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A WOMAN(S) WRITER?: SOME ISSUES IN FEMINIST READING OF THE
WORK OF ROSAMOND LEHMANN

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

The first section of the thesis begins by examining the question of the textual pleasure of Lehmann's writing and discussing the relationship between emotive and academic reactions to texts. It goes on to describe the double critical standard which operates in criticism of Lehmann's texts, that is, the way that her work has been labelled as "feminine" and therefore second-rate. The introduction to the section concludes by examining feminist, and other, attitudes towards femininity and arguing that femininity should be reclaimed by feminism as a valuable textual force. Chapters 1 and 2 discuss the treatment of femininity in Lehmann's short story "When the Waters Came" and her novel, The Ballad and the Source.

The second section continues to investigate and interrogate the ways in which textual femininity has been discussed and evaluated, particularly in the modern period. It posits a notion of gender as a (more or less) controlled performance as a counter-argument against all those who devalue aspects of femininity and argue that women are necessarily overwhelmed by their own femininity. Chapters 3 and 4 examine the modes of gender performance and feminine identity presented in Lehmann's work, drawing upon the work of Luce Irigaray and Hélène Cixous to argue that the feminine identity presented in Invitation to the Waltz and The Swan in the Evening is both performative and relational.

The final section expands the discussion of relational identity. The introduction to the section examines some theories of feminine ethics and argues that the moral vision of Lehmann's work lies in its representation and enactment of female-to-female bonds. Chapters 5 and 6, discussing Dusty Answer and The Echoing Grove, argue that Lehmann has used the genre of romantic fiction while critiquing the centrality of heterosexual relationships and both representing and enacting alternative, female-centred relationships.

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Lehmann's works have been consulted in the following editions. In the text, they will be referred to only by page numbers unless two or more works by Lehmann are being cited on the same page, in which case the abbreviations listed below in square brackets will be used for works other than the main text under discussion.

Dusty Answer (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1936; 1st published 1927). [DA]

A Note in Music (London, Virago, 1982; 1st published 1930). [NM]

A Letter to a Sister (London, Hogarth, 1931). [LS]

Invitation to the Waltz (London, Virago, 1981; 1st published 1932). [IW]

The Weather in the Streets (London, Virago, 1981; 1st published 1936). [WS]

The Ballad and the Source (London, Virago, 1982; 1st published 1944). [BS]

The Gipsy's Baby and Other Stories (London, Virago, 1982; 1st published 1946). [GB]

The Echoing Grove (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1958; 1st published 1953). [EG]

The Swan in the Evening. Fragments of an Inner Life (Revised edition London, Virago, 1982; 1st published 1967). [SE]

A Sea-Grape Tree (London, Virago, 1982; 1st published 1976). [ST]

INTRODUCTION

When I began this piece of research, I had not read any of Rosamond Lehmann's work, and indeed, had barely heard of her. The thesis was born many years ago when, as an undergraduate studying in a department which at that time made little mention of women writers and no mention at all of feminist theory or criticism in any of its classes, I was asked to write an Honours dissertation on a topic of my choice. While largely ignoring both women and feminism, some classes had discussed male writers' attitudes to, and use of, femininity. Yet essays which attempted to make points about representations of women in the works tended not to go down very well with markers. My first impulse then, one born of complete ignorance of work in the field, was to write a dissertation about a male writer's portrayal of female characters. I thought perhaps a study of Lawrence or of Hardy might afford scope for analysis of the way their portrayal of female characters could both reproduce negative stereotypes and subtly undermine those stereotypes. Luckily, my dissertation supervisor was able to point out that this was an area which had been more than covered in feminist criticism (this was 1982) and to suggest that if I was interested in that period, I might consider looking at some women writers contemporary with Hardy or Lawrence. My initial reading took me through Woolf, West, Mansfield, Vera Brittain, Storm Jameson, Rose MacAulay and Winifrid Holtby. Eventually, I produced a dissertation which discussed works by

Woolf, West and Holtby.

Later, this work was to seem naïve and dated, particularly in its circling around questions of literary value. The prime drive in my postgraduate work was to return to this issue, largely avoided in my Honours dissertation, and to attempt to account for the fact that women writers of the period were consistently ignored and undervalued by academia. Still interested in a range of women writers, I continued to expand my reading, taking in Dorothy Richardson, Elizabeth Bowen, Elizabeth Taylor, and finally, Lehmann. Theoretical issues surrounding the question of feminist literary valuation preoccupied me at that time. I at last learned about the body of feminist criticism which existed and the developments and tensions within it. For some time, there was some doubt over whether the focus of my thesis would be the feminist theory itself. Certainly, it seemed that discussion of theoretical issues would have to play a large part in the finished work. Given this, it soon became clear that I could not continue to hope to provide a survey of British women writers of the early part of this century, and must select one writer who would epitomise many of the issues which were emerging from my reading of theory. For a while, West and Lehmann appeared to be equally productive subjects for the study, but as my reading of feminist theory continued, certain key issues began to emerge. Lehmann's work seemed the ideal vehicle for exploration of these issues, not because the texts offered any resolution of problems or unproblematic feminist stance, but precisely because her work seemed to be throwing up so many unresolved contradictions. There would, it seemed, be no lack of things to say

about Lehmann's writing.

This complex process was further complicated by my initial reactions to Lehmann's work, for my first readings of her texts afforded me pure and unalloyed pleasure. The pleasure of reading was another issue which my undergraduate training had not prepared me to discuss. Indeed, I felt uneasy about attempting to discuss pleasure in an academic work. Reading for pleasure and reading for academic study seemed to me to be diametrically opposed in many cases. Or perhaps it would be more accurate to say that while academic reading afforded me great pleasure, at that time I perceived this as a different kind of pleasure to that which I experienced when reading Lehmann's texts. I had certainly not come across any academic study in which the writer expressed a personal sense of the pleasure of the text, let alone tried to account for that personal pleasure.

My attitudes to my own pleasure in reading Lehmann's work were further problematised by the fact that such pleasure seemed not only to lie outside the bounds of academic reading, but also to lie outside the bounds of feminist reading. And then there was the issue of the texts' apparent complicity with class structures which I believed to be outdated, divisive and repressive. How, then, could I account for my pleasure in these texts? Did I suspend all of my critical and intellectual faculties and simply wallow in an unreconstructed traditionally feminine immersion in emotion? Was I using my research as an excuse to afford myself escape into a fantasy of heterosexual romance which, if challenged, I would have explicitly and quite vociferously decried?

I thus now had two important preoccupations in my work. My early commitment to the authors in question had not departed me. Given my increasing theoretical knowledge, the question of why the author should be important seemed to demand an answer. My second preoccupation was with the pleasure of the texts. What kind of pleasure was I experiencing? Was it a non-academic, anti-feminist pleasure? Were there ways to account for these two aspects of my reaction to Lehmann's work which could be both academically rigorous and compatible with a feminist project? The nature of the two questions which concerned me led me to be steered towards reading some post-structuralist theory. And it was in my attempts to read this theory that the answer to both of the questions started to form in my head. For what I discovered as I continued to read widely was that not only did I now find it far easier and more pleasurable to read fictional works by women writers than by male authors, I also found it far easier and more pleasurable to read critical and theoretical works by women, or more particularly, feminist women theorists. Indeed, I found that I simply could not read much writing by male poststructuralists. Some were interesting, indeed even fun, but in the same way that a crossword puzzle or jigsaw is fun. They afforded a challenge and a sense of achievement in completing the puzzle, but I could find no position from which to personally engage with the texts in the way that I did with writing, fictional, critical or theoretical, by female writers.

The more fiction and theory by women that I read, the more these various reading issues appeared to become entangled with one another. I had developed

my feminism in isolation; not knowing where to find groups, or texts, who might support that development and offer me enriching, alternative views of what feminism might be, I believed myself to be a liberal, equal rights feminist. I knew of no other way to be feminist except to assert the basic similarity between women and men, and demand women's right to be treated in the same way as men. Yet I felt uneasy with this, for, in truth, I felt that to make such statements was to be highly reductive both of what women are, and what they could be. Thus, while my experience of the research process seemed to be leading me to a position of asserting women's difference from men, I was very uneasy about the efficacy of explicitly formulating this argument in an academic context. Not only did it seem as if my emotive response to the texts was incompatible with the academic norm of a distanced, detached response, but it also seemed as if that emotive response was indeed a consequence of my own, and the writers' sex. No amount of reading poststructuralist theories about difference and marginality could make me less uneasy with this position, since the difference which I was being drawn to discuss was an apparently very traditional, and perhaps even biological, difference between women and men. What could such an argument do except play into the hands of those who would want to devalue both my own thesis and Lehmann's work? And wouldn't I find my arguments antithetical to many feminist positions, tied up as they would be with apparently conventional notions about femaleness and femininity?

Out of all of this confusion, one thing became clear. The central aim of my thesis must be to find an academically acceptable way to account for why a

feminist should find such powerful pleasure in reading apparently traditionally feminine texts by a woman writer. In forming this account, I hoped that I could also show that feminist criticism can work within the discourses of academia to express insights which seem to be the opposite of measured, intellectual, academic responses.

Stages in the development of this account seemed to mirror the development of feminist criticism in general. Thus, I began with a notion of shared experience, of "that's my story". However, under the temporary influence of poststructuralist theory, I began to see this as simplistic, as placing both reader and writer in a mechanistic relationship to the text which bore little relationship to the real complexities of reading and writing positions. Furthermore, since many of Lehmann's texts appear, on the surface, to valorise the notion that the true female vocation lies in passionate heterosexual love, the call to shared experience, so often used in feminist criticism, is, in this case, problematic from a feminist point of view. The idea was raised that in finding pleasure in such texts, experiencing the sweeps of emotion, perhaps even floods of tears, that one might when watching a film melodrama, one must be putting one's feminism "on the back burner". This was an idea which I found not only inadequate, but also offensive. It seemed to suggest that there was only one way to be feminist, and to imply a contempt for women who enjoy having their emotions engaged by stories of heterosexual romance.

Continued reading of feminist theorists, and re-reading of Lehmann's work, and attempts to formulate arguments which would analyse the way that the texts

draw upon notions of femininity, eventually led me to stumble upon the solution to my problem. Two events helped me to this solution. The first was reading the work of Hélène Cixous - not the standards like "The Laugh of the Medusa" (Cixous, 1980b) but an essay called "Extreme Fidelity" in which Cixous describes the pleasure she feels in reading the work of Brazilian writer Clarice Lispector (Cixous, 1988). In this essay, Cixous appears to break all of the "rules" to which I was trying to adhere. She takes a little-known woman writer whose work, it appears, is often thought second-rate and bourgeois and has the courage to produce a very personal and impassioned response to that work. Reading Lispector's work, Cixous analyses the operation of a textual movement which she describes as proximity without possession: "The most difficult thing to do is to arrive at the most extreme proximity while guarding against the trap of projection, of identification" (Cixous, 1988, p29). Cixous analyses the operation of this textual movement both within Lispector's texts, and in the relationship between the author and her characters (Cixous, 1988, p33-35). Cixous also suggests that this model should inform the relationship between reader and characters, and between reader and author. Although Cixous describes the way in which Lispector assumes the persona of a male author in order to achieve proximity to her central character, the textual movement which allows such extreme proximity is continually linked to a feminine libidinal economy of pleasure which exists outside, or rather, before the law of the masculine libidinal economy (Cixous, 1988, pp15-18). It is an economy, Cixous claims, which is not exclusively female, but is nevertheless more commonly experienced by women

than by men: "It happens that culturally, women have more of a chance of gaining access to pleasure, because of the cultural and political division of the sexes, which is based on sexual difference" (Cixous, 1988, p18). Thus, Cixous's text links feminine pleasure with textual representation and enactment of a relationship between women which involves contiguity without possession: "The other must remain in all its extreme strangeness within the greatest possible proximity" (Cixous, 1988, p29). Moreover, Cixous's text itself enacts the movement it describes, and its wonderfully utopian sweep seems to offer its reader a place in a circle, or perhaps a spiral, of female-female textual relationships based upon the principle of proximity without possession. In this way, reading "Extreme Fidelity" allowed me to articulate the idea that there was a particular type of writer-reader relationship at the heart of the textual pleasure which I experienced when reading Lehmann's writing.

This feeling was reinforced by the experience of presenting a short, informal paper about one of Lehmann's short stories to a small group of women working in feminist theory. This discussion forms the basis of the analysis of "When the Waters Came" in Chapter 1 of this thesis, so I will not describe its content in any detail here. What I must do, though, is to thank all of the women involved. I had expected some negative reactions, perhaps even hostility to the story. What I discovered was that everyone there found the story immensely pleasurable to read. Equally, everyone felt sure that this was because it is a particularly "feminine" story (although individuals defined this in different ways). No-one believed that a male reader would have reacted to the story in the same way that

we did.

Armed at last with support from feminist texts and feminist women, I began to explore in more depth what the femininity of Lehmann's texts might consist of, and why that femininity should be so appealing to female readers. This involved sustained exploration of various feminist and non-feminist theories of femininity, and more particularly, of feminine textuality. This was necessary firstly because, having already experienced some of the complexity of trying to formulate a stance on femininity, I felt the need to clarify the assumptions and unspoken implications of my own arguments. Secondly, it was necessary because Lehmann's texts did not offer any obvious feminist text or sub-text, yet appeared to be appealing to feminists. This, I felt, constituted a challenge to my ideas of what feminism and feminist reading might be. The thesis begins, then, with a lengthy introductory chapter which works through various issues in the relationship between femininity, femaleness and feminism. In effect, the purpose of this introduction is to carve out a space from which I can enunciate the ideas about femininity which will be at the heart of my readings of Lehmann's texts. Having said that, the main thrust of my argument is that femininity is not one thing but many. This is central to an understanding of my model of the relationship between femininity, femaleness and feminism: I want to continually stress that there are multiple femininities available to women to draw upon. Moreover, I will show that it is possible for women to take active control of their use of femininities. At any one time, both feminist and non-feminist women might be drawing upon a range of femininities, and drawing upon them in

various ways: supporting them, developing them in a particular direction, subtly or not-so-subtly undermining them. Thus, while I find an anti-femininity stance unhelpful and, in practice, misogynistic, I am not in the post-feminist camp of those who espouse a "conscious femininity" which amounts to no more than embracing a self-sacrificial, elemental, maternal identity as if that identity were an opiate to the pain of living in a mechanistic, uncaring world. I would not claim that femininity has any essential relationship to femaleness, but equally, I do not believe that we can simply escape from the feminine. At some point in this research, I discovered the construction "to do femininity". It seems to me an enormously helpful phrase: femininity is not something that we are, but something that we do. We can do it in different ways at different times, but to suggest that we can, and should, just decide that we are not going to do femininity at all, is simply to replace one set of constraints with another and places feminism in danger of replicating the negative judgments about feminine women that patriarchy has always made.

For a model of the way that women can make conscious use of femininity, I turn to the work of Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler and particularly their discussions of femininity as performance. I will show that this concept enables theorisation of the way that women can work within dominant discourses of femininity without being wholly constrained by those discourses. The concept allows gender to be theorised as a conscious and controlled strategy which allows the dominant discourses to be undermined even as they are being used. As a textual strategy, radical gender performance therefore demands attention to the

ironies in a text's use of gender discourses. It is the feminist reader's role to join forces with the author in order to highlight the ironies of the text and make the gender performance effective as a strategy to undermine dominant discourses about femininity. Since that strategy involves using and also, to some extent, supporting those dominant discourses even while revising them, then the feminist reader must be alert to the fact that texts which make use of a strategy of gender performance will necessarily contain both conservative and radical elements in their use of gender categories.

In fact, it is just such a mix of conservative and radical elements which makes Lehmann's texts both so appealing and so problematic for feminists. I will describe the way in which conventional criticism of Lehmann's work tends to concentrate on its conservative elements and to overlook its radicalism. As a deliberate counter-move against this, I will concentrate on the radical elements of the texts. In giving prominence to this side of the texts, I may create the impression that the texts are wholly radical. This is not so. Indeed, it is one of the features of gender performance that the conventional and the revolutionary will be found together. This is true of all of Lehmann's texts. For my purposes, however, I have concentrated on those texts where the radical appears to outweigh the conservative. In others, the balance goes the other way. Nevertheless, each of her texts would have yielded some point to back up my arguments about femininity as a conscious performance and about the bonds between females which support author and characters in their attempts to move beyond conventional gender categories even while drawing upon those categories.

In Section 1, I engage with the term "femininity" in order to clear a space from which I can discuss the femininity of Lehmann's work. I do not question the attribution of femininity to the texts. Instead, I question the meaning and value of that femininity. In the course of my discussion of feminist and non-feminist attitudes to femininity, both inside and outside Lehmann's texts, I also justify my engagement with this term. I then go on to explore notions of textual femininity through readings of the short story, "When the Waters Came" and the novel, The Ballad and the Source. These texts were selected because they seemed to be "feminine" texts in some very obvious ways. My analysis of what these texts do with their femininity provides the basis for the model of conscious use of femininity which I will develop in Section 2 of the thesis.

Section 2, while placing Lehmann's work in the context of that of her contemporaries, centres around the concept of "feminine identity" and the relationship between that identity and writing. As I have already made clear, my readings of the way Lehmann's texts construct feminine selves have been encouraged and enabled by readings of both women writers contemporary to Lehmann, and of feminist critics of the period. However, it is not the project of this thesis to provide an exhaustive context for Lehmann's work by making detailed comparisons between her work and that of other women writers of the time. There are already several theses which do this, most commonly comparing Lehmann's work to that of Elizabeth Bowen and Virginia Woolf.¹ Similarly,

¹ For example, Core (1981) compares Lehmann to Woolf and Radclyffe Hall; Sullivan (1985) compares her to Bowen; Richardi (1981) discusses her alongside Richardson, Sinclair, Bowen and Lessing; Garner (1980) takes Bowen

critical and biographical studies of modernist women have given me an awareness of the context in which the texts were produced.² More than anything, perhaps, these studies have given me an awareness of what Lehmann does not share with her contemporaries. It became clear, for example, that Lehmann's work was neither as stylistically and generically conservative as some nor as experimental as others. I chose to discuss Invitation to the Waltz in this section of the thesis precisely because it appears to employ both conventional and more radical techniques in its use of style and form.

Recently, I have become more aware of Alison Light's work which discusses the way that women writers between the wars exhibited both conservative and modernist impulses in their writing. Light discusses the work of Ivy Compton-Burnett, Agatha Christie, Jan Struther and Daphne du Maurier. Again, one thing which strikes is a key feature which these writers (except Du Maurier) share with each other, which, it appears, Lehmann does not share with them: a rejection of femininity as conventionally defined and, more particularly, of the link between that femininity and romance. Light finds textual features in all four authors which, she claims, "are all in their different ways responses to the problem of imagining a femininity whose former *raison d'être* had been primarily to embody and to speak 'romance'" (Light, 1991, p210). Light describes a process in which literary texts describe and embody a reconstituted femininity

as her focus and compares her chiefly to Woolf and Lehmann, but also to Rhys and Stead.

² See, for example, Scott, 1990 and Hanscombe and Smyers, 1987.

which takes on "what had formerly been regarded as distinctly masculine qualities" (Light, 1991, p210). Light attributes this to the way that the first world war had destroyed previous ideas about masculinity and consequently left traditional femininity with nothing against which to define itself. I will show that Lehmann's texts are also responses to the problem of re-imagining femininity in the context of the post-war crisis in masculine values. However, Lehmann's response is very different to that of the four authors Light discusses.

Light also argues that many women writers of the period, particularly the "intellectual" writers like Rebecca West and Storm Jameson, rejected emotionality and romance (Light, 1991, p161). This, she argues, can be attributed to the growing visibility of the sexuality and emotionality of working class women:

We might speculate that the modern bourgeois woman between the wars retreats from the visibly erotic or from displays of femininity, as the working classes became more publicly sexualized. Certainly, with intensity of feeling and expressivity such thorough bad taste, many writers left romance well alone or found ways of writing from a less "feminine" position in the culture. (Light, 1991, p162)

Lehmann's response would appear to be very different to this. Indeed, as I will show, her work is commonly thought to revel in displays of sexuality, emotionality and femininity. However, I will also show that the way that Lehmann uses the romance genre does not necessarily imply total endorsement of its values, and indeed that in some texts, romance, both as a concept and a fictional genre, is subverted.

One attribute Light describes which Lehmann does appear to share with her contemporaries is a retreat into the domestic and the private which nevertheless

exhibits a definite distrust of those realms, and suspicion of the family's role as the site where moral and class values are perpetuated (see Light, 1991, chapters 1-3). Light argues that the texts she analyses are both conservative and modern in their depiction of class. However, she briefly suggests that Lehmann's work might be more conservative in the way it draws upon received ideas about class. She points to the class specificity of the world created in Invitation to the Waltz, and asks that critics exhibit "a fuller historical understanding of how the fears of social difference infected the imagination of the female middle classes" (Light, 1991, *pxii*). What Light seeks in criticism of Lehmann is "Not a condemnation of Lehmann, but a placing of her which admitted her conservatisms, the sticking-points of her imagination as well as its flights" (Light, 1991, *pxii*). Such analysis of the class conservatism of Lehmann's work will not be found in this thesis. Although, as I have said, my research process involved reading many writers contemporary with Lehmann, as well as studies of the period, and materialist-feminist criticism of writing of other periods,³ such a materialist analysis ultimately seemed to be at odds with the aims of this thesis. I was primarily trying to account for the fact that Lehmann's writing has a powerful emotional and intellectual effect upon myself, a modern feminist reader. I fully accept that woman are not a homogeneous group and that disjunctions exist between women. But concentration on these disjunctions would not have allowed me to account for my pleasure in these texts or to explain why the sex of the writer

³ See, for example, Boumelha, 1982 (on Thomas Hardy) and 1987 (on George Eliot) and Newton, 1985 (on the period 1778-1860).

seems important in that pleasure. It would have taken me in an entirely different direction, and left my central questions unanswered.

Nevertheless, materialist criticism has informed my stance along the way. I think especially of studies of the romance genre,⁴ and more particularly, of Cora Kaplan's essay "The Thorn Birds': Fiction, Fantasy, Femininity" (Kaplan, 1986, pp117-46). Kaplan explores the way that this text offers its readers pleasure by using and undermining received notions about femininity while conforming quite closely to conventional ideas about class. Similarly, Jane Miller argues that conformity to class conventions is the major sticking-point of Lehmann's imagination. For Miller, Lehmann's critique of heterosexual relationships can have, at best, limited efficacy, because it fails to see that to clear away the norms of heterosexuality which she attacks requires a simultaneous revolution in the class structures within which those norms are formed. Thus, for Miller:

The impasse reached by Rosamond Lehmann's heroines - and they come close to admitting it - is that they are asking for economic independence outside marriage but within the class into which they were born. What these women begin to recognise is that to defy marriage in that class is to defy the social relations that maintain that class. (Miller, 1986, p209)

Miller does not condemn Lehmann for this failure to carry her vision to its logical conclusion; indeed, she points out that the heroines of the texts seem to be straining against the limited vision which they are granted. However, the main thrust of Miller's comments is to suggest that the lack of analysis of class

⁴ See, for example, Radway, 1983, and Light's article on du Maurier (Light, 1984).

relations is a failure on Lehmann's part. I would argue that while, in one sense, this lack can be read as a failure, as a limitation in the revisionary potential of Lehmann's vision, in another sense that very limitation is enabling and allows a more radical revision of gender categories than might otherwise have been possible. In Chapter 5, on Dusty Answer, I briefly discuss the idea that the college setting of that novel, while appearing to place strict limits on the text's critique of gender values, is also an important factor which allows that critique to take place. As Gill Frith argues, the limiting device, be it a college setting or an apparently stable set of class conventions, provides a frame, creates a safe place from which the radical critique of gender values can be articulated (Frith, 1989, p318). While containing the critique, the frame also liberates it, for without the framing device that critique would be too unsettling for the writer to express or the reader to accept. As Kaplan argues with regard to The Thorn Birds and Gone with the Wind, "the reactionary political and social setting, secures, in some fashion, a privileged space where the most disruptive female fantasy can be 'safely' indulged" (Kaplan, 1986, p145). Thus, Lehmann's failure to critique class values may be a factor which allows her critique of gender values to take place.

