while she looks down at him with that cartoon-terror look: eyes big as saucers and glistening, mouth an "O" and red as a maraschino cherry. Below is a disabled stagecoach sans horses, its left wheel broken, its driver sprawled across his seat, and two passengers, a middle-aged man and woman, dangling out the open door. While this scene is drawn as background and as if far "below", I can see that all are quite obviously dead, and since their throats are cut (but their eyes are open!), I know they didn't die in any accident.

I have never seen such graphic depictions of violence, bloodlust and "sexualized" brutishness before. Inside the front cover of this magazine are several pages devoted to mail-away-for ads, and then, the title page of the "cover" story, the upper half of which is covered with a drawing I

can never get out of my head: The cowboy from the front cover drawing has caught the girl: he sits, leaning back in his chair, cowboy booted feet up on the table as he grins over at the hogtied creature, only part of whom I can see, because her legs and most of her torso are obscured by the flames of the fire in the raised fireplace/oven into which he has shoved her. She looks straight out at me with those dead black horror eyes, this time her open agonymouth a hollow, an echoing cave I'm inside, hearing and hearing the screams.

Why do I read the story that begins beneath this horrific picture? It is so awful that my intestines gurgle and wheeze, my skin prickles and aches just looking at it. So why don't I throw down this piece of garbage, trample it, destroy it? Well, I would never do that because this is my father's property and he would kill me if he found out I wrecked anything of his. In fact, the idea of doing any damage to this property doesn't even occur to me: it is unthinkable. I handle the magazine with utmost care, not wanting to mar it or in any way leave a sign that I've found it.

I want to know more about what goes on in that evil picture than the picture can tell me; words of what is happening entice me; I want narration. I want to grab onto this horror and know it beyond its pictographic shock. Just what are the details? Who is he? What is she to him? What happened to the stagecoach? Were those her parents lying dead with their throats slit?

I begin to read the story, my stomach flip-flopping. I'm reading faster than I'd like to for comprehension's sake, but my fear of getting caught compels me to speed along, getting only the gist of the storyline. My eyes bulge and pulse: events are told in the third person, but from the cowboy's point of view.
Yes, this is a tale told from a sadistic torturer's perspective. The catching, carrying, and binding of the young girl are lovingly described with slavish attention to detail for the enjoyment of the "reader". This is clearly not just for "lookers"; this stuff is for those who like to fantasize about doing these tortures to someone.

So, I wanted to "get" something. I wanted to figure out what this magazine could tell me about my father and about men. What did it mean that my father bought and read this magazine? I have no idea how "popular" these "for men only" magazines were. I have no idea whether they are still publishing the same types of magazines, or whether porno-torture videos, mock "snuff" films, and more "sophisticated" glossy S/M magazines have displaced them. I don't know if I can say I learned anything about "men", because this sort of torture/sadism fantasy stuff may appeal to only a small minority. I wish/hope/pray that is so. But the fact that it did appeal to my own father disturbs, dismays, depresses and shames me to this day. (Why "shames" me? Hmmmm). As a young girl staring at this story, I couldn't know how "pervasive" a trend it was; I

was assuming this was telling me something about the culture of men. I must have sensed that this sadism had to do with sex and power in twisted, but nonetheless recognizable ways. I think I was trying to absorb through my eyeballs hints and tidbits that would give me the means to understand this sex/power/abuse/control connecting tissue. My home life was littered with (to me) random acts of violence and abuse, and I was assuming a connection between the brutalities. And, to some degree, I was also assuming that what he was like was the way "men" were like. I know I took for granted that "men" enjoyed hurting "girls". What disturbs me is that I recall feeling sick and depressed about this "fact", but I don't remember thinking that it was wrong, or bad, or that I would/should try to do anything to change it. I don't recall feeling angry. I just recall feeling I had to "get" it, to understand what I must have considered to be a brutal, inevitable aspect of life as a woman.

Perhaps I was so rivetted to the magazine because I thought I could find ways of avoiding that inevitability by figuring our how "they" thought so I could avoid situations or outwit them. I know I generally believed that the novels and magazines that were forbidden me would give me more real, actual, bonafide information than I could get from the stuff I was allowed or encouraged to read. The "promoted" novels and stories were, I was certain, "prettified" versions of the "real" world that I wanted to know about. The books and stories we read at school were filled with pap and bull, I thought. I sneered at them.

I was helped to develop my sneer by several bold girlfriends, one of whom read me J. D. Salinger's <u>The Catcher in the Rye</u> in her basement bedroom. That was the first time I remember thinking that a writer really did "get" it and was not just trying to write "about" teenagers, but had lived the life and could make those experiences breathe for me. This was a teenaged <u>boy's</u> experience, but here was a tender and vulnerable boychild, a wildly funny and hysterical boy who could be "out there" because of my long-standing belief that some of these novels did describe a more real reality that the stuff around me that I could see and touch.