In Invitation to the Waltz, just such a process can be seen to be taking place. The text presents a world where classes are strictly stratified. It is not uncritical of those stratifications, but in the main, the class structures represented are used as a frame within which the more radical critique of gender structures can be enunciated. In this text, the notion that femininity is a matter of

performance, of costumes, scripts and masks, is explicitly articulated. It is therefore in the reading of this text more than any other that I explicitly draw upon an Irigarayan or Butlerian notion of gender as performance. Using a concept of femininity as a process of gender performance allows me to analyse the kind of feminine identity which is presented in Invitation to the Waltz. It also leads me to the tentative conclusion that that identity is somehow intimately bound up with the activity of writing. In the following chapter, I develop this idea through consideration of Lehmann's autobiographical work, The Swan in the Evening. Indeed, discussing this text at this point in the thesis serves two important purposes. Firstly, it allows me to analyse the way that the process of performing femininity might take place through writing. Being an autobiographical work, the links between the process of writing and the construction of identity are central to the work, and I will show that The Swan in the Evening describes and exemplifies a process of feminine identity-construction through writing. The second important purpose served by selecting this text for discussion is that in its presentation of the creation of a feminine writing identity, the text is absolutely explicit about the force which motivates and drives this process. Writing and identity-construction are both enabled to take place because of strong and lasting bonds between two women. In many ways, my reading of The Swan in the Evening is the pivot upon which this thesis turns. It is that reading which allows me to make the connection between feminine identity construction and bonding between women. It is therefore this reading which facilitates my theorisation of the textual movement which Cixous describes

as proximity without possession.

Thus, Section 3 takes the conclusion drawn at the end of Section 2, that a feminine writing identity is ultimately a relational one, and develops it further, arguing that the great gift of Lehmann's work to feminism is its representation and enactment of bonds between women which are largely ignored and undervalued by society at large. I develop this idea firstly in a brief discussion of some feminist theories of the relational nature of feminine ethics, and then by analysing the way that Lehmann's work represents female-female bonding. I concentrate mainly on two works, her first novel, Dusty Answer, and The Echoing Grove, which although not her final novel, many consider to be her most mature work. In selecting for consideration these two texts from opposite ends of Lehmann's output, I will show that the preoccupations of the first work are, in the later text, reworked and reconstituted. The early work uses relationships between women to undermine conventional heterosexual romance plots, but ultimately cannot find a place for female friendship. The question of where and what that place might be is one which recurs again and again in Lehmann's published work. Pressures of space and time have meant that I have not been able to provide a full survey of the way that Lehmann's texts represent relationships between women, but such relationships undoubtedly play a large part in even her most apparently conventional heterosexual love stories, like The Weather in the Streets or A Sea-Grape Tree. Female friendships are not always central to the action, but in each of her works they play an important role in development of character and plot. Thus, in choosing to discuss The Echoing

Grove, I analyse what I believe to be the apotheosis of a process which, to a greater or lesser degree, can be seen to be taking place in all of her output. In The Echoing Grove, Lehmann is finally able to find a textual place for bonds between women. Furthermore, I will show that in describing the process by which this bond is formed and placed, the text also enacts the formation of such bonds with its female readers. Analysis of the way that The Echoing Grove represents bonding between women not only serves to show how this text finds answers to the questions which Dusty Answer leaves unanswered, but also returns me to the issue of my own feminist pleasure in the texts. My reading of theory had begun to suggest that relationships between women might be at the heart of a feminist textual pleasure. My reading of The Echoing Grove allows me to account for that textual pleasure in specific, concrete terms, and to show why Lehmann's work, even although it appears to centre on conventional stories of heterosexual romance, should have such an appeal for feminist women.

SECTION 1: TEXTUAL FEMININITY

INTRODUCTION: FEMALE, FEMININE, FEMINIST

1. THE FEMINIST PLEASURE OF LEHMANN'S WRITING

For a feminist critic to approach the works of a writer like Rosamond Lehmann is no easy task. The motives behind, and purposes of, feminist criticism, inevitably complicate the already complicated business of textual analysis. Sydney Janet Kaplan identifies two motives in feminist criticism: firstly, anger against patriarchal views of art and womanhood; secondly, love for women writers and the wish to articulate the intense pleasure of reading their texts (S.J.Kaplan, 1985, pp37-38).¹ In practice, the two motives can be difficult to separate. This thesis stems from the second motive, from a love of Lehmann's work and a wish to articulate the intense pleasure of reading that work. However, in attempting to explore some of the reasons for that pleasure, the thesis necessarily engages in refuting what I see as patriarchal misreadings of Lehmann's writings.

Sue Roe points out that feminist criticism which proceeds from the second motive demands "a new style of engagement with our writing subjects" (Roe,

¹ Kaplan assumes that reading women's writing will always be pleasurable for the feminist critic. This claim seems impossible to justify. I can only discuss aspects of some women's writing which makes reading that writing pleasurable for myself. I will draw some generalisations, but my claim is not that all feminist critics read in the same way, or that all female-authored texts are necessarily pleasurable to read.

1987, p1). Critical detachment is not a goal of this type of feminist criticism, since, in Roe's words, "We are writing about other women, as well as about texts" (Roe, 1987, p1).² According to Roe, dealing with women writers demands a special kind of tact and respect from the feminist critic. I would add to this that the task also requires to be firmly connected to individual and collective political reality. If it is so connected, then feminist criticism gains the ability to make changes in both the academic, and non-academic, worlds.³

One important facet of the reading method which is paramount when the feminist critic reads out of love of women writers, is the relationship between the critic, the text, and the author. I have already quoted Roe's claim that "a new style of engagement" is necessary for feminist critics reading women writers. Roe admits that this engagement is one positive outcome of the recent influence of theory on critical practice (Roe, 1987, p1). She also makes some interesting suggestions about "the question of permission" with regard to the reading of work from the past (Roe, 1987, p7), and the respect that we, as feminists, might want to accord to women writers. However, she does not analyse this respect, therefore she does not describe in what way it is different to the respect for the writer which is a part of any critical process. For me, writing out of love of Lehmann's work, one thing at least is clear: my feminist criticism is not detached.

² This view is shared by Gloria Hull, who enumerates seven principles for a Black feminist critical methodology, including the principle that "the proper scholarly stance is engaged rather than 'objective'" (Hull, 1982, p193).

³ Adrienne Rich calls feminism a "politically motivated act of looking at literature" (Rich, 1987, p86). Cora Kaplan also talks of "the intrinsically political and progressive nature of feminist cultural analysis" (C. Kaplan, 1986, p64).

It does not aim for objectivity or claim itself a pseudo-scientific status. It is both personally and politically engaged - with the works, with feminism, with the historical being who was Rosamond Lehmann. If she had been a male writer, this thesis would not be being written, therefore who she was is important to my criticism, and if who she was is important, then I do feel I owe her tact and respect, and thus, like Sydney Janet Kaplan, I am inclined to reject the New Critical reading methods which formed the core of Kaplan's academic training and still largely shape academic reading methods today (S.J. Kaplan, 1985, p39). While not re-instating the intentions of the author as one of the elements which should be taken into consideration in the reading process, notions of tact and respect do require that the reader reads with some kind of notion of an authorial presence in the text.⁴ The exact nature of this authorial presence, and its relationship to both the living being who was the author and the reader of the text, will be a central issue in this thesis. I will show that it is possible to define and analyse an authorial presence which allows the reader to feel herself in close relationship with the "author" of the text without having to resort to a crude intentionalism or to making the author the guarantor and controller of all of the text's meanings.

Kaplan goes on to argue against the validity of the kind of feminist reading of women's writing of the past which attempts to find modern feminism in

⁴ The intentions of the author were deemed irrecoverable by New Criticism, which has, arguably, been the prevailing mode of academic criticism for most of the second half of this century. See Monroe C. Beardsley and W.K. Wimsatt, "The Intentional Fallacy" in Lodge (ed) Twentieth Century Literary Criticism (1972) pp334-44.

disguised forms in the texts. The result of such readings is that all women writers, of whatever historical period, can be praised as proto-feminists (S.J. Kaplan, 1985, p38). This approach has obvious attractions, and, as Gillian Beer points out, it is a tendency of much feminist criticism to re-interpret texts from the past so that they gain "relevance" to our modern concerns. However, according to Beer, this is a reading method which assumes that the modern is superior to anything that has gone before: "we must take care not to fall into the trap of assuming the evolutionist model of literary development, so often taken for granted, in which texts are praised for their 'almost modern awareness' or for being 'ahead of their time'. This presentist mode of argument takes now as the source of authority, the only real place," (Beer, 1989, p67). For Beer, any interpretation which serves to judge past texts by modern criteria is patronising, whether it dismisses those texts as reactionary, or praises them for prefiguring modern concerns.⁵ Beer's argument sheds some light on the question of "permission", which, for Beer, would not just mean learning something about the historical background of a text, but would mean assuming, as we read, the multiple personae of various readers, modern and past. In doing so, we not only do not violate the integrity of the text, but we also do not valorise our own knowledge as the truth. We learn that all forms of knowledge are open to change and re-interpretation, including our own: "So the informing of the text with our learnt awareness of historical conditions is not a matter simply of

⁵ As Kaplan points out, feminists who read women writers expecting to find modern feminism in all of their texts can compound the devaluation of women's writing (S.J. Kaplan, 1985, p51).

providing 'context' or 'background'. Instead it is more exactly in-forming, instantiation - a coming to know again those beliefs, dreads, unscrutinised expectations which may differ from our own but which may also bear upon them" (Beer, 1989, p68).

Beer's model of the way a historical reading process might take place is a very useful one for the feminist critic who writes out of love of women writers. It allows the critic to interpret texts from the past, as well as contemporary texts which display some ambivalence towards feminist goals as we understand them. Moreover, it allows us to interpret them in such a way that the modern critic does not position herself as the source of all knowledge and correctness; in Beer's terms, "we shall better discover our own fixing assumptions if we value the unlikeness of the past" (Beer, 1989, p68). This reading model provides a clue as to how notions of "permission", or "engagement" might usefully be linked to a theory of collectivity between writers and critics, for in Beer's model, historical reading is precisely that which allows texts of the past to read us as we read them.⁶ What Beer's reading model suggests to me is that reading texts like Lehmann's will not involve judging her work against some pre-set, modern standard of "the good feminist text", but will instead involve examining the way that her work both uses and undermines ideologies which might now be

⁶ Cora Kaplan points out the importance of collective practice for the development of feminist criticism (C. Kaplan, 1986, p63). However, it is practical collectivity she stresses, the kind which breaks down barriers between tutors and students, and between critics working in different institutions, or different disciplines. The kind of collectivity which is most important for this thesis, involves a less direct sharing of views.

considered reactionary. An important point to remember is that literary texts are not reflections of the culture they are produced in, but are refractions of that culture. Texts will necessarily draw upon the dominant ideologies of their time, but in doing so they will also re-shape, perhaps even undermine, those ideologies. Drawing upon the work of Luce Irigaray and others, I will discuss the way this process might work in general terms, and analyse more particularly the way that Lehmann's texts make use of ideologies of femininity and of heterosexual romance in order to subvert those very ideologies. I will show that Lehmann's texts both use and undermine the dominant ideologies of their period. In reading this simultaneous conservatism and radicalism, I will also show that the texts invite the reader to approach the dominant ideologies of her own time in the same way. In fact, I would argue that although Lehmann's work is, in many ways, reactionary, its mix of the reactionary and the revolutionary is ultimately more challenging for the modern reader than a text which could be unproblematically claimed as a precursor of modern feminism. A text which can be easily re-interpreted to fit with the modern reader's concerns challenges that reader as little as a text which can be easily dismissed as dated and irrelevant. Texts like Lehmann's, which cannot be easily assigned to either category, force the reader to re-examine her own reading practices and the assumptions underlying them.

The "unlikeness" of Lehmann's texts is therefore vital in the process whereby they achieve their feminist impact, an impact which is more powerful because the reader is forced to question her own assumptions. However, having said the

"unlikeness" of the texts is important, there are some ways in which their "likeness" to the present is also important. There are some aspects of the texts which can be claimed as relevant to modern concerns. Beer's assertion that we should not look for relevance in texts written in other periods is, I would argue, a rather unrealistic and impractical claim. As I have already said, one of the attractions of Lehmann's work is precisely that it seems to be describing experiences which are common to a number of women and span periods (and classes). Although much has changed since Lehmann's time, many of the dominant ideologies which the texts negotiate remain dominant today. Femininity has been partially redefined, but ideas about femininity are still powerful factors in the lives of many women. Moreover, idealised notions about heterosexual relationships do still form a key myth of our culture, and bonds between women are still largely ignored and undervalued. The way Lehmann draws upon these ideas forces the reader to question her own use of such notions, and certainly does not allow the reader to survey the past from a lofty height of progress.

As I said in my introduction, the key to my discussion of the way Lehmann's texts will both use and undermine ideologies of femininity lies in the fact that femininity must be seen as irreducibly multiple in nature. Femininity can be many things, and some of those things are more easily re-appropriated for feminism than others. There are many aspects of the feminine, even within Lehmann's texts, which remain intransigent, which cannot be read ironically. For example, in my discussions of Invitation to the Waltz, Dusty Answer and The

Echoing Grove, I will discuss several aspects of the feminine which do appear to be wholly stifling for the characters. The texts do not necessarily question every element of femininity. Some are simply used without obvious irony and therefore without being undermined in any way. I will occasionally highlight such moments in the texts, but in general, as I said in my introduction, the purpose of this thesis is to counter-balance the weight of conventional, negative critical judgments about Lehmann's use of femininity. I therefore concentrate on those places where the texts do undermine the femininities being drawn upon, or do appear to be making conscious use of femininities for a particular purpose. My wish to concentrate on the revisionary in Lehmann's work means that I have selected those texts from Lehmann's *oeuvre* which are most amenable to such readings. At this stage, however, I must point out that in other texts the balance lies more with accepting conventions than questioning them (although I would argue that all the texts do both to some extent). In concentrating upon and highlighting the radical aspects of Lehmann's use of femininities I do place myself in danger of doing what Kaplan and Beer warn against. This thesis may appear to some to claim Lehmann as a proto-feminist who anticipated the concerns of modern feminism. This is a risk I take deliberately because I believe the effort must be made to reclaim Lehmann's work from those critics, feminist and non-feminist, who would decry its feminine concerns as trivial. However, I must reiterate that I do not claim that any of the texts are wholly and simply radical. Even at their most revisionary moments, the kind of radicalism which I will read in the texts involves a dual movement. Based upon a strategy of

gender performance, it involves drawing upon and thus, in some ways, perpetuating and supporting dominant ideas about femininity even while more or less subtly questioning those ideas.

2. THE EMOTIVE V. THE ACADEMIC

Before analysing Lehmann's dual use of discourses of femininity, I must return to Roe, for she makes a statement which exemplifies another issue which arises when a feminist critic reads out of love of women writers. Roe attributes value to the essays which she has collected together because they exhibit "each contributor's deeply felt responses to the work in question" (Roe 1987, p3). Roe clearly privileges an emotive, rather than a rational response. However, for a feminist critic to privilege the emotive response in this way leaves her criticism open to attack on two fronts: by traditional, academic criticism, on the grounds that it is not rigorously argued, and by other types of feminism, on the grounds that privileging the emotive in women simply accepts the position traditionally assigned to them. The dilemma is summed up by Dorin Schumacher:

If [the feminist critic] defines feminist criticism as creative and intuitive, privileged as art, then the method becomes vulnerable to the prejudices of stereotypic thinking about the feminine and can be dismissed by much of the academic establishment. Feminist critics may find themselves charged with the inability to be analytical, to be objective, or to think critically. While the male critic may be free to claim the role of critic-as-artist, the female critic runs different professional risks if she chooses intuition and private experience as critical method and defense. (Schumacher, 1975, pp29-30)

For Schumacher, then, the feminist critic places her credibility at risk if she bases

her critical practice on the emotive elements of her response to literature. However, if, like this thesis, feminist critical work stems from Sydney Janet Kaplan's second motive, that of love of women writers, then "passion and identification" (S.J. Kaplan, 1985, p38) are the driving forces of the criticism, and cannot be simply left behind in the search for academic respectability. Indeed, as Kaplan points out, academic reading strategies often seem antithetical to any kind of pleasure in the reading process (S.J. Kaplan, 1985, p38). Such pleasure has motivated a large part of non-academic critical response to Lehmann, and if an academic consideration of her work is fired by the same motive, then "passion and identification" are inevitable during the reading process.⁷ Schumacher herself admits that the feminist critic cannot easily reject emotive methods of criticism. In Schumacher's view, the feminist critic is caught in a critical double bind, for if she chooses to view the critical process as scientific, then she becomes implicated in the methods of the academic establishment, and the radical force of her criticism is lost (Schumacher, 1975, p29).

Thus, the feminist critic who wishes to change the academy in any way finds herself facing a paradox. This thesis represents a sustained attempt to find a way out of the critical double bind which that paradox generates. It is, in effect, an academic theorisation of an essentially emotive response to a series of texts. While accepting that emotive and academic responses to texts may indeed at times seem incompatible, it has also been my own experience that textual theory

⁷ See, for example, Janet Watts' introduction to the Virago edition of Invitation to the Waltz (London, Virago, 1982; 1st published 1932) esp *piv*.

and textual pleasure do not detract from each other's impact, but actually enhance each other. Finding ways to account for and theorise the pleasure of the texts increases rather than reduces that pleasure. My own research process was driven by a wish to articulate and account for the intense pleasure of reading Lehmann's work. Such a project felt necessary because Lehmann's work is not unproblematically available for feminist appropriation. As will become clear, I do not dispute the argument that Lehmann's writing is "feminine" in quality. On the other hand, nor do I accept that my reading pleasure might be the product of a process of "putting my feminism on the back burner" when reading these texts. I do not accept that my pleasure in reading Lehmann's feminine work is incompatible with my feminism. Academic methods have proved invaluable in showing that this is the case, and explaining why it should be the case.

One question which remains implicit in this consideration of the need to balance the academic and emotive elements of my reading response is that of the efficacy of the concentration on women writers, or one woman writer in particular. Such concentration necessarily appears to take for granted that women writers are different, that they constitute a special group whose creations can, or must be, discussed separately from the work of male writers. Whilst there are sound pragmatic, political reasons for discussing women writers separately from their male counterparts, there are also sound political reasons why to do so plays into the hands of masculinist elements in the academy. As Peggy Kamuf points out, culture has always assigned a special status to the productions of female artists. The dominant post-Romantic notion of creativity

as an individual affair allows the female artist to be explained away as a special individual, a deviation from the female norm. Situating the woman artist as a special individual, as any analysis which discusses that artist in isolation appears to do, runs the risk of complicity with the assumption that female artistic production can be assigned the place of an oddity, a curiosity, and ultimately, an irrelevance (Kamuf, 1980, p286).⁸ Rachel Blau DuPlessis elaborates on this point when she compares women to the Etruscan people, whose civilization was obliterated by the Romans. Duplessis demonstrates that scholars now know something of the signs of the Etruscan language, but nothing of their signification. Therefore, learning the Etruscan language is not enough, since no-one has made the effort to understand it: "The Etruscan language can be heard, if one chooses to mouth it, but not comprehended. Pondering is not to be expected, so why bother?" (DuPlessis, 1986, p274). By comparing women to the Etruscans, DuPlessis is suggesting that the danger of celebrating any language or creativity which is specific to women is that such language only confirms women's marginal position in society, since no-one in the mainstream will take the trouble to understand it. According to DuPlessis, then, celebrating modes of female language and writing will never change their status in relation to the dominant modes of cultural production.

So why choose to write about women writers in isolation? Firstly and

⁸ Gillian Beer also discusses some of the problems in criticism which concentrates only on women writers. For example, for Beer, studying women's writing in isolation makes it impossible to measure its difference from men's (see Beer, 1989, p65).

secondly, there are Kaplan's two motives: a desire to redress the balance of masculinist criticism which ignores the existence of women writers or responds to them negatively and a wish to try to explain why these texts should be so pleasurable. These motives demand that the feminist critic concentrates on women writers and, in effect, aligns herself with those writers.⁹ Moreover, as my own reading of theory made increasingly clear to me, and as I will show in this thesis, it is my contention that female-female bonding is at the heart of my feminist pleasure in reading Lehmann's feminine writing. Far from leaving my feminism on the back burner when reading Lehmann's work, I will show that the vision of female bonding represented and enacted within the texts makes reading them a truly woman-centred, and thus feminist, experience. This bonding exists within the texts, and also in the relationship between the feminine text and its female readers. My academic theorisation of the pleasure of reading Lehmann's work thus provides cogent justification for the concentration on one woman writer and also explains why Kaplan's two motives for feminist criticism appear to me to be so interlinked. Analysing the bond between Lehmann's feminine texts and myself as a female reader both allows me to account for my love of the texts and explains why I should find it so necessary to align myself with the texts in an argument against previous, masculinist criticism of them.

⁹ However, such alignment is never unproblematic. For a description of the critic's problems with this, see Parker, 1983, and for a description of the problems it creates for the artist, see Rich, 1987, esp. p90.

3. THE DOUBLE CRITICAL STANDARD

Such feminist alignment with the work of a woman writer is more than necessary in Lehmann's case because of the way that conventional criticism has attributed "femininity" to her work and used that attribution as justification of harsh critical value judgments. In the next section of this introduction, I will examine the bases of those value judgements in order to identify the dominant critical context into which I must insert my own discussion of how I would define and value the femininity of Lehmann's work.

Lehmann's work is typically labelled "women's writing" on three grounds: firstly, and most simplistically, she was a woman; secondly, her readers were mainly women; thirdly, arguably, her books are "about being a woman" (Bennett, 1993, p11).¹⁰ However, in order to put the term "women's writing" to feminist critical use, its meaning must be more precisely determined. Past critics of Lehmann's work have been quite definite in seeing her as a "woman's writer" and have linked this to the supposed "femininity" of her writing. For example, Contemporary Authors tells us that "Rosamond Lehmann was categorised early

¹⁰ There seems to be no way of quantifying the assumption that Lehmann's readers have been mainly women, but it is shared by all critics of Lehmann. See, for example, Simons, who claims that "with the republication of her novels by Virago Press, she acquired a new following of readers, mostly women, from a generation whose mothers and grandmothers had been avid Lehmann fans" (Simons, 1992, p19). Similarly, Janet Watts, in her introduction to the Virago edition of Invitation to the Waltz, states baldly "the majority of Rosamond Lehmann's readers have always been women" (Watts, 1981, *piv*). The question of what it is for a book to be "about being a woman" will be a recurring issue in this thesis.

in her career as a 'woman's writer'. Along with Virginia Woolf and Elizabeth Bowen, she is heralded as the creator of the modern 'feminine' novel" (Evory et al, 1983, p321). It is implied that a "woman's writer" and presumably "women's writing" is necessarily "feminine". Evory goes on to quote from James Gindin, who, in his article "Rosamond Lehmann: A Revaluation", mourns the fact that Lehmann's work has been so much neglected, and begins defending her reputation thus:

Twenty-five or thirty years ago, however, Miss Lehmann was frequently discussed as fully the equal of Elizabeth Bowen and almost the equal of Virginia Woolf, all three drawn together under the heading of "feminine", a term that did not seem so condescending then as it does now, that connoted the delicate, the perceptive, the working of insight in a smaller area often missed by the blunter, clumsier, "masculine" sensibility. (Gindin, 1974, p203)

This idea, that "feminine" writing is delicate and sensitive, is reiterated by a 1977 newspaper review¹¹ of the republication of Lehmann's first novel, Dusty Answer. In this review, Hope Hale Davis describes how Lehmann was greeted as a revolutionary by her contemporaries for breaking the taboo forbidding discussion of adolescent lesbianism, but adds that she was "A curiously delicate, sensitive revolutionary " (Davis, in Evory, 1983, p321). For Gindin, defining Lehmann's work against a "blunter, clumsier, 'masculine' sensibility", the delicate and sensitive "feminine" qualities of Lehmann's work are apparently qualities to be admired, but he does admit that to the modern critic, the term "feminine" is a condescending one. Davis's use of "delicate" and "sensitive" to describe Lehmann

¹¹ Hope Hale Davis, in New Leader, Nov 7, 1977 (quoted in Evory, 1983, p321).

as a revolutionary supports this: these are not terms which connote effectiveness of revolutionary action. In a review of a recent critical study of Lehmann's work,¹² Margaret Walters confirms that "feminine" qualities are often viewed as trivial and worthless: "Reviewers have tended to treat [Lehmann], uneasily, as a romantic, working in that minor genre, the 'woman's novel.' (The dismissive label suggests something over-intense, narrowly personal, probably humourless and escapist...)" (Walters, 1985, p44).

There has been little criticism of Lehmann's work which does not adhere to the view that she is a "feminine" writer, and therefore limited in range and value. For example, in a doctoral thesis on Lehmann's novels, Wiktoria Dorosz begins by stating that she believes Lehmann's work to be limited in range (Dorosz, 1975, p11). She then places Lehmann's work into the category of "Yin" writing (see Dorosz, 1975, p15). Her description of the attributes of "Yin" writing is strikingly similar to Gindin's description of "feminine" writing, making it clear that the Oriental term has been imported to try to give spurious archetypal validity to the discussion of "feminine" writing: "The subject matter is as a rule narrowed down to interpersonal relationships in a limited social range, with no attempt at panoramic vistas. It is an exposition of the nuances of human intercourse, of the fine discriminations which are often disregarded by the writers concerned with the wider issues of the human predicament" (Dorosz, 1975, p15). The implication is that exposition of nuances and fine discriminations is somehow of a lesser literary value than concern with panoramic vistas and wider issues.

¹² Gillian Tindall, Rosamond Lehmann, an Appreciation (1985).

Gindin, too, in "revaluating" Lehmann's work, lists her strengths as a writer, then adds, "All of these, admittedly, are simply atoms of experience, not a pattern to explain, judge, or transform that experience" (Gindin, 1974, p211). Criticism of Lehmann has continually bemoaned her supposed lack of explanation, judgement and transformation. Even sympathetic critics concede these supposed lacks as justification of their assent to the grading of Lehmann as a "second-rate" writer. Examples of this abound. Diana LeSturgeon begins her 1965 work on Lehmann with a description of "The greatest satisfaction one can have in the study of a minor writer..."(LeSturgeon, 1965, preface). The qualities which consign Lehmann's work to the ranks of "minor" literature are encapsulated by Patricia Craig in a review of Gillian Tindall's study of Lehmann: "[Tindall] will insist on attributing to her subject such qualities as irony, lucidity and humour - qualities [Lehmann] plainly doesn't possess. Perceptiveness, whole-heartedness, an eye for picturesque detail, yes; but these add up to a rather less appreciable gift" (Craig, 1985, p162). The qualities which cause Craig to judge Lehmann as possessing a "less appreciable gift" are precisely those which Gindin and Dorosz see as constituting the "femininity" of her work.

This assumption that certain qualities mark the "feminine" writer, and that those qualities can only be second-rate, is one that critics have relied upon for generations. In A Literature of Their Own, Elaine Showalter demonstrates that a double critical standard was applied to novels of the nineteenth century: those written by men were typically more highly valued than those written by women, which were seen as "feminine", and as showing a range of qualities which

Victorian reviewers felt were directly linked to the sex of the author:

If we break down the periodical reviewing, we find that women writers were acknowledged to possess sentiment, refinement, tact, observation, domestic expertise, high moral tone, and knowledge of female character; and thought to lack originality, intellectual training, abstract intelligence, humour, self-control, and knowledge of male character. Male writers had most of the desirable qualities: power, breadth, distinctness, clarity, learning, abstract intelligence, shrewdness, experience, humour, knowledge of everyone's character, and open-mindedness. (Showalter, 1982, p90)¹³

Contemporary criticism of Lehmann replicates these Victorian critical categories: for example, we will see that Lehmann is thought to possess knowledge of female character, but to lack the ability to create convincing male characters.¹⁴ We have already seen that she is thought to possess refinement and observation, and to lack clarity, abstract intelligence, and humour. This is borne out in a thesis on

¹³ Cheri Register also discusses this kind of "phallic criticism", arguing that such critics assess women writers by measuring how well they conform to traditional notions about femininity. Masculine writing is preferred, but only when written by a man. Thus, to be judged a perfect(ly) feminine writer is the highest accolade to which the woman writer need aspire (Register, 1975, p9).

¹⁴ Naomi Schor shows that the double critical standard operates in both nineteenth and twentieth-century criticism of the work of female novelists (Schor, 1987, pp17-21). Isobel Armstrong confirms that the double critical standard operates in twentieth-century criticism when she looks at Leavisite criticism of Christina Rossetti, who, she notes, "can only be praised for qualities in which the 'tradition' is not really interested" (Armstrong, 1987, p122). For further examples of the double critical standard at work in twentieth-century criticism, see Mary Ellmann, Thinking about Women (1968), Chapter 2, "Phallic Criticism". This is discussed in Toril Moi, Sexual/Textual Politics (Moi, 1985, pp33-35). Moi also discusses a 1972 article by the Danish feminist critic Pål Dahlerup, who analyses adjective choice in one male critic's reviews of a poet he had assumed to be a man, but whom he later discovered was a woman. Moi paraphrases Dahlerup's conclusion thus: "male reviewers just cannot attach the same degree of authority to a voice they know to be female. Even when they do give a good review to a woman they automatically select adjectives and phrases that tend to make the woman's poetry charming and sweet (as women should be), as opposed to serious and significant (as men are supposed to be)." (Moi, 1985, p35)

Lehmann by Ruth Siegel, who quotes Virginia Woolf as one of the few to notice Lehmann's "clear, hard mind" (Siegel, 1985, p22, quoting Woolf). Siegel points out that "All too few reviews have noted or suggested the possibility of Rosamond's 'clear, hard mind', the controlling and intellectual force at play in her work. They have granted her artistry and poetic sensibility, but never the tough-mindedness Virginia Woolf admired" (Siegel, 1985, p22). Siegel also notes that few critics have noted Lehmann's irony or "keen wit" (Siegel, 1985, p23).

Thus, both sympathetic and unsympathetic critics consider Lehmann's work to lack breadth, both in formal expertise and in the subject matter it covers. However, she is defended against this charge by Ella Perrin Cox, who asserts that Lehmann makes daring use of unusual linguistic techniques, and adds that: "In choosing her material, Rosamond Lehmann has been equally daring. She dealt with homosexuality, incest and abortion long before these became accepted literary subjects. Considering this, it appears somewhat curious that the complaint which has been most frequently lodged against her fiction has been that it possesses too narrow a range" (Cox, 1977, p6). Despite such notable attempts to defend Lehmann's work as escaping conventional preconceptions of "femininity", however, it remains true in general that criticism of Lehmann exhibits the double critical standard which applied to Victorian women novelists.

Many critics have speculated on the reasons for this double critical standard.¹⁵ These can be summed up in Ken Ruthven's suggestion that it is not

¹⁵ See, for example, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, "Sexual Linguistics: Gender, Language, Sexuality", where Gilbert and Gubar review reactions to female creativity by male modernists, arguing that female artists were scapegoats

the style of women's texts which causes masculinist critics to attack them, but assumptions about women disguised as a response to stylistic features. If this is the case, then it is necessary to look at how women's writing has been received before we try to identify what women's writing is (Ruthven, 1984, p109). Thus, this introduction has and will describe and analyse the way that Lehmann's writing has been received before subsequent chapters go on to present a case for what I think Lehmann's writing is.

I have already shown that the double critical standard operates in much criticism of Lehmann's work, and that it manifests itself in three main assumptions: that there are certain attributes which characterise "feminine" writing; that Lehmann's work typically exhibits these attributes, and that such attributes relegate her output to the realm of "minor" literature. However, even more problematic than these assumptions, is the way that much traditional criticism of Lehmann tends to ignore the distinction she draws between socially constructed gendered character traits and biologically determined sex-specific traits. The difference which this misreading conceals is vital, therefore I want to begin to analyse the terms of the debate as it exists in criticism of Lehmann's work by looking at readings which assume that Lehmann's women characters exemplify "natural" aspects of "the female constitution".

Criticism of Lehmann has often been guilty of making the assumption that

who were blamed for destroying male culture (Gilbert & Gubar, 1989, pp82-85). See also "Women and Literary History" by Dale Spender, who argues that there has been a conscious conspiracy on the part of male writers and critics to lose, or appropriate, the work of female artists (Spender, 1989, pp21-34).

the feminine is synonymous with the female. Conventional feminine traits - traits which reflect social conditioning, not biological fact - are read as if they are an essential part of being female. Replaying a familiar circular logic, Lehmann's work is then seen as representing some "universal" truths about the female condition - indeed, it is often argued that this is one of the strengths of her writing. Such readings concentrate on representations of female character traits which are seen as typical of the novel of heterosexual romance. Lehmann is then classed as a writer who elevates this genre to a level where it almost gains critical respectability (see, for example, Craig, 1985, p162). I do not wish to deny that Lehmann's skill in writing romantic stories is one of the chief attractions of her fiction.¹⁶ The problem is not that Lehmann represents female characters in traditionally feminine situations, but that too many critics assume that this is a faithful representation of what women are really like and fail to fully examine the textual position Lehmann's fiction adopts towards the relationship between women and femininity. Thus Margaret Walters reads Lehmann as recognising suffering as part of female identity (Walters, 1985, p44), while Ella Perrin Cox's claim that Rebecca, in Lehmann's A Sea-Grape Tree, is "portrayed as archetypal woman, object of universal man's desire" (Cox, 1977, p281), assumes that Lehmann is presenting sexual passivity as an unchanging, natural attribute of women. Walters' equation of femaleness with suffering is the logical extension of the association of femaleness with passivity. This becomes clear when a critic

¹⁶ In Section 3, I will discuss the way that Lehmann uses the genre of the novel of heterosexual romance.

can claim that Rebecca's salvation lies in learning to "trust love without expectation of return" (Haule, 1985, p201) - in other words, in learning to submit to the traditional feminine role of self-sacrifice to the romantic ideal. R. Baird Schuman reiterates the idea that to be properly female is to sacrifice personal happiness: in discussing Judith, the hero of Dusty Answer, he suggests that she "ultimately becomes a woman when she realises that she must accept isolation and exclusion" (Schuman, 1960, p77). In equating womanhood with passive acceptance of a marginal position, Schuman implies that females gain psychological maturity when they realise that they should not protest against their exclusion from society.¹⁷ What, in the context of Rosamond Lehmann's texts, women can do with and about, their marginal position, is an issue which will be discussed later in this thesis.

To equate suffering, self-sacrifice and exclusion with being female is problematic enough, especially when such critics do not admit the possibility that Lehmann might be presenting these as evils of a feminine condition which could be escaped by restructuring our ideas of masculine and feminine. More problematic still, however, are those assertions which border on the misogynistic in their assumptions about the necessary "femaleness" of certain character traits. For example, it has been said of the central character of The Weather in the Streets that "In her female frailty Olivia is everywoman" (Smith, 1981, p973).

¹⁷ Schuman's argument also exhibits the tendency for such supposed descriptions of femininity to become prescriptions of "true" womanly behaviour. For a further discussion of the prescriptive and evaluative nature of "descriptions" of feminine maturity, see the introduction to Section 3 of this thesis.

The critic, Virginia Llewellyn Smith, intends this to be a compliment, an explanation of why the novel is so popular, and considers the assumption that every female is weak to be so much a part of our "common sense" knowledge about women that she does not feel the need to justify her statement.¹⁸ Gillian Tindall, too, in discussing the construction of Olivia's character in the earlier novel, Invitation to the Waltz, talks of "Olivia's sense of a specifically female inadequacy" (Tindall, 1985, p37) without feeling it incumbent upon herself to explain whether she means an inadequacy which is inherent or learned. Indeed, while failing to differentiate between the social category of being feminine and the biological category of being female, Tindall does find it possible to differentiate between being a feminist and being female.¹⁹ She does not define what she means by either term, but implies that the two are mutually exclusive, as if somehow to be a feminist is to be less than a "real woman". First, she denies that Sibyl Jardine, the central character of The Ballad and the Source, can be read as a feminist character, then she elaborates her own view of Sibyl's nature: "Sibyl Jardine is, on the contrary, the prototype of female strengths and weaknesses: emotion-ruled yet manipulative, scheming, constantly attempting to get her way by making use of others and by arrogating to herself the role of victim" (Tindall, 1985, p137). The main problem with this reading is the

¹⁸ That the critics who make such statements are often women themselves adds no validity to the claims. If women did not assent to the dominant ideologies of gender then those ideologies would not be dominant.

¹⁹ For a full discussion of the relationship between female, feminine and feminist, see Moi, 1989.

assumption, signalled by the phrase "on the contrary", that being "the prototype of female strengths and weaknesses" is somehow incompatible with being a feminist, or that such a character is not available for feminist appropriation (as the character of Sibyl has been).²⁰ Thus, one of the first tasks for any feminist critic must be to articulate the relationship, as she conceives it, between the female, the feminist, and the feminine. This I will attempt to do in the next section of this introduction.

4. FINDING A SPACE TO DISCUSS THE FEMININE

In the discussion of The Ballad and the Source quoted above, Gillian Tindall makes a problematic attempt to claim conventional feminine traits as strengths. The characteristics Tindall describes (such as manipulation through weakness) are, in fact, traditionally regarded as feminine methods of gaining power. However, feminists might claim that the limitations imposed on women force them to use such strategies while masking the fact that such strategies do not yield real power. Arguably, prevailing views present scheming, manipulation and so on as feminine strengths in order to fool women into believing that they have some influence while, at the same time, they are the very traits which patriarchal society derides as the worst feminine faults. To accept these as feminine strengths is, on the face of it, to be caught in the feminine double-bind: either acquiesce in your own inferior status or use the available strategies to try to

²⁰ See for example, Sydney Janet Kaplan (1981).

change that status and be branded as doubly inferior. There are ways out of this impasse, but they are not as simple as Tindall implies. Working out if, and how, in the context of Lehmann's writings, stereotypes of femininity can be put to feminist ends will be part of my analysis of the relationship between the female, the feminine and the feminist.

The first step in producing a feminist reading of Lehmann's work must therefore be to define the terms "feminist", "female" and "feminine" and determine the nature of the relationship between the three. To begin to do this, I will assent to Toril Moi's suggestion "that we distinguish between 'feminism' as a political position, 'femaleness' as a matter of biology and 'femininity' as a set of culturally defined characteristics" (Moi, 1989, p117). While adopting these as working definitions, as the thesis progresses these definitions will be continually questioned, revised and expanded. The central concern of this thesis will be the way that Lehmann's writing interacts with these three terms and represents and enacts the nature of the relationship between them.

To engage in such discussion might seem to be perpetuating patriarchal notions and supporting the use of precisely the terminology which has been used against Lehmann and other women. I will show that this is not the case, that feminist theorisation of the feminine is necessary not only as a defensive measure but also because the concept of the feminine holds some genuinely exciting possibilities for the feminist. The term has been used against women, but it has the potential to yield productive strategies for feminism.

Of course, feminists have not always believed that this is the case and not

all contemporary feminists would accept a need for feminist theorisation and celebration of femininity. One group which is important in this respect includes those in what Margaret Walters calls the "bourgeois feminist tradition" (Walters, 1976, p304), stretching from Wollstonecraft through Martineau and the Victorian suffragists to de Beauvoir and beyond. Members of this group, unlike many other feminists, show a remarkable degree of consistency in their analyses of femininity. As Walters points out, Wollstonecraft, Martineau and de Beauvoir used different vocabularies, but essentially they shared the same attitude towards the value of femininity: each saw femininity as a disability imposed upon women by men in order to keep women in their "proper" place (Walters, 1976, pp305 & 316). Such bourgeois feminists despised the feminine and wanted women to dissociate themselves from feminine attributes. Their quest was, and still is, for equal rights for women; their goal was and remains that of freeing women to take a full part in masculine society.²¹

For such feminists, the feminine text is likely to be seen as a debased text. For example, Jane Moore argues that Wollstonecraft takes great pains to place A Vindication of the Rights of Woman on the side of rational, philosophical discourse. According to Moore, Wollstonecraft equated femininity with literary, or figural language. This she saw as useless ornamentation, not to be valued as highly as utilitarian, masculine language (Moore, 1989, pp158-59; see also Kaplan, 1986, pp42-43). For Wollstonecraft, adhering to Enlightenment

²¹ For discussions of the historical development of equal rights feminism see, for example, Juliet Mitchell, "Women and Equality" (1976) and Nancy F. Cott, "Feminist Theory and Feminist Movements: the Past Before Us" (1986).

principles, natural language was rational language, while feminine, figurative language was merely derivative from it (Moore, 1989, p161). Exhibiting the kind of binary logic which Hélène Cixous attacks,²² Wollstonecraft assumed that what was secondary was also second-rate.²³

This association of femininity with a debased textuality is not just a matter of literary concern but is important for the way discourses of femininity have been used against women. Wollstonecraft constructed her arguments because she wanted to free women from femininity, but others before and since have made use of the same arguments as tools to trap women in the feminine. Patricia Parker looks at various non-feminist texts which associate femininity with a degraded or second-rate textuality and concludes that such texts embody social concern to control female speech. They define textuality as feminine "in order finally to dramatize the very process of [femininity's] containment, the limiting structures of authority and control" (Parker, 1987, p31). Parker argues that the Elizabethans saw male poets as effeminate and literary language as feminine. Neither poets nor their productions were highly valued, the former being "suspect", the latter "corrupting and enervating" (Parker, 1987, pp10 & 11). The feminine was regarded as an obstacle to be overcome on the way to narrative completion (Parker, 1987, p11). In textual terms, the feminine was a necessary

²² See Chapter 4 for a discussion of Cixous's critique of binary logic. For the present, it is interesting to note that Moore argues that Wollstonecraft's own texts were infiltrated by the "feminine" figural excess which she sought to exclude. Her writing thus calls into question its own binary logic (Moore, 1989).

²³ For an analysis of secondariness as a rhetorical trope used to devalue the female, see Parker's "Coming Second: Woman's Place" (Parker, 1987, pp178-233).

evil which had to be contained and controlled. As Parker shows in "Motivated Rhetorics: Gender, Order, Rule" (Parker, 1987, pp97-125), this argument has serious repercussions. Parker argues that analogies between Renaissance theories of rhetoric and theories of government show that definitions of literary or rhetorical language were part of the attempt to control women's speech. Theories of feminine textuality can be used to silence real women.

Practically, bourgeois, equal rights feminism is a brand of feminism which still has many uses and is, perhaps, the popular idea of what feminism is. However, such opposition to femininity risks complicity with the kind of notions of femininity which Parker analyses, in which ideas of the debased nature of femininity, and more particularly of feminine textuality, can be used to silence and control women. Such views devalue women who value aspects of their femininity and thus risks alienating the vast majority of women. Such views also valorise the masculine, in literature, in politics and in economic life, and leave feminists reiterating the misogynist question of Lerner and Loewe (following Shaw): "Why can't a woman be more like a man?"

For this reason, not all feminists take an anti-femininity stance. There are those who argue that the way to improve the lives of women is to celebrate femininity and help women to re-value themselves. This stance, known as radical feminism, accepts the dominant ideology that women are different but argues that their differences render women morally superior to men.²⁴ In its

²⁴ The most influential examples of radical feminists are Mary Daly, Shulamith Firestone and Adrienne Rich (see bibliography). For an overview of the historical development of radical feminism, and of its strengths and

most utopian form, radical feminism argues that women should live separately from men in their own communities. One problem with this argument is that the relationship of such communities with the larger societies upon which they must be parasitical is never articulated. Furthermore, there are problems with the celebration of feminine virtues - as Toril Moi points out:

Gratifying though it is to be told that women really are strong, integrated, peace-loving, nurturing and creative beings, this plethora of new virtues is no less essentialist than the old ones, and no less oppressive to all those women who do not want to play the role of Earth Mother. It is after all patriarchy, not feminism, which has always believed in a true female/feminine nature: the biologism and essentialism which lurk behind the desire to bestow feminine virtues on all female bodies necessarily plays into the hands of the patriarchs. (Moi, 1989, pp123-24)²⁵

Moi's point is that feminist definitions of femininity can become just as oppressive to women as negative patriarchal definitions of femininity. The problem lies in the fact that, as Sara Mills points out, the attempt to re-assess conventionally feminine traits "is still caught in the binary opposition of seeing femininity as either all good or all bad, and does not deal with the complexity of the phenomenon" (Mills, 1992). Furthermore, it is possible for an ideology which apparently worships femininity to mask an underlying contempt. Getting women to value themselves, or society to value women, for the attributes which have always been both revered and despised need not actually change anything.

weaknesses, see Eisenstein, 1984, Section II & III.

²⁵ Although, as with the demand for equality, this may be a necessary, or at least useful, political strategy to help women to take control of their own lives. For an example of how radical feminism can work with women who have been victims of physical abuse, see Bonnie Mann, "'Gyn/Ecology' in the Lives of Women in the Real World" (in Daly, 1991, ppxxxvi-xiv).