Now, I was well aware that many of the adults cruising in my dim, small-town reality would tear this book to shreds just because they'd "heard things". The great Moral Majority. Well, I knew what they were reading behind closed doors. Such Hypocrites. (This is what I apparently decided to get angry about).

By fifteen, I was openly reading books I knew my parents and most of my teachers would loathe, but they rarely bugged me, mostly because they often didn't know the content or even recognize the titles; but also because by then, what I was <u>reading</u> was probably the least of their worries.

The final theme that the BookMarks Collective dealt with was "Dangerous Stuff: Forbidden Reading". As it turned out, the forbidden reading we focussed on, not too surprisingly, was not political tracts, but sexual material. "Obsessed" might even be an understatement to describe our attitude toward exploring and uncovering sexual information in our early teens. For some women, the writing they did for this theme marks the first time they have expressed to others their early textual sexual exploration; in our adult lives, we are still isolated by residual layers of that thick, poisonous silence surrounding sexual matters that distorted our teenaged views with shame and ignorance.

As girls, each of us had to scuttle around, furtively sneaking peeks at books and magazines, trying to get the sexual information and stimulation that was forbidden us. The material from which we were "learning our (sexual) parts" was almost exclusively written by men for men, or was written from a male perspective, and presented "ideal" women characters as objectified and victimized "things". Our impressions, then, of what and how we were supposed to "be" as sexual beings, added up to a "standard issue" Compliant Beauty Object Adoring the Male, with the same "measurements", whether the particular version was the glossy, airbrushed Bunny centrefold, or the curvacious wench "tamed" by the hunkish male central character, or a bevy of beauty objects "throwing themselves", one after the

other, into the arms of the dashing central character. As young teenagers we were absorbing the male notions of what "women" should feel and act like sexually, and were connecting these female-passive-object ideas with sexual excitement. We had no access to any alternative visions of what sex might be like, so we had to base our fantasies on male-dominated conceptions.

All five of us found that we had been so conditioned to associating the female on display with sexual excitement, and at the same time had so little experience with learning to associate visions of the male figure with sensual and sexual arousal, that we all still look at images of women with aroused interest and pleasure. The sensuous image of the Female in our culture, it seems, has been erotically objectified to the point that men and women may look on "it" as a thing meant to be gazed at, appraised. That we women must also "measure" ourselves against that image is a further complication contributing to the alienation of ourselves from ourselves and other women.

Such complications began for us as young teenagers, convinced we would have to figure out the best ways to be passive, obedient sexual objects in order to make sexual connections. We were receiving this "view" of what we had to make ourselves "into" not only from the forbidden sexual material we sneaked looks at, but also from the popular culture of the day. Whether it was T.V.'s bottled Jeannie calling her man "Master", or a Harlequin or True Romance

character, finding her "fulfillment" in the arms of her cruel but manly lover, the range of sexually attractive female ideals from which we had to choose was no range at all: they were most likely to be beautiful, voluptuous, yielding creatures, craving secretly or openly or ultimately, to be "taken", ruled, and even abused, by males. Advice from such "girl" magazines as Seventeen also told us how best to be passive, compliant, and pretty in order to be sexually attractive to boys. Such popular books and magazines constituted much of our "bulk" reading at that time; that is, the mindless, non-critical "grazing" through books and magazines like comfort food, most often swallowing without chewing.

Where a teacher might have been, there was no one: no one in our educational lives at the time was helping us to develop the kind of critical consciousness we needed to act as a filter when we read and looked at these materials; no one to direct our attention to books that presented alternatives; no one talking or listening to us as sexual beings, but remained tight-lipped, silent, having us fill in the blanks, forcing us to pretend we were something else, too. We weren't always sure what.

In our homes, such denial and unspoken repression, combined with the discrepancies we observed between what our parents said (or did not say) about sexual behaviour, and what they did, was a source of incredible confusion for most of us, which, in our self-righteous and cynical later

adolescence, contributed a big part to a view of our parents as the Epitome of Hypocrisy. Not that we ever spoke to them of it directly, or they to us, all such matters being displaced or repressed.

For most of us, friends were of no help, either. We had so internalized the belief that nothing sexual could be talked about, most of us wouldn't think of mentioning a thing about how we felt sexually to a friend, thus reinforcing for each of us in our isolation that our own feelings were not shared by any other girl, and we must be sexually perverted, weird, or disturbed.