While accepting this contention, I have also argued that the feminist critic cannot avoid using language and definitions which are not of her own construction. To refuse to engage in dialogue with the cultural establishment leaves the feminist critic with no hope of ever changing prevailing power structures. Starting from inside the establishment, starting by using established definitions, albeit definitions which we feel are ill-fitted to feminist needs, allows the feminist critic to move on, to challenge, subvert, and ultimately revolutionise. As a purely defensive measure, then, it is necessary to engage with established definitions of the terms "woman" and "femininity". These will be key terms in my discussions of Lehmann's work, firstly because they have been key terms in previous, non-feminist discussion of her work, and in order to refute conventional critics' negative value judgments on Lehmann's writing, I must attack the ground on which those judgments stand.

As Gayatri Spivak argues, any definition of "woman" risks suggesting an essence of womanhood which is limiting, inappropriate and often just plain false. Nevertheless, Spivak claims, it is even more dangerous to refuse to create definitions, for in order to lead to practical change in the way society uses the term, it is necessary for feminists to use the term themselves, always remembering that definitions do not point to any final essence of womanhood, but are merely working definitions, always open to revision when circumstances merit it: "definitions are necessary in order to keep us going, to allow us to take a stand. The only way that I can see myself making definitions is in a provisional and polemical one: I construct my definition as a woman not in terms of

woman's putative essence but in terms of words currently in use" (Spivak, 1987, p77). The implication of Spivak's suggestion is that use of terms like "woman" and "femininity" only becomes counter-productive for the feminist if she confuses working definitions with a supposed biological essence of womanhood. "Womanhood" and "femininity" thus become terms which the feminist critic has at her disposal, not because she is concerned to celebrate an essence of womanhood, but because she recognises that the terms "femininity" or "womanhood" are multiple and shifting in nature and can, ultimately, be put to feminist use as they have been put to misogynistic use.

As I have already stated, my own use and theorisation of "woman" and "femininity" stems partly from a defensive wish to counter previous, misogynistic use of the terms against Lehmann. I will be concerned to establish productive working definitions of the terms which will allow me to use the terms against themselves. I will not, at any point, arrive at a final definition of either concept. Nevertheless, my discussions will have a dual purpose: I will undermine notions of femininity even while celebrating femininities (as I will show Lehmann herself does). My theorisation of femininity is not purely a defensive measure, but also stems from a perception that it is in femininity that women currently find their own strengths; it is in femininity that women currently find the bonds between them; it is in femininity that women currently find the pleasure of reading Lehmann's writing. Taking such a dual stance on femininity is possible because of the shifting and multiple nature of the concepts of "woman" and "femininity". Indeed, in Mary Jacobus's view, femininity is irreducibly multiple. For Jacobus,

femininity is a textual force which works within the structures of language to unsettle the assumptions upon which that language rests, but in doing so, femininity also unsettles itself: "it is in language - in reading and in writing women - that femininity at once discloses and discomposes itself, endlessly displacing the fixity of gender identity by the play of difference and division which simultaneously creates and uncreates gender, identity, and meaning" (Jacobus, 1986, p24). The quotation suggests that using the concept of femininity does not mean accepting it as a given, since, in use, it reveals itself to be a concept which is constantly in a process of change. Thus, in using femininity as a force which undermines the ability of language to bear determinate meanings, the feminist is also undermining the possibility of any determinate meaning in the concept of femininity itself.

Femininity, then, has the potential to be a productive and exciting force which can serve feminism precisely because of its unsettled and unsettling nature. Yet that unsettled nature also creates problems for the feminist attempting to theorise and utilise concepts of femininity. In order to begin to formulate my working definition of femininity, I have already assented to Toril's Moi's distinctions between femaleness as biological sex, femininity as a set of cultural constructions about that sex, and feminism as a political position which exists in uneasy relation to both of these terms. However, Moi herself points out the difficulties with such a loose definition of femininity: "A set of culturally defined characteristics' or a 'cultural construct' may sound irritatingly vague to many. It would seem that any content could be poured into this container; it does not

read like a 'proper' definition" (Moi, 1989, p123). The problem is that the construct has been a long-lasting, and widely-used one, and encompasses a range of contradictory ideas and attitudes. One theorist, Dorothy Smith, argues that there may be no qualities which feminists can claim for femininity which have not already been appropriated and put to the service of the oppression of women.²⁶ Yet, in failing to create her own definition of femininity it seems that the feminist leaves patriarchal concepts of femininity intact and operative.

To bridge this impasse, it is essential to look at the way the concept "femininity" is used in practice. Smith suggests that we begin by accepting the validity of the everyday ability to know what is meant by femininity in any given circumstances. Her argument is that whether or not an individual can define "femininity", he or she can always produce examples of it (Smith, 1990, p165). For Smith, theorising femininity must proceed by looking at how we can assign attributes to the category, how we know whether or not a characteristic fits into the category of the feminine. The study of femininity then becomes not the study of a predefined concept, but the study of historically and culturally variable discourses of femininity. In thus defining femininity as the crossing point of a set of contradictory discourses rather than as a settled concept, we account for its fundamental multiplicity.

"Discourses" can be defined in many ways, but one of the most helpful is Chris Weedon's Foucauldian definition of discourses as "ways of constituting

²⁶ For an analysis of how feminist attempts to define femininity can fall into the trap of repeating patriarchal gestures, see Smith, 1990.

knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which inhere in such knowledges and the relations between them" (Weedon, 1987, p108). Thus defined, discourses are not just ways of speaking and writing, but are the means by which individual experience is constituted. However, as Weedon reminds us, while it is true to say that nothing, not even one's experience of one's own body, has meaning outside of discourse, discourses themselves are "part of a wider network of power relations, often with institutional bases" (Weedon, 1987, p108). Being part of a network of power relations, discourses are not hegemonic: not only do discourses exhibit differences through history and across cultures, but at any one cultural moment a set of different discourses, often conflicting with each other, will be in operation (Weedon, 1987, p109). The contradictions which arise from these conflicting discourses allow individuals to challenge power structures, to intervene against the dominant. Discourses provide a set of constraining rules, but the individual can interact with those rules and resistance is possible. Discourses are the site of both oppression and resistance.²⁷

The implications for feminist analyses of femininity of defining cultural and social practices as discourses are manifold. Firstly, it becomes clearer why it is necessary to work with prevailing definitions or, rather, discourses of femininity without it being necessary to counter with a feminist but equally essentialist, definition of the concept. Such study allows us to theorise the ways that

²⁷ It is precisely the fact that resistance and change have been possible over time which allows the feminist to explain discontinuities within concepts of femininity (Mills, 1992).

individuals are determined by discourses of gender, but also the ways that those individuals, in practice, make subtle revisions in those discourses. Thus, a concept of femininity as a set of multiple discourses allows me to explain why it is possible for Lehmann's work to be both conservative and radical at the same time. In this way, it becomes possible to analyse the way individuals revise the dominant discourses available to them without having to claim those individuals as "ahead of their time". Analysis of the way individuals both accept and revise discourses is possible because, as Toril Moi reiterates, seeing language as discourse shifts the object of study from a supposedly uniformly oppressive language to the operation of specific linguistic strategies in specific situations (Moi, 1985, p154). Furthermore, it is only by examining those specific situations that their relation to the dominant power structures of their period can be determined. In Weedon's words, "it is only by looking at a discourse in operation, in a specific historical context, that it is possible to see whose interests it serves at a particular moment" (Weedon, 1987, p111). Moreover, I would add, it is only by analysing one's own and others' use of multiple discourses of femininity that one can intervene in negative uses of that term and make use of femininity in ways that are both enabling for feminism and subversive of the dominant order. I will discuss femininities in order to resist conventional uses of these discourses but also in order to theorise what alternative, feminist uses might be in the context of Lehmann's work.

5. RECLAIMING THE FEMININE FOR FEMINISM

As I have shown, the dominant critical writings on Lehmann's work frequently draw upon discourses of femininity. Critical use of conventional discourses of femininity commonly robs Lehmann's texts of all revisionary potential. Feminist analysis of the discourses of femininity used in criticism of Lehmann's work is therefore absolutely essential because, even if a text exhibits points of fundamental conservatism in its use of discourses of femininity, any one text will draw on a range of discourses, some of them conflicting with each other. A literary work is not a single discourse, but a matrix of different discourses, discourses which moreover exist in a network of power relations. The complexity of these interactions allows the contemporary feminist to intervene in the categorisation of women writers as feminine without having to claim past authors as some kind of unconscious proto-feminists. As I have said, my argument will be that Lehmann's texts exhibit both conservative and subversive uses of discourses of femininity. Thus, in my counter-move against conventional criticism which deploys discourses of femininity to reduce the revisionary potential of Lehmann's texts, I will draw on those and other, contradictory discourses of femininity in order to release and amplify the revisionary potential of her writing. I will show that Lehmann both uses and revises received discourses of femininity. In fact, her work exhibits twin impulses: one, towards acceptance of the class and gender conventions of her time; two, towards revision and rejection of those conventions. Critics have, in the past, concentrated mainly on the conservative

impulses of Lehmann's work. It will be the project of this thesis to analyse the revisionary elements of the texts, showing how these revisionary elements interact with the texts' more conventional uses of discourses of femininity, and setting them in the context of their conventional reception in order to try to analyse the effectiveness of that revision, to determine with more accuracy whose interests are served by Lehmann's discourses of femininity.

The aim of such discussion of the revisionary potential of Lehmann's discourses of femininity will ultimately be to revalue her work, to account for the feminist pleasure of reading the texts and argue that its femininity does not debase it, but enriches it. Yet I have suggested that a strategy of simply revaluing conventional feminine characteristics is not likely to be a productive one. In what ways, then, can I try to ensure that my revaluation of Lehmann's work will be productive? I will show that femininity has not always been devalued by society and that there have been aspects of femininity which have been highly valued by certain groups at certain historical moments - but only when exhibited by men.

In fact, while most aspects of femininity are identified with femaleness and are disparaged, any attributes of femininity which are highly esteemed are regarded as the province of the superior male. Barbara Johnson cites the example of Mallarmé, who, like many writers past and present, equated a feminine passivity with poetic inspiration. However, for Mallarmé, this feminine openness to the text is valuable only when exhibited by the male poet (Johnson, 1987, pp126-27). Mallarmé's argument, according to Johnson, is that the female

unconsciously embodies states which the male poet is able consciously to make use of: "Women's unconsciousness of meaning - that which makes them capable of standing for the male poetic instinct - is what denies the legitimacy of their ever occupying the role of the poetic subject. Men know what they are doing when they leave the initiative to words or jewels; women don't" (Johnson, 1987, p128). Johnson points out that Mallarmé may describe himself as deliberately occupying the female position when he writes, but this does not help real women to break their silence (Johnson, 1987, pp130-31).

This position is reiterated by Christine Battersby in her book Gender and Genius (1989), in which she argues that although femininity has been regarded as a quality of genius, genius is a category from which females have been excluded. According to Battersby, femininity only acquires positive significance when it is seen as part of male greatness. For example, the great artist can be conceived of as a feminine male (Battersby, 1989, pp3-9). Examining the history of the concept of genius, Battersby claims that there have been changes in the particular faculties which are prized at any given historical moment, but that women are always regarded as lacking the prized faculties (Battersby, 1989, p115). Or, in a variation on this misogynistic strategy, the prized faculty, such as vigour, is seen as unnatural in a woman and therefore only prized in the male (Battersby, 1989, p79). Surprisingly, this turns out to be so not only for conventionally masculine qualities like vigour, but also occurs when the prized faculty is one traditionally associated with femininity. Looking particularly at post-Enlightenment theories of genius, Battersby argues that the perfect creative

male was thought to take on a kind of feminine passivity which opened him up to divine wisdom (Battersby, 1989, pp107-8). Mallarmé's conception of creativity as conscious, controlled use by a male of "feminine" attributes of passivity and receptiveness was not a unique aberration, but was related to a set of ideas which had some critical and philosophical currency at the time. Battersby shows that one idea which had wide currency was that the perfect artistic male always included aspects of the feminine, while the female was always only female. Thus, for both Johnson and Battersby (Johnson, 1987, p129; Battersby, 1989, p113), Romantic thinkers saw androgyny, or gender-crossing, as an attribute of the great artist.²⁸ However, only males could transcend gender in this way. What debarred women from being creative geniuses was that they were unable to rise above the condition of their sex.²⁹

Thus, what is at the heart of the devaluation of female use of the feminine is not a wholesale rejection of any value in the feminine itself, but an assumption that women cannot control their own femininity, and indeed, that women are always and only wholly feminine. Thus, the fact that aspects of femininity have

²⁸ This is virtually Woolf's argument in A Room of One's Own (1977, pp94 &99). Interestingly, Battersby argues that despite reiterating Romantic ideas about the androgyny of the artist, Woolf herself felt trapped by the idea, and consequently could not escape seeing herself as a literary failure (Battersby, 1989, p104).

²⁹ By contrast, Gill Frith argues that common characterisations of women as readers stress their ability to identify with both masculine and feminine identities at the same time, thus suggesting that the female self is simultaneously gendered and transcendent (Frith, 1991). Elaine Showalter makes a similar point about women's relationship to male culture and female subculture (Showalter, 1986, p262).

been valued when consciously exhibited and controlled by exceptional men suggests what my revaluation strategy should be. As I have already suggested, it is not enough simply to attempt to revalue those aspects of femininity for which women have always been deprecated. Instead, my revaluation of femininity will take place through a reclamation - a reclamation, not simply of those aspects of femininity which have been highly valued when ascribed to special men, but more generally, of the whole idea that femininity can be a productive and creative force which individuals can use without having to be trapped within it and without having to define their identities solely in terms of that femininity. The process does still involve revaluation, but it is necessary to be clear that it is women's use of femininity, rather than femininity itself, which is being revalued by such reclamation. For me, then, the most productive feminist stance on femininity is neither one of simply rejecting it nor of revaluing it, but is a more complex stance which takes into account the fact that femininity has been defined and valued in a number of different ways and which tries to negotiate those ways in order to find a definition which can be reclaimed for women in order to help them to revalue themselves without having to make them into honorary men.³⁰

The more complex revaluation strategy which I will attempt will involve simultaneous celebration and questioning of discourses of femininity. To some

³⁰ This has, in fact, been a feminist strategy at least since the beginning of the "Second Wave", despite the popular characterization of Sixties "Women's Libbers" as bra-burning man-haters. See, for example, Mary Ellmann, Thinking about Women (1968) and comments on this in Moi, 1985, esp p39.

extent, I will work with dominant discourses of femininity, therefore I will take the risk of appearing to accept prevailing definitions of femininity, but my purpose in working with those discourses will be, ultimately, to undermine them. I will not attempt to produce any final definition of "femininity", but will strive, at all times, to be clear that I use the word not as a settled concept, but as a set of multiple discourses. In discussing femininity, then, I do not use the term as a pointer to any essential features which women must share. Moreover, I will also continually emphasise the shifting nature of the discourses upon which I am drawing. A major part of my analysis of the femininity of Lehmann's work will be to show that there is no single femininity which is characteristic of the texts or of women. Even for women who choose to remain within the feminine side of the gender spectrum, there are a variety of different discursive models upon which they may draw when constructing their own patterns of behaviour and identity. There are also a variety of different ways in which this range of feminine discourses can be drawn upon. In reading Lehmann's texts, my primary aim will be to pay attention to the differing discursive models of femininity which are represented and the various ways in which both the text and the characters within them relate to those models. It is in these differences that the possibilities of reaching a productive feminist reclamation and revaluation of aspects of femininity must lie.

CHAPTER 1: "WHEN THE WATERS CAME" - A FEMININE TEXT?

I have stressed that in analysing how Lehmann's texts negotiate the multiple discourses of femininity available in her period, I will concentrate on the revisionary elements of her use of those discourses. Conventional critics have already done more than justice to Lehmann's conservative use of discourses of femininity. But I have also said that I will analyse how the texts simultaneously use and undermine conservative discourses of femininity. Indeed, in some ways any radical vision of femininities which Lehmann's work presents is entirely dependent on the conventional vision which accompanies it, for it is only in the moment of drawing upon the conventional discourses that the texts are able to undermine them.

I will show, then, that Lehmann's texts simultaneously support and revise received discourses. One of the prime sites where this is achieved is in Lehmann's use of literary form. In Chapters 3 and 4, I will discuss Lehmann's use, revision and commentary on literary forms in Invitation to the Waltz and The Swan in the Evening. In the present chapter, I want to begin detailed discussion of Lehmann's writing by considering the short story "When the Waters Came" (in The Gipsy's Baby and Other Stories, London, 1982; 1st published 1946). The purpose of reading this story at this point will be twofold. Firstly, detailed analysis of the opening paragraph will exemplify the way that Lehmann's work can radically undermine literary conventions even while drawing upon those conventions. Secondly, more general examination of the story will begin to

suggest how such textual strategies allow the texts to negotiate multiple discourses of femininity, and to mirror the simultaneous use and undermining of literary conventions by a concomitant use and undermining of conventions of femininity.

The story, written and set during the Second World War, begins in what, at first reading, seems like a classic folk tale mode: "Very long ago, during the first winter of the present war..." (p93). This seems to be the kind of impersonal yet communal voice which is characteristic of fairy stories and legends. The events are described as being both "Very long ago" and as having happened "during the first winter of the present war", suggesting that, to the community being described, the war seems interminable, even if it has only lasted for a few years. This opening also removes the story from the realm of everyday events, making the present war seem like the kind of slightly unreal, never-ending strife that countries always seem to be undergoing in legends; as Siegel describes it, "the story establishes a folkloric ethos that encompasses the idea of existence in a legendary period, of passage through a recurrent historical moment" (Siegel, 1985, p207). In one sense, then, the opening is placing contemporary events within the realm of folk-legend, thus using the conventions of that particular narrative form in order to give a sense of the importance and dignity of the events which will be described. In another sense, as Siegel's allusion to a "recurrent historical moment" suggests, events are being placed in a non-linear time scale, where time can be both now and all time, can be both recent and "long ago". This time-scale is part of the folk voice, but by explicitly referring to

the contradictions of such a time-scale the narrative begins to unsettle that voice and to suggest that the comforting certainties of folk knowledge can no longer be relied upon. Thus, in its opening words "When the Waters Came" exhibits an example of the strategy of using and drawing positive value from the conventions of an accepted narrative form even while undermining those conventions.

The opening sentence of the story goes on to describe the state of affairs during that first winter of the war: "it was still possible to preserve enough disbelief in the necessity for disaster to waver on with only a few minor additions and subtractions in the old way" (p93). The phrase "preserving disbelief", with its echoes of the literary theories of Coleridge, is the first sign that the narrative is not going to be operating in the realm of everyday, "commonsense" expectations. This is confirmed by the unusual collocation "necessity for disaster". Here, the conjunction of terms amounts almost to oxymoron: disaster is not usually something which people need, yet, at first reading, this is what the phrase suggests. The sentence is not easily paraphrasable, but can, with effort, be read as a statement that the characters did not believe that hostilities really had to happen. In effect, what is happening in this sentence is that multiple negatives are being used to convey something of the uncertainty, the feeling of limbo which the characters feel, since the story is set at the beginning of the war during the supposed "phoney war" when it seemed as if nothing was going to come of the declaration of war on Germany. At the same time, the use of multiple negatives, unusual collocations and oxymoron injects an ironic tone into the narrative voice. However, despite this apparent control, narrative authority

is being undercut by the structure of the sentence, which embodies the "wavering on" which is described: following the unsettling opening of the sentence, the phrase "a few minor additions and subtractions" is itself a minor addition to the sentence, interrupting its flow the way thoughts of the war can be taken to interrupt the flow of daily life for the characters. Furthermore, the whole meaning of the sentence is called into question by the "minor subtraction", that is, the omission of the comma which should follow this phrase. Without this comma, the sentence loses any claim to unitary meaning and becomes highly ambiguous: it could mean that life goes on in the old way, despite a few minor additions and subtractions, or it could mean that making minor additions and subtractions is the old way.

The difficulty of the sentence, its resistance to straightforward paraphrase, the ironic narrative voice whose authority is undercut all distance the reader from the situation being described in the story. After the opening paragraph it becomes clear that this irony is aimed at upper-middle-class country ladies, including the main character. Evacuated children have been "a tough problem for the local ladies" (p93), suggesting that such ladies (the term itself is derisory in this context) are incompetent do-gooders who think of evacuated children as a problem for themselves when they should be focusing on the children's problems. However, the authority of the ironic tone is again undercut, this time by shifts in the narrative point of view:

One thought, of course, of sailors freezing in unimaginable wastes of water, perhaps to be plunged beneath them between one violent moment and the next; of soldiers numb in the black-and-white nights on sentry duty, crammed, fireless, uncomforted on the floors of empty

barns and disused warehouses. In her soft bed, she thought of them with pity - masses of young men, betrayed, helpless, and so much colder, more uncomfortable than human beings should be. (p93)

Here, the point of view shifts from the very generalised narrative of the first few lines to the point of view of one character. But the "one" who is thinking in the first sentence is not fully individuated; the story has only hinted (through an earlier use of the word "her") at the presence of a character to whom the reader could attribute these thoughts. The "of course" suggests that the narrative is still engaged with "commonsense" folk knowledge and still treating that knowledge with irony, yet it does seem to be moving onto a more personal level. In the next sentence, the use of the pronoun "she" for the first time makes it clear that the text is now describing the thoughts of one particular character, but this character has not been described in any way. This further unsettles the meaning of the opening words, since the introduction of the thoughts of one particular character opens up the possibility that the "one" of the start of the sentence and the narrative voice of the opening of the story are not articulations of any kind of folk voice at all, but the voice of this one character. Thus, it is not clear whether the ironic tone is directed at a community's commonly held assumptions or at the opinions of this particular character.

The fact that the narrative rests momentarily on the thoughts of one individual character might imply that she is going to be central to the action to be described. If so, then conventionally the narrative could be expected to give information which allows emotional engagement with the character, whether by sympathising with her or by being repelled by her. The description of the woman

lying "in her soft bed" might suggest that she is to be viewed as a self-indulgent character. Moreover, in her comfortable refuge, she can only think of soldiers who have no comfort and no refuge with "pity", a word which suggests condescension rather than genuine sympathy. The character cannot feel real sympathy for these men because she can think of them only in general terms, not as individuals. However, the reader is prevented from condemning the woman for this because the text has placed the reader in the same relationship to the central character: she cannot appreciate the predicament of soldiers because she cannot think of them as individuals; similarly, the text does not offer a position which would allow the reader to appreciate the character as an individual. It may be that the wastes of water are unimaginable to her because she lacks the ability imaginatively and sympathetically to enter someone else's situation or it may be that they are unimaginable because they are so huge and so awful that in her very failure to grasp the situation she is, in fact, comprehending its utter inhumanity. There is, too, a feeling of real pathos in the phrase "betrayed, helpless, and so much colder, more uncomfortable than human beings should be": the combination of abstract and acutely physical discomforts which she attributes to these men suggests that she has thought about their situation in some depth. Here, then, the text momentarily offers a position of sympathetic understanding towards the central character.

Again, though, the narrative voice blocks the possibility of assigning a single interpretation, for the sympathetic presentation undercuts itself by ending on the assertion that soldiers are "uncomfortable", a rather absurd term for the

experience of war and one which suggests that the character can only think of the soldiers in terms of her own experience, tucked up in her comfortable bed. That she lacks any real grasp of their situation is borne out when the text tells us that, for her, the soldiers "remained unreal, as objects of pity frequently remain" (p93). Because these words are reported in a passage of free indirect speech, it is not clear whether these words should be attributed to the central character or to the narrator. If they are the narrator's, the words are part of a whole narrative strategy in which general received wisdom, related through a folk voice, prevents the personal coming through in the story. If these words are the narrator's, then they distance the reader from the character both by assuming their place in that wider pattern of narrative distancing and, more particularly, by calling on connotations which suggest that the central character is to be seen as shallow. However, if these words represent the character's own thoughts, then this judgement must be modified by the acknowledgment that she is intelligent and sensitive enough to know her own faults, and the reader might then achieve a degree of empathy with her.

The shifting point of view makes it impossible to choose between these possible interpretations and the meaning of the paragraph remains multiple and unsettled. The nature of Lehmann's central character is enigmatically ambiguous; she cannot be pinned down with an easy moral judgement. In fact, the whole opening of the story exhibits a kind of "cumulative verbal effect" in which "paradoxical usage thwarts any single perspective or definition" (Treichler, 1980, p251). Examining the work of Kate Chopin, Paula Treichler argues that

this multiplicity of textual stances is, in itself, a feminine textual effect. Similarly, Bonnie Costello, in an essay on the poetry of Marianne Moore, argues that one feature which makes Moore's style feminine is the use of continual shifts in the flow of the text, intruding on conventions which we readily naturalise, reminding the reader that she is reading, not "seeing", the events being described (Costello, 1980, p235). Like Moore's poetry, Lehmann's story breaks through realist conventions, foregrounding its own textuality, its multiplicity of viewpoints and resultant ambiguity. The shifting viewpoint makes it impossible to read the text as if it were a slice of life reflected on the page: through unusual collocations and ambiguous phrasing the language draw attention to its own presence. Critics like Treichler and Moore tend to assume that such questioning of its own textual conventions is a symptom of the "femininity" of a text. At present, however, I do not want to draw such general conclusions: thus, in this chapter, I will not make claims about the femininity of this kind of textual effect. What I will show is that this story exhibits ambivalence towards both the textual conventions and conventions of femininity upon which it appears to be drawing.

This story has much in common with The Echoing Grove. For example, both draw heavily upon religious imagery, particularly imagery of salvation, and both describe a situation in which war creates a literal "No Man's Land" in which female characters must fend for themselves and find ways in which to define their own identities without recourse to their relationships with men. Both texts also share a sense of the failure of traditional moral or community values. In chapter 6, I will argue that it is in The Echoing Grove that Lehmann is able to

make most productive use of a strategy of simultaneously drawing upon and questioning conventions, be they literary or gender conventions. In this respect, the most striking similarity between the novel and the story is the way that both draw upon ideas about motherhood.

Images of pregnancy and childbirth and more particularly of stillbirth, miscarriage and abortion are recurrent motifs in Lehmann's work. Indeed, more generally, there is hardly a central female character in any of her works who has not lost a child in some way. "When the Waters Came" is, in this sense, an exception, for the central character in the story does not lose her child. Indeed, she saves her child from death. Does the story, then, simply valorise conventional notions about motherhood? I will now briefly examine the way in which the story draws upon the feminine stereotype of the strong and self-sacrificing mother.

As I have already noted, the story can be read as an allegory about war. The weather can be taken as an image of the state of a nation at war. The story opens by describing the political situation, positioning the war as a backdrop to all that will occur. It then goes on to describe the freak weather occurrences, the sudden freeze and thaw, which could be read as allegorical of the effects of war. But the bulk of the story describes a single incident in the lives of the central character and her two children. The descriptions of the war-time situation and the extreme weather can be seen as simply the context within which the central character's personal struggle takes place.

That motherhood is a key concept in the story is signalled in the title itself.

"When the Waters Came" makes explicit reference to the physical act of childbirth and, arguably, calls upon notions of overwhelming natural forces working through the woman in labour. In contrast to this, the effects of the freeze are described as distinctly unnatural. Sheep are frozen to the ground, "pigeons were stuck dead by their claws on branches. The peacock at the farm had been brought in sheathed totally in ice" (p94).¹ The unnaturalness of the scene suggests portents of doom and disaster: "that night was the end of the world" (p95). Later, when the snows suddenly thaw and the landscape is transformed by temporary rivers and lakes, the central character takes her two children outside. There is no-one else around:

Where were all the other children? Gathered by parents indoors for fear of the water? The cottages looked dumb.
"It's like a village in a fairy story." (p95)

This free indirect report of the central character's thoughts seems to suggest that she is far from secure in her own maternal competence. She appears to be struggling to decide what would be acceptable behaviour, looking for models in the behaviour of the other parents. But they are invisible and therefore give her no answer. Her explicit comparison of the eerily deserted village with a village in a fairy story might suggest that she can find no answers in conventional folk knowledge, either. She is struggling to make sense of her duties as a mother and is finding no help in community or literary conventions.

The reason for this perhaps becomes apparent a few paragraphs later, when

¹ There are echoes of "the Great Frost" in Virginia Woolf's Orlando (Woolf, 1977; 1st published 1928, especially pp22-23).

the central character again makes an explicit literary allusion when looking at the flooded landscape:

The water ran so fast and feverish, carrying winter away. The earth off the ploughed fields made a reddish stain in it, like blood, and stalks of last years' dead corn were mixed and tumbled in it. She remembered 'The Golden Bough', the legend of Adonis, from whose blood the spring should blossom; the women carrying pots of dead wheat and barley to the water, flinging them in with his images. *Sowing the Spring.* (p96)

The legend she remembers is that of Adonis, the beautiful young man who was loved by Aphrodite, goddess of beauty, love and reproduction. In her association with Adonis, Aphrodite appears as a mother-goddess unable to protect her mortal lover/son from death. This would appear to present an image of maternal powerlessness. However, in ancient Greece, the rites associated with Adonis involved women mourning at his death and then rejoicing at his rebirth, symbolised by the re-birth of vegetation in spring and early summer. Thus, while the mother is powerless to protect her child from death, natural forces can effect a re-birth. In calling upon this legend, the central character of "When the Waters Came" begins to suggest why she should be so uneasy about her own maternal power.

This uneasiness is apparent in her reluctance to allow her children to paddle in the newly-created river. She charges her son, John, with the task of looking after his younger sister, but inevitably the two children become separated. Then it becomes apparent that the central character's failure to find an adequate model on which to base her parental decisions is at the heart of the disaster which occurs:

Oh, they're beginning to look very far away, with water all round them.

It can't be dangerous, I mustn't shout. They were tiny, and separated.

"Stay together!"

She began to run along the bank, seeing what would happen; or causing it to happen. It did happen, a moment before she got there. Jane, rushing forward to seize a branch, went down. (p97)

The central character is caught between two conflicting conventional views of maternal duty. She knows that to over-protect her children would be as culpable as failing to protect. Trapped in this dilemma, she contributes to the accident which happens. Conventional views about motherhood not only do not help her, but actually make the situation worse.

The current begins to sweep Jane away, but instead of describing what happens at this, the most dramatic point in the story, the narrative, like the action of a Greek play, jumps abruptly to the point when the crisis is past. We can assume that the central character has waded into the water to save Jane, for she now has "ice stockings" (p97). John, her son, denies any part in the disaster, complaining that he does not need a hot bath since none of him is wet. Only the two females have been involved in the accident, and the mother is literally weighed down with guilt at her failure to fulfill her maternal role:

An adventure, not a disaster, she told herself unhelpfully, stumbling and splashing up towards the garden over the ploughed field, weighed into the earth with the weight of the child, and of her ever more enormous clogged mudshoes that almost would not move; and with the weight of her own guilt and Jane's and John's, struggling together without words in lugubrious triangular reproach and anxiety. (p97)

Earlier, I suggested that the allusion to the fertility rites associated with Adonis suggested a certain ambivalence about maternal power. Here, the effects of such rites are comically re-written. Jane and John have thrown sticks into the river like the worshippers of Adonis, but instead of being rewarded by a spring re-

birth of vegetation, their rite has been resulted in both Jane and her mother appearing to be pulled down into the earth instead of growing up from it. It seems that while her own community fails to offer her models on which to base her maternal behaviour, the ancient rites are equally inadequate as models. Indeed, what the story points to more than anything is the sheer physical hard work of motherhood. The rhythm of the above passage is slow and plodding, allowing the reader to feel the effort that the woman must make in order to transport her child safely home. This contrasts sharply with the earlier image of her lying "in her soft bed" thinking vaguely about the physical discomforts of sailors and soldiers. Indeed, she had thought briefly of "sailors freezing in unimaginable wastes of water, perhaps to be plunged beneath them between one violent moment and the next" (p93). Then, those discomforts had seemed "unreal" to her, now she knows exactly what that might feel like.

After arriving at her home, it seems that more hard work has been necessary in order to clean and warm up herself and Jane. Once the practicalities have been accomplished, however, the sense of impending doom and tragedy is dispelled: "Disaster had vanished into the boothole with the appalling lumps of mud, into the clothes-basket with sopping bloomers and stockings, down the plug with the last of the mustard-clouded bath water" (p97). In my discussions of Dusty Answer, and more particularly of The Echoing Grove, I will show that those two texts present practical caring skills as the basis of female salvation. In this short story, also, it is not the quasi-religious rite, but the practical care which follows it which leads to the re-birth, for it is only after the

central character has succeeded in returning her family to the warmth of their fire that she looks out and sees that spring is indeed on its way: "She looked out of the window and saw that the water in the fields had almost disappeared already. After countless white weeks, the landscape lay exposed again in tender greens and browns, caressing the eye, the imagination, with a promise of mysterious blessing" (p98). It seems that sacrifice of the child was not necessary for re-birth to take place, after all. Indeed, the story would appear to be countering myths of maternal powerlessness with an equally traditional myth of a powerful mother. In fact, although it is the legend of Adonis to which the central character explicitly refers, and although the relevance of that legend might be borne out by the wartime setting and the impending sacrifice of the lives of thousands of young men, I would argue that it is not the Adonis legend which provides the story's founding myth of death and re-birth. The myth which underlies the actions of the central character and her daughter is that of Demeter and Persephone.

Taking this as the unspoken myth which underlies the story's actions explains many of the apparent inconsistencies in the narrative. It explains, for example, why, after referring to the sacrifice of Adonis, it should be the female child who is carried off. It explains why, after the rescue, mother and child are not immediately saved but are "weighed into the earth" (p97) and it explains why, in the end, this mother is seen as powerful, her interventions not only saving her daughter but also being followed by the return of spring. Sydney Janet Kaplan, discussing Lehmann's The Ballad and the Source, suggests that the feminist

appeal of the Demeter myth lies in the fact that the goddess does not only mourn when her daughter is lost, she is also "enraged" (Kaplan, 1981, p128). I would suggest further that the myth is appealing because in her rage, Demeter takes action to find and secure the return of her daughter. Unlike Aphrodite, she is powerful enough to succeed, if only partially. In this myth, and its associated rites, it also becomes clearer why rebirth and death should be so closely bound, for what Demeter wins is the agreement that for one half of the year her daughter will be with her and the earth will be alive, while for the other half of the year, Persephone will preside over the dead as queen of the underworld while her mother presides over the dead earth above. Thus, in "When the Waters Came", although spring is promised at the end of the story after the daughter has been saved, death still retains a presence, introduced by the daughter herself. While her mother is wondering if spring will bring salvation, Jane is thinking about the presence of death in the flood-waters:

What will the spring bring? Shall we be saved?

"But you were wrong about one thing, Mummy," said Jane, from the sofa. "You know what you said about ... you know."

"About what?"

"Go on. Cough it up."

"About nothing being ... you know," said Jane with an effort.

"Drowned."

"Oh dear, was I wrong?"

"Yes, you were wrong. I sor a chicking. At least, I think so." (p98)

These are the final words of the story, and they suggest a comic ambivalence about the central character's slightly pompous and over-optimistic view of the coming spring. Ending on this uneasy note, the narrative points to an irony in its own underlying use of the Demeter myth. Jane's criticism that her mother

was wrong reminds the reader that the mother was wrong; she may have saved her child, but she also partially caused her child's accident. At the same time, the comedy in the way the child expresses her criticisms means that the attack on her mother's power and wisdom literally need not be taken seriously. What Sydney Janet Kaplan calls the myth of "the Great Mother" (Kaplan, 1981) is neither wholly valorised nor wholeheartedly undermined. It is used to structure the story and point to a valuation of the central character, but is also subtly questioned.

Taking the Demeter myth as the key to this story also makes it clear why the central character is not given a name. She is not a fully individuated character, but represents the difficulties, contradictions and power of the maternal role. Similarly, the story points to the difficulties, contradictions and power in myths and fairy stories themselves. The one myth which the story might seem to be most fully drawing upon is the one which remains un-named in the story. Explicitly, it directs the readers' attention to a myth of a maternal goddess which is inadequate as a parallel for the events in this narrative. By referring to this other myth, and by treating the myth upon which it draws with a degree of ironic and comic distance, the story is able to draw upon mythical associations while subtly suggesting the inadequacy of myth as a means by which to make sense of the modern world. Indeed, the final words of the story belong to Jane, a character fully individuated in vivid concrete descriptions. The presentation of the characters of the two children adds a note of realism which offsets and sometimes sits rather uneasily with the mythical atmosphere of the

story. Ultimately, Jane's childish voice is allowed to comically puncture the story's own rather pretentious use of mythical content and tone. "When the Waters Came" may draw upon myths of maternity but it undermines those myths even as it uses them. Thus, just as the story both draws upon and questions the narrative conventions of the folk tale mode, so it also draws upon and questions conventions of femininity.

CHAPTER 2: THE BALLAD AND THE SOURCE - FEMININE MYTHS

In my discussion of "When the Waters Came" in Chapter 1, I argued that the theme of mothers losing their children is a recurrent one in Lehmann's work. In all of her works there is at least one female character who has lost a child, and in most the central female character suffers this trauma, whether through miscarriage, abortion, stillbirth or death in childhood or beyond. However, one novel stands out from the others as the one in which this theme receives its most sustained and dramatic treatment. That novel is The Ballad and the Source (London, 1982; 1st published 1944).

While some critics view this as Lehmann's greatest novel, others see it as deeply flawed.¹ Such disagreements perhaps stem from the nature of the action depicted and of the central character, Sibyl Jardine. Sibyl can be seen as either a woman thwarted by a harshly patriarchal society, or simply as a monster.² Whichever one thinks she is, one thing is undoubted - the action which forms the focus of the narrative is all prompted by one central motivation: Sibyl's view of her own maternal powers. This view is not presented to the reader directly, but through the medium of a child narrator, who relays Sibyl's story, not in

¹ For example, Diana LeSturgeon calls the novel "the Everest of her career", describing it as "a work of the imagination astonishing not only in its power and complexity but in its freedom from the limitations which mar three of the preceding novels" (LeSturgeon, 1965, pp23 & 89). Gillian Tindall, on the other hand, refers to "the creaking of the structure" of the novel (Tindall, 1985, p141).

² For the views of various reviewers, see Cox, 1977, pp208-9.

chronological order, but in the order in which she originally "heard" it, from Sibyl and other narrators. This multiple and complicated narrative structure means that there are several levels on which the narrative must be mistrusted, and indeed much of the narrative is explicitly concerned with the power of narration itself. However, before I discuss what the novel has to say about story-telling, I want first to consider the theme which it has in common with "When the Waters Came", that is, the issue of the nature of mother-daughter relationships.

The story is told by a young girl called Rebecca Landon. As a child, she is befriended by Sibyl Jardine, who is a neighbour. As I have indicated, the book is Sibyl's story, retold by Rebecca after "hearing" it from Sibyl herself as well as from other characters. As a young woman, Sibyl had left her husband for another man, leaving behind her baby daughter, Ianthe. Later, her husband prevented her from claiming, or even seeing, the child. The remainder of the story centres on Sibyl's attempts to get back her daughter, or later, when she feels her daughter is lost to her, to win the right to care for and control her daughter's children, Maisie, Malcolm, and Cherry, who have earlier been abandoned by Ianthe.

The Ballad and the Source, like "When the Waters Came", makes much of mythical associations of motherhood. Indeed, Sibyl explicitly creates a mythical atmosphere around herself. For example, when Rebecca and her sisters are first invited to Sibyl's, it is to pick primroses on her land before taking tea with her. Sibyl's letter of invitation describes the children as "little Primaveras" (p6). Although Mrs Landon explains to her daughters that Primavera was the goddess

of spring, she obviously finds the allusion "fanciful", as Sibyl's letter itself anticipates (p6). Rebecca's sister, Jess, is startled by the comparison, but Rebecca herself is flattered by it and it occasions a flight of romantic fantasy on her part, in which she imagines herself "in an indistinct but pleasing diaphanous light, moving over the green hillside, spiritually and gracefully gathering blossoms" (p6). When the children first visit Sibyl's home, Rebecca describes it as being like a place "in a fairy story" (p8). From the start, then, Rebecca's willingness to believe the myth is established. Later in the novel, in a much-quoted description of Sibyl, Rebecca imagines her gazing into the darkness: "her glittering face blazed in the firmament, savage, distraught, unearthly: Enchantress Queen in an antique ballad of revenge" (p238). Another description of the same scenario is presented as a direct report of the words of Maisie, Sibyl's granddaughter, who finds Sibyl frightening because one moment she appears prostrate with illness on a sofa, then: "Next view - straight, upright, posted there, towering above use like an avenging Fury. Oh, it seemed as if she'd been there for centuries - that she was the ghost of the wicked old house, and now I understood the secret of its sinister face! I could almost see her eyes glitter" (p268). Sydney Janet Kaplan points out that the allusion to the Furies is apt because the Furies "are frequently interpreted as survivors of the old matriarchy who wreak vengeance on the usurpers of their powers" (Kaplan, 1981, p141). Kaplan traces the novel's allusions to maternal archetypes, arguing that Sibyl represents aspects of both the "Great Mother" and the "Terrible Mother" archetypes. Sibyl herself sees her maternal powers as manifestations of the omnipotence of the Great

Mother archetype. For example, she describes to Rebecca how she had physical knowledge when Ianthe was ill, even though separated from her child. Furthermore, unlike the mother in "When the Waters Came", Sibyl has absolute faith in her own ability to save her child from death:

Once it is born, and the cord is cut, it is free of one's own flesh; yet in a sense it remains for ever part of one. So when it is badly threatened one is bound to get some warning. If one is far away the warning can only take the form of this blind dull drag towards it. Once one has got there - oh, then one recharge it with life again from one's own; as one did before it passed out of one's body and became separate. The birth miracle will happen over again. (pp160-61)

Sibyl's view of her own powers is, of course, over-inflated. Even Rebecca, who rarely questions any of Sibyl's assertions, on this occasion is moved to point out that Tilly, the nursemaid, had been unable to save her young son from death.

Sibyl is stung into reflecting upon her own claims:

Of course it is not always so. I was indulging in a dream. What do I know of this other experience, the positive one? I have never been called to come. It was perhaps the worst feature of my separation from her, the hardest to bear, I mean - the haunting fear that death would stretch a hand for her, grasp her before I could reach her and draw her back. As I felt - I knew - I had the power to. For whatever they do, they cannot do that: they cannot cut the invisible cord. (p161)

For a moment, here, Sibyl sees her own delusion, but only for a moment. She ends by asserting again her faith in her own supernatural maternal powers.

This faith in her powers proves to be totally unfounded, for two of her grandchildren die, but more importantly, when she thinks she can save her daughter from madness, all she does is precipitate her into it. At this point, late in the novel, Ianthe has come to Sibyl's French château to find her children, but has become seriously unbalanced. Unknown to Sibyl, Ianthe has been locked in

a room to protect herself and others, but Sibyl hears her moaning, guesses who is on the other side of the locked door and calls out, "Do not be afraid, Ianthe! I am coming to you" (p304). What she fails to realise is that what has pushed Ianthe into madness is the sight of sculpted heads of Sibyl, and that Ianthe now views Sibyl as a terrible creature who has stolen away her daughter and is trying to kill her (pp290-91). When Sibyl enters the room, then, Ianthe screams and jumps from the window in a suicide attempt (pp304-5). Sibyl's maternal powers are revealed to be dangerously deluded.

The plot of the novel is propelled by a delusion. But it is not just in the dénouement that the delusion is revealed as such. Indeed, as Kaplan suggests, the way the novel draws upon myth and archetype itself presents contradictory views of Sibyl. Kaplan finds references to Demeter, to the Sibyl of Cumae and to the Furies (Kaplan, 1981). But the novel does not confine its allusions to classical deities. Like "When the Waters Came", The Ballad and the Source also alludes to fairy stories.³ One critic sees Sibyl as a descendant of the evil stepmother of folk tales.⁴ As Snow White's stepmother constantly asks her mirror for confirmation of her beauty, so Sibyl must constantly ask other characters to mirror her own brilliance back at her. This property of Sibyl's nature is commented upon by Gil Olafsen, a young sculptor whom she has tried

³ Judy Simons finds references to fairy stories in Sibyl's descriptions of Ianthe's childhood with her father (Simons, 1992, p108) while Ruth Siegel argues that Tilly, the old nursemaid, is like the malevolent thirteenth fairy in *Sleeping Beauty* (Siegel, 1985, p237).

⁴ Vida Markovitch, quoted in Cox, 1977, pp209-11.

to mould:

From anybody else in the world [...] she gets back - immeasurable reflections of herself. It's not deliberate, so it's pointless to moralise about it: it's some property of her nature - some principle. Like yeast. She throws out all she has - her beauty, her gifts, her power over people - and objects - and events; and it works. Each time she tries it out, it works like magic. Up come all these disturbing, magnetised self-images. (pp236-37)

What is important about this aspect of Sibyl's character is not the allusion to any particular fairy tale role, but the general behavioural pattern which Gil is describing. Sibyl no more fits the patterns of the fairy tale stepmother than that of the Demeter myth. The vital point is that Sibyl's ability to get reflections of herself back from other people is a function of her skill as a performer and storyteller. Although she asserts repeatedly that she is one of the rare people who know how to live what this novel is really concerned with is not Sibyl's life but her attempts to tell the story of that life. What Sibyl (and the novel) does is to take a variety of different archetypes, from a variety of different fictional genres which deal in maternal myths, and extracts from each whatever elements suit her own particular purpose. As Judy Simons argues, Sibyl deliberately draws upon fairy tale, bible stories and classical tragedy and legend in order to manipulate others into accepting her own evaluation of her life story as tragic (Simons, 1992, pp108-10).