One member, who as a young teenager did have the good fortune to have a friend with whom to talk about books, sex, booksex, and twenty billion other necessary things, knew that it was no exaggeration to say that such intimate conversation had changed the course of her life.

It was never too late, we figured, for us to start talking.

V. DÉNOUEMENT: UNRAVELLING PLOT COMPLICATIONS

Everything that is in the heavens, on the earth and under the earth
is penetrated with connectedness, is penetrated with relatedness.

-Hildegard of Bingen
Illuminations

I started all this with the flash of insight that I had been unselfconsciously reading like a man. I thought that this must be the symptom and symbol of the problem I had to get fixed for myself and other women. I identified it as one of the troubles with textually-created "woman's place" in this patriarchal culture that we begin "reading" into our lives from earliest childhood, and tucked it inside the question:

> "What does it mean to say that we are gendered by what and how we read as girls?

I emphasized my "unconscious male-reading" theme whenever the BookMarks Collective got together, but the other members, while never denying my concern, refused to take it up in the way I wanted, and the collective's insight in this matter turned out to be central to our eventual understanding of the research question. The collective has managed to "pull through", even after I performed some major surgery on the project's design, which I later saw as serious errors in judgement.

First, I decided I could compress a project which really needed to evolve over a period of at least a year, preferably two or more, into a four-month run. Second, needing to find some way now to "speed" things along, I decided to inflict four themes on all collective members, chosing to ignore the originators of the collective memorywork process, who had emphasized that the development of the themes by the collective process is a critical first

step upon which the particular nature of a given collective's work is then designed and built. My expeditious handing over of themes to the other women of the collective at our first meeting was a mistake, the consequences of which were saved from being disastrous by the perceptivity, good humour, and hard work of the women of the collective.

Ideally, what we should have been focussing on in those four months was just the development of the themes themselves, using as our means of doing so our practice of memory-writing, group critique, and rewriting, a complex undertaking in its own right. As it was, we did not have enough time to develop our memory-writing skills; I, for one, know that I still don't write my stories "properly", having yet to master the kind of focussed telling that is required to really "mine" a memory.

On the other hand, in its messy, meandering, ongoing way, our actual engagement in this project is probably more like life is lived, anyway. Considering that the project's aim was to use memory-work to uncover ways to help us live our own lives, perhaps it turned out as it needed to.

Working together, it didn't take us long to realize that this project wasn't so much about books and words as it was about the textual and contextual meanings we give our lifestories, and the power we have to make changes in our lives by re-working those meanings. We realized that there wasn't an infinite array of stories, nor was there an

endless number and type of changes to be made. We are not free-floating atoms in the universe, landing where and when we'd like, but rather, women walking the earth in a particular time and place, living and interacting inside particular social structures which affect the way we live and what we have become. However, the structures are not set in concrete but in wet clay, and those who are looking at and feeling that clay can choose to take time and make something of it. That "looking and feeling" is the critical consciousness the collective was developing amongst the members through the writing and discussing of the memory-stories.

Collective critical consciousness is the ingredient necessary for the finding and the re-working of points of resistance from our past into revised interpretations of our lifestories. The key method of maintaining such critical consciousness is dialogue: we have to keep talking to each other. We live tangled in one anothers' lives and space whether we choose to talk or not, but talking may allow us to coexist, rather than simply exist, our interpretations becoming not "mine" or "yours" but "ours". That does not make it one story, but rather, many that are ours, stories shared amongst us, not any one claiming the whole or final one.

What we bring to the conversation has much to do with what and how we have read and written; it is important that we read critically and write reflectively, skills which we

practice alone, but learn and improve upon together. We adults have to practice this network of skills amongst ourselves, and then we will be ready to draw our children into the conversation.

The richness and depth of the conversation's fabric will depend on how many elements and voices we can weave together. Therefore, we don't want to omit readings from our list, we don't want to ban people from our converations: every component and person adds to our understanding.

We know, too, that we remember selectively, then retroactively "train" our lifestories to be like one-trick ponies, jumping through the same hoops in the same tidy order. The BookMarks project aimed to find ways of teaching the ponies a new trick or two. As an illustration of the way that work provided us with an answer to the research question, I return to the collective's response to, and treatment of, my problem with reading unconsciously like a man. I was looking for support from the others to agree this is an entirely terrible condition. Instead, we worked out another way to view it, having decided after listening and talking together that I was lucky to have had the chance to learn to read like a man; it was not that, but my unconsciousness of it that could have prevented me from using the knowledge to the fullest. Such reading, the group members thought, had allowed me to imagine myself a hero, to internalize the hero "parapheralia" needed to

translate the role into life. They credit my grade five-six teachers with having provided me with the context in which to practice being "my own hero" and they wished that they could have been there, too. While it's true that the textual models were male, and the plots revolved around the quest motif not "intended" for me as a girl, I obviously had no qualms about "taking up" those heroic roles to try out their shape textually, just as I had used texts to expand my horizons in other directions. To be allowed and able to imagine oneself in a wide range of roles is the first step to being able to rearrange their "parts" into one's own life-role. I had not, after all, spent my entire life reading only as a male; indeed, the experience may have "pushed" me to seek stronger female figures in other books, since I had learned to enjoy and expect an heroic central character. And there were such novels around if one was looking for them. It certainly sparked my interest in trying to "combine" female and male ideal traits in the female characters of my own stories. Now, I am able to use such insights into my reading skills to help develop new interpretations of the literary hero applicable to females as well as males.

By using a collective consciousness-raising process to approach the question of what it means to say we are gendered by what and how we read as girls is a critical intervention into the question itself, taking up the the "how" collectively and creatively to reinvent the "what",

and therefore, move from the passive "we are gendered", to the active "we engender".

VI. OUTCOME: RESOLVING THE CONFLICT

We are faced with the problem of not only what we can know but also of what we are to do.

-John Caputo
Radical Hermenuetics

The resolution of internal conflict in an interpretive story is linked to the emotional, spiritual, and/or intellectual growth of the central character. The dynamic protagonist must change and grow over the course of the story, discovering or developing character traits that allow him/her to experience some revelation about life, some insight into her/himself. In the same way, as the story of the BookMarks Collective unfolded, participants developed insights into themselves and their lives by experiencing and developing certain "character traits" of the collective memory-work process.

Indeed, I chose to model my research approach upon the collective memory-work developed by the authors of Female Sexualization because it embodies the traits I felt were essential to the task of transforming the theories I had studied into meaningful action by "transforming" the participants in the project. Those character "traits" are feminist praxis, autobiographical writing, and collectivity, which, in the BookMarks Project, acted in concert: collaborative, praxis-oriented feminist research using reflective writing and collective autobiography was undertaken to investigate the "reading" of femininity into our lives through our girlhood reading.

A. RESEARCH AS PRAXIS: Exemplary Feminist Work

> Our intervention is itself an act of liberation.
>
> -Frigga Haug et al.
> Female Sexualization

Reading Patti Lather's (1991) book, Getting Smart, has helped me to more fully appreciate the above quote from Female Sexualization. Lather begins Getting Smart with the statement: "Believing that in our action is our knowing, my central focus in the writing of this book is how research and teaching methods can better challenge the relations of dominance" (p. xv). To this end, she wishes to explore the possibilities and limits of oppositional discourse and practice to break the hold of the dominant order over social life. Lather focusses in particular on praxis-oriented feminist efforts to produce emancipatory knowledge, explaining that to do feminist research means putting the social construction of gender at the centre of one's inquiry, and in doing so, many feminists have found that their methodological task "has become generating and refining more interactive, contexualized methods in the search for pattern and meaning rather than for prediction and control" (p. 72). Methods that search for "prediction and control" reflect beliefs about the purpose of research, which have been shaped by the dominant androcentric values of society. Feminists who begin by challenging androcentric dualisms are challenging foundational assumptions of Western knowledge, one of the sturdiest pillars of which has been the belief that an objective, impersonal scientific method can be employed to discover absolute and immutable Truths in the physical as well as the human sciences. They question the possibility of researcher neutrality, doubting that an

omniscient, impartial researcher can conduct pure research upon "subjects" who are the research "objects". Having found such "objective" scientific methodology to be jarringly inappropriate for their purposes, some feminists have turned to developing democratized approaches that better reflect feminism's grassroots "no more experts" credo, which is premised on "the sturdy sureness that, given enabling conditions, every woman has something important to say about the disjunctures in her own life and the means necessary for change" (Lather, 1991:xviii). Research such as the BookMarks project conducted from such a perspective aims for "action on the everyday world by women as subjects and objects of their own experiences. The norms guiding such work involve openendedness, dialogue, explicitness, and reciprocity" (Apple in Lather, 1991:x).

The key word here is "action": researchers whom Lather calls "postpositivist" because their work is characterized by the rejection of the methodological and epistemological certainties of positivism (p. 52), desire transformative action and are committed to the development of change-enhancing approaches to knowledge-building:

> Rather than the illusory "value-free" knowledge of the positivists, praxis-oriented inquirers seek emancipatory knowledge. Emancipatory knowledge increases awareness of the contradictions distorted or hidden by everyday understandings, and in doing so it directs attention to the possibilities for social transformation inherent in

the present configuration of social processes. (p. 52)

Postpositivist praxis-oriented research is "explicitly committed to critiquing the status quo and building a more just society" (p. 50). It is marked by inquiry approaches which recognize that knowledge is "socially constituted, historically embedded and valuationally based" out of which has arisen research that is "openly ideological [and] advocacy-based" (p. 52).