The quotation above suggests that Gil thinks Sibyl is successful in manipulating others into reflecting back the image of herself which she wants to create, but, in fact, few of the other characters accept Sibyl at her own valuation. Rebecca is the exception here. For example, when Tilly, the old nursemaid who now does sewing for Rebecca's family, tells Rebecca about Sibyl's actions when

she first left her husband and child, Rebecca is struck by Ianthe's loss:

I knew what Tilly didn't: I knew the maternal goodness of Mrs Jardine: her lovingness, her patience, the way her hands could tend and soothe; the certainty she inspired that she would know in a flash what to do if you were frightened; above all her accuracy, that made you feel important, equal, respected. I had no words for all this; but I realised with despair the birthright that Ianthe was losing. (p76)

This is the view of Sibyl which is held by the child Rebecca throughout the narrative: Sibyl as the archetypal Good Mother and completely truthful and accurate story-teller. However, although Rebecca narrates the story, her view of Sibyl is counter-pointed by others' version of parts of the tale. On this occasion, it is Tilly's opinions which are reported to the reader as a counterpoint to Rebecca's glowing praise. Referring to Sibyl's attempt to kidnap the baby Ianthe from her father, Tilly comments, "Don't tell me a mother's feeling caused that bit of play-actin'. A mother - that is a mother - studies 'er dooty to 'er child, and acts according to the best of her abilities. No matter 'ow near she might be drove to it by excrutiatin' circumstances she'd never go and do a deed like that" (p76). By juxtaposing Rebecca's naïve childish faith in Sibyl with Tilly's more conventional and cynical view, the text suggests that Sibyl's version of events need not always be a true one.

The juxtaposition of Rebecca's naïve comments with the narratives of other characters not only undercuts Sibyl's view of events but also opens up a gap in Rebecca's narrative itself. This effect is a consequence of the fact that the story is not narrated by the child Rebecca but by an older Rebecca looking back on the events of her childhood. While seeking to represent the effects of Sibyl's power by reproducing her own childish naïveté, the adult narrator allows subtle

ironies to expose the inadequacy of the child's view. Tilly's version of Sibyl's maternal attributes contrasts sharply with Rebecca's, suggesting that the child's view should be re-examined and that the child's idealistic picture should be viewed ironically. Moreover, the child's narrative is also ironised when it is Sibyl herself who is speaking, for example, when Sibyl makes some oblique reference to sex which Rebecca does not understand. One instance of this occurs when Sibyl repeats another woman's story of hearing Ianthe knocking on her husband's door at night, claiming that she was afraid to sleep alone. Rebecca reports this, but her comments on it reveal her utter incomprehension: "I told myself it might well be so, though very babyish. A girl who had never been allowed to sleep in a room by herself" (p157). On such occasions, Rebecca's comments inject a comic note and puncture the grandiosity of Sibyl's narrative. Sometimes the adult Rebecca plays up this comedy as she reproduces her own childish reactions to Sibyl's stories. For example, during a very long story-telling session in which Sibyl tells Rebecca about the events of Ianthe's late adolescence, Rebecca is lost in the sexual allusiveness of it all and can only munch her way through the contents of the tea-table in utter incomprehension:

Floundering in all this, I began to feel, as I ate my way on through scones into sponge cake, how unequal I was proving to my own opportunities. I was not going to be told - or maybe I had been told, and had not taken in a word of it. Perhaps it had been the same with Ianthe and Mrs Connor: perhaps their chances of illumination, of bettering themselves, had been presented to them in so rare a way that they had not even noticed them. (pp148-49)

The comic description of herself calmly eating her way through scones and sponge cake while Sibyl tells her tragic story and the explicit reference to her

own lack of understanding of what she was hearing are signals from the adult narrator that the child's view is not to be taken at face value. The idea that hearing Sibyl's story might provide "illumination" and the opportunity to "better oneself" is clearly a view expressed by Sibyl which the child accepts. The child realises that the road-to-Damascus-like vision has not occurred, but situates the reason for failure in her own inadequacy. However, the irony injected by the adult narrator signals to the reader that it is Sibyl's over-inflated narrative which is at fault, and not to be trusted.

Thus, although the novel is narrated by Rebecca, it is not necessarily her child's view of events which the reader is invited to accept as the accurate one. Rebecca is presented as utterly truthful, and as a faithful transcriber of others' words, yet the reader is asked to distrust her interpretation of the story she tells. It is primarily through the complex narrative structure that this is achieved. Most critics of the novel discuss Rebecca's function as narrator. Several argue that using a child narrator to re-tell stories told by adults allows the text to encompass contradictory views about Sibyl without presenting any of them as the final truth.⁵ However, others, like Rita Sullivan, argue that although Rebecca may not be able to decide between the available interpretations and judgments of Sibyl's actions, the reader can judge (Sullivan, 1985, p98). Repeatedly, critics point out the parallels with Henry James's What Maisie Knew, where the innocence of the

⁵ For example, Wiktoria Dorosz argues that the child narrator allows the story to be re-told without ethical bias, so that the reader is invited to suspend moral judgment (Dorosz, 1975, p39).

child narrator, while it prevents her from understanding the story she is telling, is precisely what directs the reader to interpret and judge that story.⁶ I would argue that these critics are all caught in the trap of confusing the faithfulness of Rebecca's narrative with its reliability. Sullivan, for example, offers the following argument:

The sections of the novel not quoted from the conversations of adults are definitely from a child's perspective, but they are written with a sophistication of vocabulary and syntactical structure that marks them as the work of an adult. It is a child's point of view presented to the reader in the voice of an adult. The narrator, though she may not understand all the implications of what others say to her, is clearly a reliable narrator; the reader may trust Rebecca though she may not always trust her interlocutors. (Sullivan, 1985, p92)

Sullivan rightly points out that Rebecca's narrative can be trusted in the sense that one can take it as a faithful representation of the stories she has heard. It is also true to say that this is not always the case with Rebecca's interlocutors, who, the text suggests, often deliberately select, distort or sometimes blatantly fabricate the stories they tell.⁷ Rebecca does none of these things, yet it is not accurate to describe her narrative as "reliable". What Sullivan has failed to see here is that the presence of the adult narrator serves precisely the function of signalling to the reader that although Rebecca is a reliable narrator, her narrative

⁶ See, for example, Siegel, 1985, p239, or Tindall, 1985, p134.

⁷ For example, when Sibyl finds Ianthe in Bohemia with Tilly, she discovers that Tilly had taken Ianthe away to give birth to an illegitimate child. Tilly is quick to try to exonerate herself by claiming that she had told Ianthe to go back to her mother. Rebecca, of course, takes this at face value, and Sybil has to point out that "That was Tilly's version of the conversation" (p171). Interestingly, although Tilly tells Rebecca much about Sibyl, and about her own part in Ianthe's life, she denies having any contact with Ianthe after the latter has grown up (p93).

is not reliable. In making use of this doubled narrator, and the complex narrative structure, events are told at varying temporal and narrative distances. Sometimes events are described by a participant; sometimes the story is already second or third hand before Rebecca hears it.⁸ Sometimes the events which are being described have happened not long before the text's "present day"; sometimes they have happened years or decades before. Sometimes stories are related in chronological order, starting from the beginning of the incident and proceeding to the end; sometimes the conclusion of an incident is described at the beginning, and the function of the story-telling is to explain and elaborate upon that conclusion.⁹ The effects of this complex narrative structure are central to an understanding of the text, for a key theme, if not the key theme in the text, is that of storytelling. As we have already seen, Rebecca's initial fascination with

⁸ For example, Tilly tells Rebecca about Sibyl's attempt to kidnap Ianthe. Tilly prefaces the tale with "I'd 'ave give somethink to been there" (p76) and at one point, when asked by Rebecca what Sibyl's husband had said is forced to reply "Not 'avin' been present, I couldn't tell you" (p78). Nevertheless, she tells the story in such dramatic detail that when she describes Sibyl leaving, defeated, Rebecca appears to feel that she is there watching, for her narrative brings this past event into the present tense and places herself as a witness: "Now she was in the dark street alone, defeated. She was standing still, wondering where to go, what to do next. Now she was walking away with the step I knew, vanishing, swallowed up in the night beyond the reach of my imagination" (p80). Rebecca can imagine the scene which Tilly describes, but it is Tilly who is the storyteller here.

⁹ See, for example, Maisie's explanation of what happened when her mother appeared at the château in France. The dramatic conclusion of the novel is reported briefly on p251, then the details of the incident are related for a further sixty pages. Interestingly, part of the incident has already been reported, in a letter from Sibyl to Mrs Landon, but Sibyl is there concerned to conceal the whole truth (p218). This letter, unlike others from Sibyl to Mrs Landon, is not "quoted" for the reader. Instead, its content is reported indirectly. Thus, the reader has no way to discern that there are gaps in Sibyl's narrative.

Sibyl stems less from interest in Sibyl's story than from a sympathy with Sibyl's expressive and idiosyncratic use of language. Throughout the narrative, the way that Sibyl and others tell their story is as important to Rebecca as the substance of the story being told. For example, reporting an early conversation with Sibyl, Rebecca comments: "I could have listened all day to Mrs Jardine, for the sheer fascination of her style. She enunciated with extraordinary clarity and precision, giving each syllable its due, and controlling a rich range of modulations and inflexions. I wondered at first if she could be reciting from Shakespeare or someone" (p23). Reflecting upon Sibyl's narrative style, Rebecca realises that at its heart is a dramatic urge. Sibyl does not just tell her story, she performs it. Later, I will show that The Ballad and the Source blurs the distinctions between story-telling and dramatic performance or role-play, but first I want to consider with whose powers of performance the novel is concerned.

Significantly, all of the story's narrators are female. By foregrounding their narrative strategies and the effects of those strategies upon their female reader, Rebecca, the text dramatises and enacts a relationship between women and language, or more particularly, between women and storytelling. That women are presented as having a special relationship with storytelling is evident when one looks at the contribution to the narrative of the only male character whose words are reported at any length. Near the end of the novel, Gil Olafsen spend some time in conversation with Rebecca, but his words merely provide a commentary upon Sibyl's (and his own) character (see above). He does not

complete the story for Rebecca. He is a critic, not a storyteller.¹⁰ Indeed, he suggests that Sibyl herself might later bring "the story of her life up to date" (p242) although, in fact, it is Maisie who performs this function.

Rebecca's narrative is a patchwork of the narratives of Sibyl, Tilly the maid, Maisie, Mrs Mack (a relative who has spent some time looking after Maisie and the others) and Mrs Landon, Rebecca's mother. The male characters remain largely at one remove from the reader. Not only do they not take part in the construction of the narrative, but they are also not presented to the reader directly through Rebecca. For the most part, they exist only as characters in the second or third hand narratives which Rebecca repeats.¹¹ Maisie's brother, Malcolm, appears briefly in Rebecca's "present day" narrative, but Rebecca's description of the photograph of himself in uniform which he sends to Jess could be taken as a comment upon her own descriptions of Malcolm: "his photograph remained upon the mantelpiece, not very like anybody in particular: mass-produced photograph of a dead English subaltern" (p316). That Malcolm is attracted to Rebecca's sister, Jess, who cannot relate to Sibyl's linguistic idiosyncrasies (see p6) and that he is not allowed to know about the more

¹⁰ Interestingly, when Sibyl describes what she sees as the critical establishment's hypocritical reactions to her attempt to discuss incest in one of her novels, she is quite specific in saying that it was "male critics" who found the subject-matter unacceptable (p124).

¹¹ A partial exception is Rebecca's father, whose dictates determine the relationship between herself and Sibyl's family (see, for example, pp 27 & 216) but when Rebecca reports near the end of the novel that "My father had set out without complaint upon his slow heart-rending journey into the shadows" (p219) it means little to the reader, for whom he has always been a shadow.

unpleasant parts of the narrative (see, for example, p251) are evidence that he is not seen as a fit vessel to receive or transmit the narrative. Thus, in The Ballad and the Source, storytelling is characterised as a female skill.

I have said that the narrative is pieced together from the contributions of several female characters. I have also shown that the text invites the reader to distrust the way that Sibyl repackages her own life-story as a classical myth or legend. On the other hand, positioning the narrative in the power of female narrators and explicitly excluding male characters from that power, as happens with Gil and Malcolm, does create the effect that what is presented to the reader is a female mystery passed through a line of female priestesses. Kaplan discusses the similarities in content between The Ballad and the Source and the myth of Demeter and Persephone which is at the heart of the Eleusinian mysteries but she fails to point out that the structure of the narrative is a reflection of the structure of the mysteries themselves, in which a female priesthood ritualise a powerful myth about a mother and her daughter. Kaplan fails to see the significance of her own paraphrase of Erich Neumann, who has written extensively on these mysteries:

While timeless cycles of rebirth and decay were enacted repeatedly through participation in the Eleusinian mysteries, Neumann suggests that there was another impulse, more hidden, which was to express the persistence of some level of female power in a society where that power was already being undermined by the increasing domination of the patriarchy. For all their solemn beauty, the mysteries actually grew forth out of oppression and female misery. (Kaplan, 1981, p128)

In Chapter 1, I argued that the central character in "When the Waters Came" searches through available narratives of maternal behaviour in order to find a

model upon which she can base her own actions. The character herself fails to find such a model, but, I have argued, the story suggests that the Demeter story might have some power as an explanatory myth. However, I have also pointed out that the story is ambivalent about its own use of this myth, and undermines that use by a certain irony. In The Ballad and the Source the myth is again drawn upon, but this time that ambivalence is more fully explored. Unlike the mother in "When the Waters Came", Sibyl Jardine believes that it is appropriate to build her sense of her own maternal powers upon the models of classical myth and legend. The text, however, point us squarely to the conclusion that Sibyl is deluded in this belief. Yet it is not as simple as that. The content of the narrative suggests that Sibyl is wrong to believe that motherhood is a matter of quasi-mythical, almost supernatural powers, but, simultaneously, the pattern of the narrative dramatises a structure which, as Kaplan suggests with regard to the Eleusinian mysteries serves "to express the persistence of some level of female power in a society where that power was already being undermined by the increasing domination of the patriarchy" (Kaplan, 1981, p128; quoted above). Thus, the story-telling is not just a repetition of events, but crucially, like the mysteries, involved re-enactment of those events: "As if all were still happening, could yet be changed, as if now, this moment, the half-visionary figure was being devilishly threatened and deprived, I fought with passion to justify her, to give her her own" (p75). The stories told to Rebecca, like the mysteries of Eleusis, ritually re-enact a mother's loss of her daughter. The purpose of that re-enactment is not to celebrate the loss, but to re-create possibilities for the

matriarchal line to be re-found, for the mother-daughter bond to be renewed. The story which is told is less about Sibyl and Ianthe than about the forces which can sever mother-daughter bonds. The means of telling that story exemplify forces which can restore that bond. Woman-centred, The Ballad and the Source can be read as a narrative of how female power can be passed from mother to daughter in patriarchal society.

There are elements of explicit feminism in The Ballad and The Source. For example, the text makes reference to the inequities of the patriarchal system in which male children automatically receive any inheritance (pp205-6) and mothers are denied access to their children by "the law of cruel men" (p88). Tilly tells Rebecca, "As a girl, she [Sibyl] was always one to go on about women's rights - and they should all be trained up to professions [sic] like men, and be the equal of 'em" (p89). However, I will argue that the text's moments of explicit feminism are less important than its implicit suggestions about female identity and power. In this respect, more interesting than the fact of Sibyl's rebellion against patriarchal marriage is the means of that rebellion. For what Sibyl does to support herself after she has left her husband is to act and to write.

The story of Sibyl's youthful rebellion is narrated to Rebecca by Tilly. Tilly clearly disapproves of Sibyl, and later we learn that Tilly has helped Ianthe to evade her mother, apparently in a spirit of revenge against Sibyl (p168). However, the source of Tilly's hostility does not lie in disapproval of Sibyl's unconventionality, or even of her abandonment of her child. For Tilly, Sibyl's crime is that of story-telling. Tilly had been employed by Rebecca's

grandmother, Laura, a good friend of Sibyl's. After Sibyl's rebellion, Laura had helped all she could, but ultimately supported the values of her own and Sibyl's husband. Later, Sibyl wrote and published a novel which, Tilly assumed, was wholly autobiographical. The central character in this novel is a woman wronged by men and "Wronged by a woman she trusted, one 'oo turned out a false friend, and stabbed 'er to the 'eart" (p91). Although Tilly had never read the novel, she interpreted this as a direct portrayal of Laura:

Oh, it was wrapped up cunnin', of course, so you couldn't lay your finger and swear that's 'oo was meant. If she's 'a been faced with it, she could 'ave acted innocent. 'Why, Madrona, good gracious me, it's only a story made up out my 'ead. You 'air's dark, Madrona, and the one in the story's fair. 'Owever could you fancy such a thing?' Ah, no doubt she would 'ave, given the chance. (p92)

In this passage, Tilly exhibits one of the recurrent traits of her own, and Sibyl's story-telling: she dramatises the story, puts words into the mouth of characters, and acts their parts rather than just relating their stories. As I will show, Tilly's story-telling crosses over the division between narrative and dramatic art. More importantly at present, it also crosses over the boundary between fact and fiction. For little of Tilly's narrative is told at first hand; most of it has been related to her by a witness, or even someone who has heard the story from someone else. Yet when Tilly re-tells the story to Rebecca she embellishes it with details, imagines characters' facial expressions, words and actions (see, for example, p66). Tilly's narrative, which purports to be entirely a matter of truth is also largely a matter of fiction. Tilly, like Sibyl, creates her effects carefully, like a skilled ancient balladeer engaged in passing down legends to a new generation: "I must have it, the worst, the Sin, straight out. But Tilly was creating drama. She had

no intention of destroying her suspense to gratify a child's banal curiosity" (p63).

Thus, Tilly's own story-telling technique involves turning her story into a drama and in the process blurring the distinction between fact and fiction. This blurring is important, for it is precisely a confusion between fact and fiction which causes Tilly to make such a harsh judgment on Sibyl's book. For Tilly, Sibyl's crime lies in the "truth" of this book. But the truth of the book is not easily decidable. Tilly, who adds narrative embellishment to make a story seem more "true", assumes that Sibyl's narrative embellishments are intended to hide the fact that the book is true, to allow Sibyl to claim the work as a product of her imagination (see p92, quoted above). Tilly's objection to the book is that when the fiction is read as true, the truth thus read is a fiction. In all of her judgments Tilly fails to acknowledge that the book was a work of fiction, packaged and sold as such. She assumes that Sibyl must be writing about her own life and that the characters she creates must be portraits of people she knew. Judging the book against inappropriate criteria, she produces a condemnation which is riven by contradiction.

For Tilly, then, Sibyl's real crime lies not in anything she did but in telling the story of what she did. In Chapters 3 and 5 I will show that Olivia Curtis in Invitation to the Waltz and Judith Earle in Dusty Answer both think of turning their pain into fiction. But, as Rita Sullivan points out, this is precisely what Sibyl has done (Sullivan, 1985, p94). Sibyl does not acknowledge that her book might have caused Laura any distress. Her explanation of their separation is that "Love proposed. Man disposed between Laura and myself" (p108). Indeed, we

have only Tilly's judgment to trust that the book did offend Laura, for Tilly admits that "Not one word [about the book] ever crossed 'er [Laura's] lips" (p91). What Tilly can report with some certainty is that both Laura's and Sibyl's husbands were angered by the book. Both took action which prevented Laura from helping Sibyl by severing links between Laura and Sibyl's child (pp92-93). It seems, then, that patriarchy interprets Sibyl's writing as a crime, but there is no evidence that Laura does so.

Earlier, I suggested that Sibyl's feminism lies not so much in what she says or in the fact of her rebellion, but in the methods of her rebellion. Sibyl begins to write some time after she has left her husband and child, but the reactions of Tilly and of Sibyl's and Laura's husbands to Sibyl's novels are evidence that turning to writing as a means of earning her living is seen as a fresh rebellion on Sibyl's part, perhaps more shocking than her previous rebellion because more public. In this respect, it is interesting to examine Sibyl's most explicitly feminist speech. She says to Rebecca, "One day, Rebecca, women will be able to speak to men - speak out the truth, as equals, not as antagonists, or as creatures without independent moral rights - pieces of men's property, owned, used and despised" (p101). Sibyl optimistically believes that this change may occur during Rebecca's lifetime and tells Rebecca, "When you are a woman [...] living, as I hope and believe you will live, a life in which all your functions and capacities are used and none frustrated, spare a thought for Sibyl Anstey. Say: 'She helped to win this for me.'" (p101). Rebecca is interested in the fact that Sibyl has reverted to using her maiden name. Sibyl gives no direct explanation for her use

of this name for herself, but she does tell Rebecca, "it was my maiden name. Also my stage name, and the name with which I signed my books" (p102). There is a suggestion here that Sibyl Anstey, and not Sibyl Herbert or Sibyl Jardine, was the one who helped to win women's rights, because Sibyl Anstey was the one who wrote and performed. Thus, there is here the hint of an acknowledgment from Sibyl that it was not her rebellion against her husband but her acting and writing career which was her most effective rejection of patriarchal values.

Sibyl's choice of writing and acting as the means to earn her living allows her to explore the various means of self-expression which are open to her. By the time Rebecca meets her, she has fused these two skills into one. Her words are no longer recorded on paper, but spoken to another female. More importantly, her story becomes a performance:

Her words came so smoothly, with such precision of timing, it was impossible not to feel that she was presenting a part she had rehearsed a hundred times. I experienced a curious moment of disabused vision, and thought I saw myself not as uniquely privileged, selected after a lifetime to receive her secrets, but as one of a long shadowy series of confidential audiences, all gazing, listening, as spellbound, as gratified as I. (p110)

Telling her story to Rebecca, Sibyl enacts a female identity in which a woman is a performer of her own life. Rebecca is not a privileged listener, she is merely one of the worshippers attending the ritual of the high priestess. I have said that the text presents storytelling as a female medium, a means of asserting female power in a patriarchal society. More than this, the text presents that storytelling as a fundamentally dramatic art, so that in the women's narratives, as in those of ancient balladeers, the boundaries between narrative and dramatic art are transgressed. Tilly, as we have seen, turns each storytelling session into a

performance, as Rebecca acknowledges when she describes a gap in Tilly's narrative with the words "No feed line occurred to me" (p62). And Sibyl reports that Tilly had rendered a "monologue [...] with fine dramatic fervour" (p171). Furthermore, when Sibyl recounts this monologue of Tilly's, it becomes clear that in performing their dramatic stories, the female narrators try on the roles of other characters in the drama. Sibyl's performance of Tilly's monologue goes beyond mere repetition:

These impressions of Tilly's style, breaking recurrently into the classical form of her narrative, were accompanied by an uncanny facial transformation. It was as if the ghost pattern of Tilly's features kept intruding, diffusing Tilly's alien spirit through her own mask of flesh. Since then I have noticed young children's faces alter in this way after they have been staring for some time in total unselfconsciousness at someone. She had "got" Tilly to the life, at some deeper level than mere imitation. (p170)

In re-telling a part of the story which is Tilly's, Sibyl "becomes" Tilly in some way which goes beyond conventional dramatic role-play. Sibyl temporarily assumes Tilly's facial expressions and linguistic traits, so that not only does Sibyl's narrative cross boundaries between story-telling and drama, but it also crosses boundaries between herself and Tilly. Thus, the text's narrators try on and discard various female roles. Such role-play, as Rebecca acknowledges, goes beyond "mere imitation". One could deduce from this that the female narrators identify with each other, and see their own identities as essentially interchangeable. However, this would be too simplistic. Sibyl does not identify with Tilly. Rather, when she enacts her dramatic narrative, Sibyl implicitly acknowledges that female identity is fundamentally a matter of role-play. For Sibyl, playing the part and being the part mean the same thing. Thus, when Sibyl

complains about Ianthe's voice, she sees that voice as inextricably linked with her character:

To hear that heartless, high-heeled voice from my own daughter; I who consider the most important part of a girl's education is to learn to speak, to breathe - nobody knows how to breathe nowadays - to pitch the voice, to develop and make flexible its modulations, to love words, to feel them, to be - ah, yes! - a person of feeling! [...] I would have seen to hers somehow, poor material as it was. She inherited it from his side - they all squeaked and whimpered and clipped their syllables. Oh yes, I should have worked on it. And possibly improved her character into the bargain. (p133)

It would appear that for Sibyl, there is little difference between a woman feeling and performing feelings. However, this is not to suggest shallowness. It is perhaps significant that Ianthe, who ends in madness, does not learn to control her own performances. Reflecting upon the different versions of Ianthe's character which have been presented to her, Rebecca reaches an understanding that "no person was one and indivisible - one unalterable unit - but a multiplicity; so that everything about a person might be equally true and untrue" (p122). Critics have homed in on this passage as the text's credo about the nature of identity. However, I would argue that what the text is saying about identity is much more complex than this statement would suggest. The important point is that Rebecca's insight comes to her after considering Ianthe as a series of stereotypical images of femininity:

I saw her [Ianthe] with a wreath awry on her dishevelled locks and a straggle of broken flowers in her hand, like the picture of Ophelia in my illustrated Shakespeare. Then suddenly the miniature Maisie had shown me slid before my mind's eye [...] now it struck me that this phantasmagoric Italian princess, that Christmas Annual mother were one and the same person. Between these two incompatible figures, where, apart from their equal mystery and fascination, was the connection? (p122)

From what we learn of Ianthe, it appears that she is propelled passively through

various stock feminine roles, roles so stereotyped that they seem almost two-dimensional. Ianthe is unable to find herself a role to play outside of these two-dimensional images. Furthermore, she, like Rebecca, cannot reconcile the incompatible images. For example, her reaction to the stultifying nature of her married life is to turn herself into the patriarchal image of a prostitute (p313). It seems that Ianthe can only veer wildly from one extreme stereotype to another. Unable to control the roles she plays, Ianthe, like Ophelia, throws herself into a weed-choked river.