To illustrate the "ways that full attention to the research process itself can help develop forms of inquiry that are 'interruptors' of the social relations of dominance" (p. 92), Lather presents six "exemplars" of actual research methods that praxis-oriented researchers have developed and put into practice, one of which is the Haug et al. collective memory-work project.

The authors of Female Sexualization are exemplary researchers, offering others such as our BookMarks Collective a "living" model upon which to design their work. We discovered that the inquiry-approach is itself an "interruption" of the prevailing social relations of dominance and subordination reflected by traditional methodologies. For example, our collective collapsed the researcher-subject/researched-object divide by becoming both the subjects and objects of our own research. In this configuration, we participants recognize our agency:

> If we refuse to understand ourselves simply as a bundle of reactions to all-powerful structures...if we search

> instead for possible indications of how we have participated actively in the formation of our own past experience, then the usual mode of social-scientific research, in which individuals figure exclusively as objects of the process of research, has to be abandoned. (Haug et al., 1987:35)

Instead of approaching "human beings from the point of view of their controllability, the predictability of their actions", the members of the collective think that since they are "concerned here with the possible means whereby human beings may themselves assume control, and thus with the potential prospect of liberation, our research itself must be seen as an intervention into existing practices" (p. 35). Part of this "intervention" is the collapse of the theory/practice split accomplished by having all members of the collective participate in all aspects of the research, including the interpretation of it. We can also bring down the separation between scientific knowledge and everyday life by demanding the right to use experience as a basis of knowledge. The process of writing our remembrances is another "transgression of boundaries" (Haug et al., 1987:37), a collapse of categories: the private becomes public, or, in the words of the slogan popularized by feminists in the 1970s, "the personal is the political". Here, participants engage in "interactive reciprocal self-disclosure" (Lather, 1991:73) as well as self-reflection, which refuses binary thinking and

stimulates "a self-sustaining process of critical analysis and enlightened action" (Lather, 1991:75). This approach is open-ended and designed to work in any number of applications, such as in my adaptation. The members of the collective present their work as the start of much work to be done, sharing Lather's notion that "rather than establish a new orthodoxy, we need to experiment, document and share our efforts toward emancipatory research" (p. 69).

In this type of research, theory, method, and praxis are inseparable: political activism is an integral part of the research and everyday experience is tied to its theoretical underpinnings. In my adaptation of this approach to the research, the participants did not simply "study" emancipation; our work is not "about" liberation: it is in itself liberating.

The collective's development and practice of the memory-work approach may well be one of those elegantly small-scaled, change-enhancing actions that Wendell Berry (1989) tells us we must develop as new examples to live by (p. 17); it may well be the sort of local, specific excavation job that Michel Foucault (1980b) tells us we should undertake. (p. 82). It may well be that, unlike the advice of so many, the collective's words have been and will be translated into action.

B. WRITING AND REMEMBERING

Writing as the thread out of the labyrinth....I want to reach back a long way and recall what Confucius is said to have said: The reform of a society begins in the reform of its language.

-James Hillman
We've Had a Hundred Years of Psychotherapy
And the World's Getting Worse

Literally, reconceptualization means to conceive again, to turn back the conceptual structures that support our actions in order to reveal the rich and and abundant experience they conceal.

-Madeleine Grumet
"Autobiography and Reconceptualization"

Whoever does not write is written.

-Phillipe Sollers
Writing and the Experience of Limits

If meaning is constructed within language, and if the meaning of women's stories has been interpreted for them in language not their own, then to claim their own interpretations of their stories, women have to reconceptualize the language in which they have been spoken into existence. The habitual, repetitive patterns of "everyday language" tend to lull women into self-forgetful acceptance of events as "just the way things are". Day-to-day language, loaded with preconceived notions and value judgements, is nonetheless heard and spoken as a neutral and transparent medium through which reality is transmitted. Members of the Haug collective found that this un-selfconscious view of everyday language coupled with a lack of adequate means within the language to express or understand the diversity of women's experience is a major obstacle to liberation (p. 62). Believing,

however, that this is not an inevitability; that "language can serve either as a prison house, or as the material of liberation", they realized that one of the collective's tasks was to "act as a kind of language school which, unlike traditional schools, sought out words familiar from our own experience that might equip us for active social intervention" (p. 62). In their self-examination of language habits, the group first noted that the cliche was the most common form in which memories were verbalized:

> Cliche defines like a corset the contours of "appropriate" female feelings and desires....In using cliche, we are to an extent passing sentence on ourselves; the cliche condemns us to walk on the well-trodden path of that which should be.
>
> The cliche debilitates; it acts as an obstacle to understanding. (p. 63)

Then, they noticed that when a woman in the group told a story, she at first seemed to be relating a series of events as a harmonious whole; only a few hairline cracks marred the apparently uncontradictory surface of her narrative. The collective found that this type of attempt at seamless storytelling reflected a "perceived need for harmony", which, like cliche-ridden language, "is particularly detrimental to the expansion of our knowledge":

> [T]he need for harmony ornaments ugly inconsistencies, plasters over the cracks. The price we pay for the elimination of contradictions is acquiescence in a kind

> of narrow-mindedness that conflicts at every turn with the level of knowledge we have actually attained. (p.69)

Much, then, is left unsaid, or unsayable, in the clichéd language of patched-over, sewn-up narratives that attempt to ignore contradictions. Everyday language "suppresses the concreteness of feelings, thoughts and experiences, speaking of them only at a distance. Hence the enormous effort involved in translating female experience into narrative" (p. 64).

The collective found that the practice of self-reflexive writing can help women to develop the skills necessary to break through the hegemonizing rituals of everyday speech. The act of writing itself allows for a kind of focus on and review of one's words and their meaning that is not possible in everyday speech. Their practice of autobiographical writing, which requires one not only to review and rewrite one's own work, but also to read others' writing in order to help develop one's own, allows the writer of personal stories to reach "across the line dividing it from creative writing" (Grumet, 1981:144), ignoring artifically-imposed genre divisions in order to learn from fiction its "focus on the concrete particularities of life which create powerful narrative tellings" (Connelly and Clandinin, 1991:128).

This type of focussed, sensuously-detailed writing of the personal narrative can be used as a tool with which we may

uncover richer meaning and express deeper understanding of our lived experience. However, a major hurdle to be overcome has to do with the fact that those traditionally regarded as the storytellers in our culture have been male literary authors (Haug et al., 1987:38), and women have not been encouraged to regard any writing about their everyday lives as important, interesting, or worthy of undertaking. Women themselves have tended to accept that "internal hopelessness", as Louise Berknikow (1988), using the example of her grandmother's life and experience, explains in Among Women:

> Hers is a life story full of interminable variations of heroism--a struggle for survival worthy of Sisyphus. She knew how to make a stew for seven from a lonely potato. She was as wily as any con man in life or literature, as resourceful, as imaginative, but honest. Her journey, like any pilgrim's progress, was from oppression, degradation, danger and terror to a freedom laden with responsibility. And she persisted in the face of odds as great as any that faced Odysseus. Her education in the ways of the world was as interesting and more profound than all the "young man from the provinces" novels I have read. She does not think her story worth telling. She could not--and I, for many years could not--imagine that it would be the stuff of literature, of chronicle, of history. It is, after all, only a woman's story, only about food, cooking, shelter and families--and about women. (p. 42)

While Berknikow makes clear that neither the woman's story nor its teller has been valued by the external forces of the dominant androcentric culture, and while women have most certainly and often violently been silenced by those forces: "What chance has the female storyteller had, making her way through closed gates to an alien city to an inhospitable audience in the town square of the patriarchy?" (p. 42), she emphasizes in her grandmother's story the self-inflicted damage done by internalizing that hopelessness, because as we begin to recognize how much energy we expend suppressing our feelings and aiding in our oppression, it will become possible to re-direct it to projects of self-liberation.

In their exemplary work, the authors of Female Sexualization not only encouraged us, but also showed us how to begin dismantling the internal and external barriers to female authorship by taking up the writing of our lives as a consciousness-raising, emancipatory process. They regard the writing of memory-work stories as a means for women, "through their own historicization", to "retrieve from the dominant culture elements of a new image of themselves, on the basis of which they may possibly be able to construct alternatives for the future" (p. 49).

To initiate such a process of re-creation, we begin on our own, but certainly not alone, because in quiet contemplation, we start to hear and heed the voices we've allowed to be silenced and suppressed (Harris, 1988) in fitting our identities into pre-cut patterns.