Ianthe, unlike the other women in the story, does not try on the roles of other characters. The only roles which she can enact are stereotypes of femininity, two-dimensional images which can only represent women as a set of incompatible extremes. The structure of the narrative, on the other hand, suggests another way in which women can play the received roles laid out for them by patriarchal society. For, as I have shown, in telling their stories, the female narrators of The Ballad and the Source try out one another's roles as well as the stock roles of fiction. The female narrators deliberately and self-consciously rehearse and revise available female roles. In one monologue, for example, Tilly plays Laura then plays Laura playing Sibyl, and revises both by injecting her own strong style through the performance: "She delivered the rest of the speech in the vernacular and her richest histrionic style" (p72). Nevertheless, despite this lapse into her own style, Rebecca is drawn into the mutual agreement that the spirit of the original has been captured:

"Oh, she did speak beautiful, didn't she? Were those her very words?"
For this phrase was a customary punctuation to the reminiscences.

"Er very words. Or if not, as near as makes no matter." (p72)

Here, answering Tilly, Rebecca herself picks up Tilly's linguistic habits. The implication of the passage is that story-telling is a matter of re-working the original into one's own style, using what one needs and discarding the rest. This is precisely what The Ballad and the Source itself does: it mixes and reworks a variety of narrative genres. It could be read as a re-working of myth, of classical tragedy, of folk ballads.¹² But in using characters and situations from these genres, the text transgresses the boundaries of each of them, revising our view of the genre even as it draws upon its conventions. In thus using and undermining literary conventions, the text also suggests its own relationship with the conventions of femininity upon which it draws. For example, in its representations of motherhood, the novel is quite explicit in suggesting that Sibyl is deluded in her view of her own maternal powers. Yet the textual structure itself enacts the passing of knowledge and power from mother to daughter. In doing so, the novel creates a series of links between women, story-telling and role-playing which suggests that the only way to escape from the patriarchal images of femininity which oppress Ianthe is for female characters to self-consciously and deliberately create their own lives as dramas in which the performer is not restricted to a single role, but can move in and out of a series of roles at will. Thus, The Ballad and the Source goes beyond "When the Waters Came" in linking a simultaneous use and undermining of literary conventions

¹² Judy Simons makes a convincing argument that The Ballad and the Source plunders, reworks and ultimately reverses conventions of Victorian sensation literature or melodrama (Simons, 1992, pp97-111).

with a concomitant use and undermining of conventions of femininity.

SECTION 2: MODERN(IST) GIRLS

INTRODUCTION: MODERNISM: FOR MEN ONLY?

I have shown that in "When the Waters Came" and The Ballad and the Source, there is a characteristic double movement. Both of these texts draw upon generic and gender conventions at the same time as subtly undermining those very conventions. To a greater or lesser degree, each text subverts the available models of textuality and femininity while negotiating for itself a path through those conventions. Given that the most prolific period of Lehmann's career was in the thirties and forties, one might assume that critics would have examined the relationship between her experimentation with literary and gender conventions and the textual experimentation of the modernist movement. Yet this is not the case. Accounts of modernism tend to ignore women writers, and completely ignore Lehmann.¹ Accounts of Lehmann's work tend to assume that it is not

¹ For example, in their section of brief biographies of key modernists, Bradbury and MacFarlane include only four women writers out of over one hundred listed (Bradbury and MacFarlane, 1976, pp613-40). The four are Dorothy Richardson, Edith Sodergran, Gertrude Stein and Virginia Woolf (Bradbury & MacFarlane, 1976, pp633-39). Women writers do fare a little better in the articles themselves, where many women are mentioned and a few more are discussed briefly. It also appears that more recent studies perpetuate the characterisation of modernism as a male movement. Bonnie Kime Scott comments: "While modernist studies are rolling off the presses at an unprecedented rate, a surprising number still find interest only in canonized males" (Scott, 1990, p7; see p17, note 5 for a list of those studies, and note 6 for Jane Marcus's personal list of women writers, including Lehmann, who should be included in studies of modernism). Lehmann is not mentioned in Bradbury and MacFarlane's introductory guide to the period, despite the fact that it covers a huge range of writers and artists (Bradbury and MacFarlane, 1976). In

relevant or appropriate to try to place her in the modernist tradition. One study discusses her work alongside that of Lawrence, Woolf and Radclyffe Hall, but it positions Lehmann and Hall as "minor writers" (Core, 1981, p2) who are included only as a counterpoint to discussion of the other two. Ella Perrin Cox, on the other hand, does gesture towards placing Lehmann in the modernist tradition. Cox cites Daiches's description of the factors affecting the modern novel, centring on the breakdown of public agreement about the significance of experience.² This breakdown required both new subject matter and new techniques in the novel. For Cox, Lehmann's work exhibits both of these attributes:

Rosamond Lehmann's novels and, indeed, all her writings indicate her awareness of these new emphases upon differing aspects of the human condition; her conscious, assured, often daringly innovative technique illustrates her attempts to deal effectively and artistically with these new emphases; and her choice of subject matter illustrates her awareness of the intellectual, social and spiritual milieu of her time and place. (Cox, 1977, p2)

Cox makes the strong claim that Lehmann was able to become "a full participant in [...] Modernism" because of "an unclouded vision, a keen intelligence and an open-ness" (Cox, 1978, p49). However, Cox's main concerns lie elsewhere and, disappointingly, she does not analyse Lehmann's relationship to modernism in

Bradbury and MacFarlane's case the problem may partly be that they choose 1930 as their arbitrary cut-off point, the supposed end of the period. If Lehmann's work does have any affinities with modernism, then sustained analysis of those affinities might well necessitate a redefining of the literary period. Janet Todd suggests that any consideration of the genres of women's writing will involve redefinition of literary periods (Todd, 1988, p99-100).

² The reference is to David Daiches, The Novel and the Modern World (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1960; 1st published 1938) pp10-11.

any more detail than this.

One study which does discuss Lehmann's relationship to her writing contemporaries is Ruth Siegel's. Siegel chooses to discuss Lehmann as a thirties writer (even those texts written and published outside the thirties are seen as having been shaped by that period's concerns). Apparently sharing Bradbury and MacFarlane's view that the modernist period was effectively over by the thirties, Siegel considers thirties writers to be a younger generation, living in the shadow of their predecessors (Siegel, 1985, p11). She claims that Lehmann is representative of her generation, her femaleness intensifying difficulties and obsessions shared by writers of both sexes. One of those difficulties lies in placing oneself in a literary tradition at the same time as finding an individual voice. Siegel describes the admiration, and the sense of conflict, in the younger writing generation's attitude to the modernist generation:

Rosamond shared in this admiration especially for T. S. Eliot whose presence in the early novels wrestles with the feminine narrative. Yet the fact that these were all men seems to have been disturbing, for she observed that she knew no twentieth century women writers, with the exception of May Sinclair, and she found this isolating. For Rosamond the problem the male thirties writers faced was compounded in this way, for they all had to find their voices at the same time the previous generation were making either their major statements, or those statements that defined modernism itself in literature. (Siegel, 1985, p15)

Implicit in this description of Lehmann's relationship to her contemporaries and near contemporaries is the conflict between modernism and femininity in writing. If Lehmann felt her lack of knowledge of twentieth-century women writers to be isolating, then clearly she felt neither a part of the modernist nor of the thirties' generation. As Siegel herself says, thirties' writing has been regarded as entirely

male (Siegel, 1985, abstract), and as Siegel suggests, and I will show, modernism as defined by Eliot seems to exclude, and indeed be in conflict with, the feminine. This, I think, is the key point about Lehmann's writing, and not her place as a member of a slightly younger generation of writers who could still be classed as sharing modernist concerns. In other words, the key issue in Lehmann's relationship to modernism is not her age, but her sex.

Feminist critiques of modernism tend to centre on the way that movement has defined itself by casting out the feminine as its other. Again and again, in the influential critical works of the period, great poetry is characterised as hard, direct and unemotional, suggesting, although rarely explicitly saying so, that the Romantic notion of the poet as a feminine male is being rejected in favour of a concept of the poet as the possessor of all the traditionally masculine "virtues". Indeed, T. E. Hulme, in his influential work "Romanticism and Classicism", attacks Romanticism head-on and defines in opposition to it "that positive fundamental quality of verse which constitutes excellence, which has nothing to do with infinity, with mystery or with emotions" (Hulme, 1972; 1st published 1924, p101). And Ezra Pound stresses conventionally masculine qualities when he calls for poetry to be "as much like granite as it can be [...] austere, direct, free from emotional slither" (Pound, 1972; 1st published 1954, p66).

Recent feminist critiques of modernist theory have tended to stress this aspect of it, arguing that modernist writing tended to define itself as exclusively masculine, positioning all that was deemed feminine as the Other of valuable modernist art. For example, Suzanne Clark claims that modernist theorists

sought to define the modernist project by placing it in opposition to popular, sentimental writing, into which category the writing of most women was assumed to fall (Clark, 1991, pp1-2).³ For Clark, modernism defines itself in opposition to a women's writing seen as characterised by excess of feeling. She also argues that women writers were further excluded by the separation of modernism from writing which tries to connect with political practice or to communicate with a large body of readers:

High modernism meant that the works of a few male writers stood for a whole period of literary history, with a definition of literature that would seal off the anarchic forces of the revolution of the word. It left women out of the literary canon, and it made sentimental into a term of invective. The modernist criticism also posed a problem for feminism which persists to this day, separating literary style from rhetoric and political practice and estranging the serious critic from the popular community. (Clark, 1991, pp34-35)

So, for Clark, modernist critics defined high art as disengaged from personal feeling, and from political rhetoric, both seen as characteristics of popular, less serious writing.⁴ Such strategies are obvious in Pound's advice to poets that they should "Consider the way of the scientists rather than the way of an advertising

³ Hulme certainly seemed to be arguing against the value of sentiment or emotion in poetry. He describes what he sees as the most common reaction to poetry in the period: "There is a general tendency to think that verse means little else than the expression of unsatisfied emotion. People say: 'But how can you have verse without sentiment?'" For Hulme, on the other hand, "There is another quality, not the emotion produced, which is at the root of excellence in verse" (Hulme, 1972, p99).

⁴ Clark also describes modernism as divorced from questions of ethics and of scorning any representations of love, as opposed to lust, thus excluding two more of the supposedly typical concerns of women writers of the time (Clark, 1991, pp77 & 25). I will return to these issues in Section 3, where I will discuss Lehmann's ethics, and her treatment of love.

agent for a new soap" (Pound, 1972, p61).⁵

Other feminist critics identify further aspects of definitions of modernism which exclude women writers. For example, Clare Hanson argues that Katharine Mansfield is commonly excluded from the modernist canon for two main reasons: firstly, her refusal to create a critical metalanguage which enshrines her own textual strategies as the only valid literary strategies, and secondly, her commitment to the common, surface things in life as keys to deeper understanding (Hanson, in Scott, 1990, pp301-2).⁶ This stress on the importance of the everyday, domestic details of life is a feature which, for Judy Simons, is a specifically female response to a modernist problem:

A central matter of modernist enquiry was the place and function of art itself, often perceived by artists of the age as a harmonising factor that could impose order on a chaotic existence. For women writers this search for a stabilising but creative centre was frequently identified with domesticity and the disclosure of artistry in hitherto unrecorded tasks. Mrs Ramsay in Woolf's To The Lighthouse creates a work of art out of her dinner party, energising disparate elements into a unified entity. Mrs Fairfield in Mansfield's "At the Bay" can transform a room through her arrangements of a bowl of glowing nasturtiums. (Simons, 1992, p28)⁷

The harmonising influence of previously unrecorded and often unnoticed domestic tasks by women is a recurring motif in Lehmann's work. In my

⁵ This aspect of modernist theory was developed and elaborated by the New Critics. See, for example, Allen Tate's "The Man of Letters in the Modern World" (1959; 1st published 1955) which argues at some length that the "man of letters" must divorce himself from the new mass-appeal media.

⁶ These statements are both true for Lehmann's work as much as Mansfield's. In fact, Lehmann's and Mansfield's work share a range of characteristics (see Siegel, 1986, p149).

⁷ The references are Woolf, 1927 and Mansfield, 1951; 1st published 1922.

discussion of The Echoing Grove, in Chapter 6, I will show that Lehmann portrays commitment to the common and the everyday as a means of salvation in a meaningless world. I will further show that Lehmann presents this commitment to the everyday as a specifically female virtue.⁸

Bonnie Kime Scott suggests that definitions of modernism also exclude women by placing its antecedents in the great war, rather than in, say, the newly won female political franchise.⁹ Furthermore, Scott points out that only battlefield experiences were considered as valuable subjects for literary treatments of the war, and that work by women writers describing the situation on the home front, or in battlefield hospitals, have been neglected (Scott, 1990, pp5-6).¹⁰ Thus, even when women writers share the same general concerns as

⁸ Arguably, in much of the writing of male modernist writers, everyday, domestic tasks tend to be seen as trivial, demeaning and quite expressly at odds with the individual's attempts to reach a deeper understanding of life. See, for example, T. S. Eliot's "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" and part of "The Fire Sermon" section of "The Wasteland" (Eliot, 1974, esp pp15-16 & 71). However, in James Joyce's short story, "The Dead", the domestic fussing of the Markan sisters is described in a detail which both celebrates and ridicules it. Ultimately, though, the domestic work of the two women is seen as powerless to harmonise their company and trivial when compared to the forces of death at work in their lives (Joyce, 1977, pp138-73).

⁹ Siegel argues that the key influences on Lehmann's work were the increasing opportunities and freedom for women (Siegel, 1985, p2). Thus, for Siegel, the social forces which shaped Lehmann's fiction were not those which are central in definitions of modernism.

¹⁰ Thus, canons of the "great works" of the First World War tend not to include Rebecca West's The Return of the Soldier (1980; 1st published 1918), Vera Brittain's Testament of Youth (1978; 1st published 1933), or Rose MacAulay's Non-Combatants and Others (1986; 1st published 1916) or Told by an Idiot (1980; 1st published 1923). Nor do such canons often include works by women which chart the less direct effects of the war (with the possible exception of Woolf's Mrs Dalloway [1976; 1st published 1925]), into which category might

their male counterparts, they tend to be excluded from the literary canon on the grounds of very finely tuned definitions of literature as masculine.

Critical reactions to Lehmann's writing suggest that Clark, Hanson and Scott are right to argue that the modern period has spawned a series of narrowly prescriptive definitions of "high art". In my discussion of the double critical standard at work in criticism of Lehmann's writing, I have already shown that her writing is thought to be emotionally over-intense and over-committed to the description of detail rather than to abstracting an overall pattern from those details (see the introduction to Section 1, above). Indeed, the first of these charges is probably the main objection to the inclusion of Lehmann's work in the literary canon. The modernist eschewal of feeling in literature which Clark documents is a doctrine which still holds powerful sway, so that writing which attempts to describe emotions with any degree of intensity is thought to be the province of popular writers and such writing is derided as a consumerist appeal to the masses (Clark, 1991, pp3-4).¹¹ Indeed, this is one of the reasons Janis Richardi judges Lehmann's work to be minor in comparison with that of Woolf: as Clark suggests, the portrayal of emotion is labelled sentimental, now used

fall many of Lehmann's works. For example, Core argues that the influence of the war on the male characters determines the whole tone and approach of Lehmann's work (Core, 1981, p112).

¹¹ For evidence of modernist distaste for "the masses", see Eliot's comments on football supporters (Eliot, 1972b, 1st published 1923, p80). His description of the reactions of the "Browning Study Circle" makes it clear that he sees the common reader as somewhat stupid and unable to appreciate the value of the intellectual, as opposed to the emotional, in poetry (Eliot, 1972b, p82).

purely as a term of abuse (Clark, 1991, p2).¹² The assumption, as Clark shows, is that portrayal of emotions must be sentimental, that sentimentality is popular, and that what is popular cannot be serious or valuable (Clark, 1991, p34).¹³ For example, Simon Raven implies that Lehmann's work is commonly judged to be second-rate because she writes in genres popular with women: "the stock thing to say about Rosamond Lehmann is that she writes, albeit with exceptional brilliance and penetration, the kind of story which is yearned after by the editors of women's magazines" (Raven, 1963, p59). Raven attempts to defend Lehmann against this kind of dismissal, but makes it clear that he believes the portrayal of love affairs appeals to "the kitchen maid's basic fantasy" (Raven, 1963, p60).¹⁴ His defence is not a defence of the popular, far from it, but a claim that Lehmann's work rises above its own popular elements. Such backhanded

¹² For example, here is Richardi's description of a love scene in Dusty Answer: "This remarkable scene, with its quivering darkness, springs of life welling up, desperate clutches, and passionate kisses, is one that can be found in every second-rate novel of romance" (Richardi, 1981, p135). For an example from the modernist period of the use of "sentimental" as a term of abuse see Pound's description of the achievements of the Victorian period as "sentimentalistic" (Pound, 1972, 1st published 1954, p65).

¹³ For example, in a review of Lehmann's work, Virginia Llewellyn Smith attempts to describe why Lehmann's works are popular, and indeed pleasurable to her as a reader, but obviously feels that the emotionality of Lehmann's work is a fault. Thus, Smith talks of "Judith's embarrassing emotional outpourings" in Dusty Answer and calls The Weather in the Streets "overblown", both descriptions suggesting that to portray strong emotions is to lack artistic balance (Smith, 1981).

¹⁴ Of course, such attacks on sentiment are not unique to the twentieth century, but continue the eighteenth-century tradition of censuring feminine sensibility, for example in Jane's Austen's portrayal of Marianne Dashwood in Sense and Sensibility (1969; 1st published 1811).

defences are commonplace in sympathetic criticism of Lehmann (see my introduction to Section 1, above). Arguably, popular and academic readers value Lehmann's works for different reasons. For example, Janet Watts points out that Dusty Answer was an instant bestseller, "devoured by readers for its exposure of a young woman's varied and powerful passions". Academic readers, on the other hand, admired the novel's "exceptional literary qualities" (Watts, 1981, p*i*). What Watts fails to point out is that this dichotomised reaction is the result of a deliberately constructed cultural model which serves to elevate modernist work at the expense of the work of the vast majority of women writers who were at the time still working in more accessible and popular forms.

Thus, the form that women writers chose was crucial. If there is one issue that is the key to the exclusion of women writers in general, and Lehmann in particular, from the modernist canon, it is the issue of formal experimentation. Patricia Waugh argues that it is a general tendency of modern thought to value abstract knowledge over that based in human experience, since the latter is thought to be unreliable: "One can see in much modernist, postmodernist and poststructuralist writing an obsessive desire to displace human experience entirely by the substitution of intellectual categories and formal, 'impersonal' structures" (Waugh, 1989, p20). This valuing of intellectual structures over human experience found expression most clearly in the prioritisation of form over content which was one of the central concerns of modernism, particularly in the criticism of T. S. Eliot (see Clark, 1991, p35). Paul Lauter argues that this formalism not only severed the connection between art and society, but also

served to drastically narrow the canon by valuing only those works which exhibited complexity and tension and by "set[ting] at a discount art which strives for simplicity, transparency and unity in its effects" (Lauter, 1985, p31). Such simplicity, transparency and unity are precisely those virtues which Clark claims for women writers. Moreover, such over-valuation of formal structures in art tends to be accompanied by a similar over-valuation of formal experimentation and the goal of art becomes the creation of new forms for itself. For example, T. E. Hulme argues that "We shall not get any new efflorescence of verse until we get a new technique, a new convention, to turn ourselves loose in" (Hulme, 1972, p97). For Clark, on the other hand, most women writers of the time tended to be less interested in formal experimentation and more interested in trying to connect with their women readers or to make a political point.¹⁵ Additionally, as Celeste Schenck argues, the valorisation of formal experiment in modernism has not only substituted for radical politics but has come to be identified with such a politics (Schenck, in Scott, 1990, p317).¹⁶

¹⁵ She cites Edna St Vincent Millay as an example of a woman writer whose prime purpose is to connect with her women readers, and Emma Goldman as an example of a woman writer whose prime purpose is to make a political point (Clark, 1991, Chapters 2 & 3, pp42-67). For Clark, the woman writer is less interested in experimentation and more interested in connecting with other people because of her marginal position in society (Clark, 1991, p71).

¹⁶ Thus, those whose work is not formally experimental are refused recognition on three grounds: not just that they lack radical aims and radical form, but also that they lack radical content. Schenck describes critics' censure of Charlotte Mew for the small scale of her formal experimentation. Tellingly, one quotation she gives could easily come from criticism of Lehmann: "her pitch is refined and her scale is modest" (Leithauser, quoted by Schenck, in Scott, 1990, p316). Furthermore, Schenck continues: "in their haste to excuse her 'measured and unspectacular' production beside the new form-shattering

The most influential critic/theorist who appears to identify textual experimentation with radical politics is Julia Kristeva. Kristeva is often labelled a "feminist theorist" but her work is frequently hostile to feminist action.¹⁷ Moreover, in her discussions of modernism, Kristeva creates another critical double bind for women writers. Presenting textual experimentation as a prime site of revolutionary activity, and a key indicator of literary value, Kristeva not only excludes from her canon of important writers all those women who have not practised such experimentation, but she has also excluded those who have. To show how she does this, I must begin by briefly summarising some of Kristeva's theories about language.