This can become disturbing and dangerous work, uncovering monstrous memories. Harris tells us that the words **monster** and **memory** stem from the same Latin root, **mens** (p. 32); we mould much of what we are afraid to face about the past into unspeakable monsters, hidden away from the daylight tellings of our seamless stories. The monsters are put away under and over "there", externalized, displaced, and controlled, as long as we don't look at them. Nobody mentions them. But avoiding the monsters limits and regulates our lives: we spend our time performing rituals, murmuring incantations, and staying away from so many rooms and closets so they can't "get" us, that our lives become small and cramped and twisted. We become used to our lives that way, so it is very hard to work up the courage to look under the bed. Even more frightening is shining a flashlight in the face of the monster, and seeing our own faces reflected in the mirror hidden there. In the light, the pretense ends, and we begin to see our complicity in the maintenance of life led blindly. While it is difficult to first face getting used to wearing a monstrous countenance, it is frightening to realize that once we know we are the monsters, we are responsible for what the monsters have done. What we make the monsters into from there, however, becomes a conscious decision.

While re-viewing the past eventually allows us to become conscious and active participants in our present and future lives, it must be acknowledged that initially, it is for some an exceedingly painful experience, and for most, a

distasteful and disturbing one. But in either case, it looks as if the alternative is to live our lives as hopeless and mind-numbed victims of "fate" and "circumstance".

As educators, we often try to improve our technique, our materials, the class environment, or the curriculum, but as Krishnamurti (1953) emphasizes, "if we want to change existing conditions, we must first transform ourselves, which means we must become aware of our own actions, thoughts and feelings in everyday life" (p. 68). We can begin to develop such transformative awareness through written contemplation of our past and re-vision of our memories.

This process invites us to re-create ourselves "less as masters of truth and justice and more as creators of a space where those directly involved can act and speak on their own behalf" (Lather, 1991:137). Written self-reflection tends to open rather than close the mind and the heart, creating room to hold more and varied possibilities for oneself as well as for one's students. The teacher who practices contemplative writing, awakened to her own complexities and multiplicities, is more likely to become a teacher "who wants to redesign a pedagogy which makes room for the multiple, creative capacities existing in human beings, for possibilities and processes which make for expansion, not contraction" (Harris, 1988:2). And such writing, having helped the teacher to learn ways of confronting painful issues, of living with ambiguities, and

of re-viewing contradictions in her past, is work that helps the teacher to realize that "remembering well means remembering how each of us might struggle through life's bittersweetness with the kind of courage that enables life to go on" (Smith, 1994:180). To believe in and undertake as our pedagogical task such profound and courageous remembrance, we must believe we are agents in the construction of our own lives now and in the future. To believe that, and thus take up teaching as a courageously lived curriculum, we must break free of mindlessly self-defeating habits and patterns of thinking. Putting pen to paper may be the key act which opens the door to such self-conscious and dynamic agency.

C. COLLECTIVITY

Human beings produce their lives collectively. It is within the domain of collective production that individual experience becomes possible.

-Frigga Haug et al.
Female Sexualization

We cannot discover what a woman is in isolation; we need each other.

-Patricia Duncker
Sisters and Strangers

The reading of our own individual stories requires that we also read our collective stories.

-Madeleine Grumet
"Women and Teaching: Homeless at Home"

Women must organize for themselves and in their own interests before they can fully think their way out of patriarchy.

-Gerda Lerner
The Creation of Feminist Consciousness

Raising consciousness, James Hillman (1992) reminds us, is about keeping the conversation going (p. 99), but it's also about with whom and where and how long and about what you get to converse. Women continue to find themselves physically and mentally isolated from one another in a culture that romanticizes the male-female dyad, sentimentalizes the nuclear family, glamourizes the male buddy system and the old boy network, and valourizes the individual male hero, while denigrating and sabotaging the personal and political relationships of women:

> The hegemony of patriarchal thought in Western civilization is not due to its superiority in content, form and achievement over all other thought; it is built upon the systematic silencing of other voices. Women of all classes, men of different races or religious beliefs from those of the dominant, those defined as deviants by them--all these had to be discouraged, ridiculed, silenced. Above all they had to be kept from being part of the intellectual discourse....
>
> The definition of those to be kept out was usually not even made explicit, for to have made it explicit would have meant to acknowledge that there was a process of exclusion going on. Those to be kept out were simply obliterated from sight, marginalized out of existence. (Lerner, 1993:282)

Unconsciousness, James Hillman (1992) also reminds us, is "really nothing more than letting things fall out of

conversation, no longer talking about something" (p. 99). But for a few harmless sorts, women have been dropped from the conscious life-shaping conversations of our culture. While a few "great" feminist intellectuals per generation have been allowed to flourish, they pose no real threat to the establishment from their position so deeply entrenched within it:

> Mary Wollstonecraft argued with Burke and Rousseau, when arguing with Makin, Astell and Margaret Fell might have sharpened her thought and radicalized her. Emma Goldman argued for free love and a new sort of communal life against the models of Marx and Bakunin; a dialogue with the Owenite feminists Anna Wheeler and Emma Martin might have redirected her thinking and kept her from inventing "solutions" which had already proven unworkable fifty years earlier. Simone de Beauvoir, in a passionate dialogue with Marx, Freud, Sartre and Camus, could go as far with a feminist critique of patriarchal values and institutions as it was possible to go when the thinker was male-centred. Had she truly engaged with Mary Wollstonecraft's thought, the works of Mary Astell, the Quaker feminists of the early 19th century, the mystical revisioners among the black spiritualists and the feminism of Anna Cooper, her analysis might have become woman-centred and therefore capable of projecting alternatives to the basic mental constructs of patriarchal thought. (Lerner, p. 280)

The great individual female writers and thinkers not only based their arguments upon and within the Great Man tradition, they also for the most part addressed these arguments, in form and content, to a male audience, to the powers-that-be, who would read or perhaps not read, scoff or smile, indulge or dismiss them, without making a ripple on the serene surface of patriarchy.

When we remain isolated from one another, we cannot help but continue the tradition of the millenia: "What we need to note is the discontinuity in the story of women's intellectual effort. Endlessly, generation after generation of Penelopes rewove the unraveled fabric only to unravel it again" (Lerner, 1993:275). Without community, we struggle individually, re-inventing the wheel. And the "wheel" is not "ours" anyway; what is worth making, what it is possible to conceive making, is determined by androcentric norms and values. Dialogue with other women past and present is critically important to our understanding and appreciation of our own histories, public and private, for out of such collective self-knowledge, we can construct and project a desired future: "Feminist consciousness is a prerequisite for the formulation of the kind of abstract thought needed to conceptualize a society in which differences do not connote dominance" (Lerner, 1993:280). Women have only recently begun to form the kinds of personal and political action coalitions that will make it possible, through our conversation, to create, maintain, and develop collective

consciousness. Since, unlike the isolated female genius, these politically-activated affinity groups can seriously interrupt and disrupt patriarchy, there have been innumerable "backlash" campaigns by the dominant culture aimed at specific women's organizations and feminists in general (Faludi, 1990; Wolfe, 1991; Tavris, 1992) to undercut their effectiveness and marginalize their efforts. While such relentless campaigns have had their effect, they have not succeeded in silencing or disbanding women's collective action groups. The work of both the Haug and BookMarks collectives stand as examples.

The women of the collectives found that their projects required both individual and collective action, working in concert. It was important for members to begin the re-view of their memories by first writing down as many specific and particular uncensored remembrances as they could. Analysis of those first writings, however, needed to be a collective endeavor. Without the intervention of group critique and analysis of individual autobiographies between initial and re-written drafts, memory-stories remained mired in clichés and harmonized generalizations, or were smoothed-over versions from which much was left out entirely as too shameful or hurtful to dare write about at all. The group acted as a corrective to any harmonizing of contradictions, for through collaborative analysis of the stories, members began to see that alternative versions of their lives could be found in the spaces and contradictions of their initial memory-stories; or,

as the group members poetically put it: "Alongside omissions, absences and the unnamed, it is still possible to reconstruct past events in the cracks between the echoes of our silence" (p. 68). The collective was able to see patterns and breaks in the stories that the individual working in isolation would not see. In their dynamic conversational community, the women made the transformational possibilities of the memory-writings become contextual realities; words on the page were "made flesh", and then had a real impact on the way they viewed and led their lives. It is through such collective action that women's lives have been and will be changed.

Much of our lives as teachers is spent in spiritual and intellectual isolation. Many of us have split ourselves so efficiently into "professional" and "personal" selves that we live twilight half-lives, alienated from our students, our peers, ourselves. In our culture, the dominant patriarchal discourses of our social, personal, and institutional lives conspire to tell the same story, and in many ways we actively, if unselfconsciously, recite it ourselves: having memorized the words, we act out our parts, thinking its plotline to be the inevitable and only one.

Leading this disconnected existence on the "wrong" side of the androcentric divide, women in particular are often unhappy and discontented, but in our isolation, we feel we can do nothing about it, and so plod on because that's "just the way it is". Such regretful resignation permeates out pedagogy.

Instead, it may be possible to translate our discontent into transformational action, using the memory-work method as a structured intervention into the hegemonizing discourses of patriarchy. Written reflection can begin to show up the cracks in our own memory-stories as participants in patriarchy, and together, in the focussed dialogues of affinity groups, we can draw out information from contradictions, patterns, silences and spaces of many stories, giving us the material from which we can then re-vision and re-write our individual and collective lives. As teachers, we will transform our teaching as we change ourselves, by re-membering the stories of our lives as connected human beings, by approaching our problems locally, actively and collectively, and by keeping the conversation going in all our relationships.

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