In Kristeva's analyses of literary texts, she draws upon her own distinction between two linguistic modes, the symbolic and the semiotic (for full explication of these terms, see Kristeva, 1984, pp19-85). The former is the language we all use everyday, the ordinary communicative, supposedly referential language of speech and writing. The semiotic, on the other hand, is not, strictly speaking, a linguistic mode, but consists of rhythmic, constantly moving pulsions which

norm set by a masculinist 'Modernism,' these critics fail to read beyond what they see as rhythmical familiarity and rhyme to a strikingly unconventional content" (Schenck, in Scott, 1990, p317).

¹⁷ Kristeva scorns group views or strategies, and claims that the solutions to women's problems must be entirely individual (Kristeva, 1987, p114). She attacks feminism for its complicity with phallogentrism, claiming feminists are "militants in the cause of their fathers" (Kristeva, 1977, p32). At her most extreme, she describes feminists as "sulking and even obscurantist" and compares what she calls "sectarian" feminist groups to totalitarian societies, and even to Nazism (Kristeva, 1987, p116). She sees feminism as a power-seeking, therefore suspect, ideology (Kristeva, 1982, p208).

correspond to the pre-Oedipal drives of the infant (Kristeva, 1984, p40). Expanding on the work of Lacan, Kristeva argues that after the Oedipal period and the entry into the Symbolic, the rhythms of the semiotic persist as a constant pressure on symbolic language. However, the semiotic is rarely noticed because it does not dominate the signifying process; the only time the operation of the semiotic becomes obvious is in textual play which disrupts the communicative function of symbolic language (Kristeva, 1984, p29). The way that the semiotic operates has much in common with the mode of language use described as "feminine" by other theorists: it involves rhythms, repetitions, gaps and ambiguities which block symbolic language's movement to closure. In fact, Kristeva herself calls the semiotic a "feminine" realm: "Indifferent to language, enigmatic and feminine, this space underlying the written is rhythmic, unfettered, irreducible to its intelligible verbal translation; it is musical, anterior to judgment, but restrained by a single guarantee: syntax" (Kristeva, 1984, p29). Here, Kristeva makes it clear that the semiotic is not a "language". The semiotic exists only as pressure on or within symbolic language. It is a force which disrupts symbolic language, but is, nevertheless, restrained by the rules and conventions of symbolic language use. The two realms are inseparable. Both are found in all instances of language use, although the relationship between the two and relative dominance or weakness of each may shift: "Because the subject is always both semiotic and symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both" (Kristeva, 1984, p24). So, like Irigaray's

"womanspeak", the semiotic will always have to work within the conventions of symbolic language in order to disrupt that language.¹⁸

In the quotation above, Kristeva explicitly names the semiotic a "feminine" realm. This, and the fact that the semiotic is linked to the dominance of the pre-Oedipal mother, might seem to suggest that the semiotic, inasmuch as it is a language at all, is a female language.¹⁹ However, there are several grounds for concluding that this is not the case.²⁰ Most strikingly, Kristeva does not associate the semiotic, the primary vehicle for linguistic revolution, with female speech or writing. In theory, the semiotic is open to be used by individuals of either sex.²¹ However, Kristeva finds semiotic linguistic disruption to be most clearly at work in the writing of late nineteenth century avant-garde writers like Mallarmé, or in

¹⁸ For example, adolescent writing is partly contained by dominant stereotypes, but because it is also open to the operation of the semiotic, those stereotypes are modified by the inscription of the adolescent's unconscious (Kristeva, 1990, p22).

¹⁹ See Kristeva, 1984, p27, and Lechte, 1990, pp26-27.

²⁰ For an argument against equating the semiotic with a female language based upon the nature of the pre-Oedipal mother herself, see Moi, 1985, pp164-65. However, those aspects of Kristeva's theorising of the pre-Oedipal mother that Moi defends as anti-essentialist, Elizabeth Gross sees as essentialist in the extreme (Gross, 1990, pp97-102). Nevertheless, both critics argue that the semiotic is not a female linguistic realm.

²¹ For Kristeva, the feminine subject position is open to both men and women (see "The System and the Speaking Subject": Kristeva, 1986, pp24-33). Arguably, however, the feminine position is more likely to be assumed by women. Kristeva admits that sex does play a part in the positioning of the subject in the symbolic, but argues that social discourses also affect the process. She describes the speaking subject as "an identity that is sexual (among other things), and which is constantly remade and reborn through the impetus provided by a play of signs" (Kristeva, 1987, p111).

twentieth century modernists like Joyce (Kristeva, 1984, p88).²² She calls modernism a "feminine" style of writing (Kristeva, 1977, pp39-40 & 1984, p29), but does not find such femininity in the work of female writers. She rarely examines the work of women writers, but when she does she does not appear to accord it the serious intent and purpose that she accords to her male canon and indeed often replicates misogynist critical judgments on women writers rather than making any serious attempt to analyse their writing.²³ For example, Kristeva's reading of Sylvia Plath's work is a rather conventional one which stresses Plath's madness and disadvantage (Kristeva, 1977, p40). She also briefly discusses Woolf and Tsvetaieva, concentrating not on their work, but on their "madness" and suicides (Kristeva, 1977, pp39-40). In doing so, Kristeva follows the model of patriarchal criticism which considers a woman writer's work to be secondary to her life. She also reinforces the patriarchal association of women with madness: by failing to look at the historical and personal circumstances of Woolf's and Tsvetaieva's suicides, by making their spells of "madness" definitive

²² For discussions of the problems in locating revolutionary potential in the literary avant-garde, see Eagleton, 1986, p202; Spivak, 1987, p142, and Mitchell, 1986, p102. The most problematic example of such a claim in Kristeva's work is probably her defence of Celine's proto-fascism - see Powers of Horror (Kristeva, 1982, Chapters 6-10, pp133-206).

²³ In "Talking about 'Polylogue'", Kristeva discusses women's writing, claiming that it is different but that there is no way to decide whence those differences spring. She relates the difference of women's writing to typical themes, of which she identifies three, and to two stylistic features: firstly, use of highly emotionally charged language, and secondly, lack of interest in formal composition. In assenting to the last two features, Kristeva repeats the judgements of the double critical standard, but in the interview she studiously refuses to confront the problem of the valuation of women's writing (Kristeva, 1987, pp111-13).

of their lives, she reduces the specificity of their lives to stereotypes of the mad woman writer.²⁴ Discussing Woolf, Plath and Tsvetaieva in this dismissive way is symptomatic of Kristeva's inability to accord women writers the serious, informed attention she accords to their male counterparts. More seriously, while Kristeva may claim at times that all literature in some ways subverts the symbolic order (see for example, Kristeva, 1982, p207 & 1990, p11), and may at other times claim the subversive force to be analogous to the feminine (see above), her readings of female-authored literature make it clear that females do not make productive use of this feminine, subversive force. Indeed, a reading of her theory seems to suggest that females cannot make productive use of the semiotic. The reason for this lies in Kristeva's psychoanalytical assumptions about women's relationship to the pre-Oedipal mother.

As I have said, the semiotic exists as a pressure on symbolic language; it is by maximising the productive operation of this pressure that writer and critic can undermine the patriarchal structures of symbolic language. Importantly, the pressure can be perceived in certain textual features which, by operating within the structures of patriarchal language produce "phonetic, lexical, and syntactic disturbance" (Kristeva, 1984, p56). Such features, which might include punning word-play and ellipsis, may multiply the meanings of the text but they do not reduce it to unintelligibility (Kristeva, 1984, p56). One of the effects of this textual pressure is that both syntax and the position of the speaking subject are

²⁴ For a critique of this aspect of Kristeva's work, see Mills et al, 1989, pp170 & 181.

simultaneously shattered and maintained. For Kristeva, it is this dual movement which differentiates the text from psychotic babble. The text is a place where the semiotic can be inscribed within limits that prevent signification from slipping into the nonsensical discourse of madness:

a text, in order to hold together as a text [...] require[s] a completion, a structuration, a kind of totalization of semiotic motility. This completion constitutes a synthesis that requires the thesis of language in order to come about, and the semiotic pulverizes it only to make it a new device - for us, this is precisely what distinguishes a text as signifying practice from the "drifting-into-nonsense" that characterizes neurotic discourse. (Kristeva, 1984, p51)

For Kristeva, it is precisely the bounded nature of the text which gives it its revolutionary potential. Writing which attempts to achieve infinite heterogeneity, to be purely semiotic, can have no political and social consequences and therefore cannot be truly revolutionary.²⁵ This, indeed, would appear to be the reason for her exclusion of Plath, Woolf and Tsvetaieva from her canon of revolutionary writers: for Kristeva, these women retain too close a link to the pre-Oedipal mother and allow the semiotic to take over to the point where their writings "drift into nonsense". Her discussions of the work of Plath, Woolf and Tsvetaieva suggest that, like the Romantics, she presumes that creative femininity

²⁵ In fact, Kristeva goes further and differentiates between nineteenth-century avant-garde texts, which do nothing but inscribe negativity/the semiotic, and lack "socio-historical content" (Kristeva, 1984, pp186-87), and modernist texts which actually rewrite the social and disrupt the logic of the social order by using that logic (Kristeva, 1984, pp81-83). For further discussion of the distinctions between modernist and nineteenth-century avant-garde texts, see Kristeva, 1984, pp104-13 & 188-91). However, it must be said that the distinction is not always clear and sometimes she appears to be discussing the two types of text as if they operated in exactly the same way.

is a force which must overwhelm the female. Kristeva's work could thus be read as a continuation of the Romantic appropriation of feminine creative qualities for the male who has the psychic strength to use those qualities without being overpowered by them. Her work could be seen as no more than another theory which ignores, insults, or otherwise effaces, the productions of actual women while re-appropriating the feminine for the male.²⁶

However, although Kristeva's own analyses would seem to suggest that women writers are less able than men to make productive use of the textual strategies which she identifies as revolutionary, there is no reason why feminist critics should not find evidence that women writers can unleash the revolutionary potential of the semiotic in their work.²⁷ Celeste Schenck argues that there are two main groups of modern women writers, those who eschew formal experimentation, and those, like H. D., Gertrude Stein and Mina Loy, who have actually produced "daring verbal experiments" (Schenck, in Scott, 1990, p317). I do not purpose to examine those writers to ascertain whether their textual experiments are revolutionary or drift into neurotic nonsense. What I do propose to show is that Lehmann's work combines the experimental and the

²⁶ As Gross points out, Kristeva implicitly replicates the structures of the mythic universe of the Oedipal story in which, as Kristeva describes it, only the male may know and define the problems of the separation of masculine and feminine powers (Kristeva, 1982, p86). Thus, the female is precluded from speaking femininity, which may be articulated only by certain men who are willing to put their symbolic positions at risk (Gross, 1990, p98).

²⁷ If Kristeva fails to argue that women may make productive use of the semiotic, in her own writing she does nevertheless exemplify that they can do so. For analyses of the revolutionary potential of Kristeva's own texts see Moi, 1985, pp150-69 and in a more critical vein, Atack, 1986, pp31-33.

traditional in ways which allow her to make productive attacks upon dominant literary and cultural values even while working with and within those values. As I have already begun to show, Lehmann's work falls into neither of Schenck's two groups and, in fact, lies somewhere between the two. Although she does experiment with the form and language of the novel and the short story, such experimentation has been largely ignored or misunderstood, perhaps because she mixes formal experimentation with use of more traditional techniques, sometimes in the same work. Thus, she is under-rated both by those for whom any experimentation with classic realism is a path to incoherence, and by those for whom her experimentation is not daring enough. Again, then, my project is twofold: both to show that Lehmann has produced more open and experimental works than has previously been assumed and to argue that such experimentation need not be the only way her texts may be radical and need not be the only source of textual value.

There is one aspect of the modernist and New Critical privileging of form which is a key one in discussions of women writers, and that is that one of the effects of judging a work of art only by its formal characteristics is to exclude the realm of the personal from the work. Censure of the intimate and personal aspects of the work of Woolf, Plath and Tsvetaieva is implicit in Kristeva's rejection of their work. In this, Kristeva's approach to the question of literary value has some affinities with that of the high modernists themselves. In "Tradition and the Individual Talent", T. S. Eliot claimed that "the poet has not a 'personality' to express, but a particular medium, which is only a medium and

not a personality, in which expressions and experiences combine in peculiar and unexpected ways" (Eliot, 1972a; 1st published 1919, p75). It is the poet's medium, not his personality, which counts. Thus, in modernist theory and the New Critical theories developed from it, it is not only said to be critically invalid to spend time searching for the author behind the text but, more importantly, it is supposedly artistically invalid for the writer to allow his/her own personality or personal situation to intrude upon the work. Indeed, Eliot claimed that, "The progress of an artist is a continual self-sacrifice, a continual extinction of personality" (Eliot, 1972a, p73). For Eliot, the goal of the artist is depersonalisation and quasi-scientific objectivity. He famously compares the artist to a chemical catalyst: it is the function of the artist to set in motion a reaction in which the artist's mind "remains[s] inert, neutral, unchanged" (Eliot, 1972a, p74). Thus, for Eliot, "the more perfect the artist, the more completely separate in him will be the man who suffers and the mind which creates; the more perfectly will the mind digest and transmute the passions which are its material" (Eliot, 1972a, p74).²⁸

This prescription of what is valuable in art is one of the factors which contributes to the exclusion of the majority of women writers from the literary canon, for, arguably, their writing has tended not to strive for objectivity and impersonality but, on the contrary, to try to express emotions, or a political

²⁸ Eliot's characterisation for the artist as a catalyst, although ostensibly anti-Romantic, implicitly continues the Romantic idea of creativity as an overwhelming force to be passively undergone, and again implies that intellectual strength is required to undergo the process.

statement, or to make connections with other women.²⁹ Patricia Waugh describes what she sees as the gulf between modernist and post-modernist theories and the work of women writers:

women writers, on the whole, have not felt comfortable with an aesthetics of impersonality as it appears in many modernist and postmodernist manifestos. The reason for this is the overvaluation in the first instance of exclusive objectivity, of distance, autonomy, separateness, discrete form, and the disappearance in the second instance of human connection via meaningful affection, communication, or ethical belief. (Waugh, 1989, p20)

For Waugh, then, a modernist aesthetics based on objectivity, distance and separateness is incompatible with much twentieth-century women's writing. As Eliot makes clear, the artist can only achieve this objectivity by rigorous excision of the personal from his or her work. Modernism thus contributes to the rejection of the liberal humanist self which reaches its peak in postmodernism and poststructuralism. And, just as to join in poststructuralism's triumphant announcement of the death of the author would be a premature step for women writers today, so in the earlier part of this century was it inappropriate for women writers to forego the luxury of self-expression. However, this is not to say that women writers valorised the concept of the unified humanist self which their male counterparts were rejecting, as Waugh points out in her discussion of Woolf's work:

To ask 'Who am I?' is to articulate a question which usually assumes an *a priori* belief in an ultimate unity and fixity of being, a search for a rational, coherent, essential 'self' which can speak and know itself. For Woolf, like many women writers positioned in a patriarchal society, a more appropriate question would be 'What represents me?' This question carries an implicit

²⁹ To make such a claim is not to reduce women's writing to direct expression or political statement, as I will show.

and necessary recognition of alienation: the phenomenological perception that 'I' am never at one with myself because always and ever already constituted by others according to whom, and yet outside of what, I take myself to be. (Waugh, 1989, pp10-11)

According to Waugh, while male modernists rejected the humanist self because they saw it as problematic in a mass society which alienates the individual, women writers of the early twentieth century did not follow suit (Waugh, 1989, pp16-17).³⁰ Instead, women's writing investigated the constructed nature of identity and the social constraints which operate during the process of self-construction. Waugh argues that women's texts of the period articulate "a core belief in a self which, although contradictory, non-unitary, and historically produced through 'discursive' and ideological formations, nevertheless has a material existence and history in actual human relationships" (Waugh, 1989, p14). Although Waugh claims that women writers did not reject the notion of the humanist self as their male counterparts did, I would infer from her two analyses of the situation quoted above that women writers investigated the constructed and constrained nature of the self, and although they may not have rejected all notions of self, they did reject the humanist self (which is supposedly free and self-determining). Waugh's earlier claim that women writers did not challenge the validity of the humanist self would therefore appear to be an over-statement.³¹ Through my readings of Lehmann's fiction I will show that what

³⁰ The "consciousness-raising" writers of the 1960s do not fit this pattern, since it was precisely their goal to define a unified female self. See Waugh, 1989, pp22-27.

³¹ Perhaps Waugh also takes the argument one stage too far when she claims that only women writers investigated such notions of a socially constructed

most concerned at least one woman writer about the non-unitary, historically-produced self was how it came to be a gendered self and what that gender meant for its material existence and human relationships.³² I will show that there is a characteristic double movement in Lehmann's writing. Firstly, it makes use of notions of a feminine self which have the effect of building individual and group identity but, secondly, it also exposes the inextricable links between that self/identity and the dominant discourses through which it must be expressed.

In order to find a productive model for the way that a feminine language and identity may be forged within the discourses of patriarchy, I will turn to the work of Luce Irigaray. Although Irigaray is not a literary critic, much that she has to say is of relevance to discussions of women's writing. Irigaray assumes that a specifically female language exists. She appears to argue that the forms of this female language stem directly from the forms of the female body. Irigaray calls this female language "*parler femme*", usually translated as "womanspeak". Womanspeak, she argues, stems directly from women's libidinal

self. The personae and characters which male writers of the time created, while exemplifying their rejection of the humanist self, must surely have constituted an investigation into the constructed nature of that self.

³² Judy Simons argues that in this project women's writing was enabled by new psychological theory and social practice which had only superficial effects on male modernists' portrayal of female subjectivity. She sees the work of Lehmann and others as responses to masculine definitions of female identity in both modernist writing and modern society (Simons, 1992, pp30-33). A prime example of such an investigation occurs in Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1977; 1st published 1929). For analyses of the way Woolf constructs several different selves, explores the way each assumes its gendered identity, and uses those constructed selves to connect with her female readers, see Furman, 1980, and Bell & Ohmann, 1975.

economy, which in turn stems from the physical characteristics of their genital and erogenous zones.³³ Irigaray argues that the plurality of the female genitals, in which the two lips constantly touch each other, and the multiple nature of female erotic pleasure, which can have its focus in a number of zones all over the body, subverts the notion of unity which founds phallographic thought:

This organ which has nothing to show for itself also lacks a form of its own. And if woman takes pleasure precisely from this incompleteness of form which allows her organ to touch itself over and over again, indefinitely, by itself, that pleasure is denied by a civilization that privileges phallogravity. The value granted to the only definable form excludes the one that is in play in female autoeroticism. The one of form, of the individual, of the (male) sexual organ, of the proper name, of the proper meaning . . . supplants, while separating and dividing, that contact of at least two (lips) which keeps woman in touch with herself, but without any possibility of distinguishing what is touching from what is touched. (Irigaray, 1985b, p26)

This multiple sexuality cannot be adequately represented in phallographic thought because it does not conform to the logic of unity. It is both one and more than one, but is seen in the dominant order as nothing. So, too, is women's speech conventionally seen as illogical, disconnected, without meaning:

"she" sets off in all directions leaving "him" unable to discern the coherence of any meaning. Hers are contradictory words, somewhat mad from the standpoint of reason, inaudible for whoever listens to them with ready-made grids, with a fully elaborated code in hand. For in what she says, too, at least when she dares, woman is constantly touching herself. She steps ever so slightly aside from herself with a murmur, an exclamation, a whisper, a sentence left unfinished . . . When she returns, it is to set off again from elsewhere, from another point of pleasure, or of pain. One would have to listen with another ear, as if hearing an "other meaning" always in the

³³ Irigaray's primary motive in theorizing a female language is to counter the psychoanalytic proclivity to define the female solely in terms of the male, that is, to take the male as the originary term and the female as a deviation from there. In this, her call to a female biological essence is a useful strategy. (For a summary of Irigaray's argument, see Mills et al, 1989, pp159-62.)

process of weaving itself, of embracing itself with words, but also of getting rid of words in order not to become fixed, congealed in them. (Irigaray, 1985b, p29; Irigaray's emphasis)

Here, it appears that the starting point of Irigaray's descriptions of female language lies in patriarchal definitions of such a language. The passage begins with masculine, derogatory views of female speech and accepts them, posing female morphology as the origin of these speech patterns. Irigaray makes no attempt to repudiate patriarchal descriptions of female speech but instead attempts to turn criticism of female speech patterns back on itself, claiming that the fault lies with phallogomorphic thinking which cannot encompass/understand/decode female speech.³⁴

Such a stance appears to have much in common with the strategy I propose to adopt in reading Lehmann's texts: I, too, will draw upon patriarchal discourses of femininity in order to undermine those discourses; I, too, will attempt to overturn traditionally low valuations placed upon femininity when exhibited by females; I, too, will emphasise that femininity is a concept riven by the play of multiple differences. In my readings of "When the Waters Came" and The Ballad and the Source, I have already shown that Lehmann herself revises available patriarchal discourses of femininity even as she uses them. I have also traced the beginnings of a textual awareness that femininity is not a single concept, but a multiplicity of concepts which must be negotiated. Yet despite my

³⁴ For a critique of Irigaray's failure to consider the way knowledge of the body is mediated through ideology and of her failure to examine the material, as well as the ideological/discursive elements of women's oppression, see Plaza, "Phallogomorphic power' and the psychology of 'woman'" (1978). See also Moi, 1985, pp144-48.

sympathy with an Irigarayan stance, I do not find her work unproblematic. In particular, Irigaray's call to female morphology as the basis of her revaluation of female language would appear, ultimately, to work against her claim that she is attempting to free a multiplicity of feminine forms. For it seems that in Irigaray's theory, the multiple differences exhibited by women's language exist only on the linguistic level and that femininity itself constitutes a unique and indivisible category, since it can be attributed to the single difference between female and male biology.

Indeed, a frequent criticism of Irigaray's conception of womanspeak is that her thought is biologicistic and essentialist and hence problematic for feminism. But the situation is not as simple as it seems. Despite the apparent biologism of Irigaray's descriptions of womanspeak, the theory is not essentialist. Although she links its forms with the forms of the female body, Irigaray does not see womanspeak as a "natural" product of that biology. In fact, for Irigaray, womanspeak is a revolutionary language, a positive force for change. It does not occur "naturally" in patriarchal society, but can only emerge when women withdraw from the system of exchange which characterizes the masculine sexual economy and which allows no place for female pleasure and female speech (Irigaray, 1985b, p32). Nevertheless, Irigaray, unlike some radical feminists, does not advocate permanent withdrawal into women-only groups. It appears that the productive power of womanspeak can be discovered and utilised when women withdraw on an ad-hoc basis, since womanspeak "emerges spontaneously when women speak together, but disappears again as soon as men are present" (Moi,

1985, p144). That womanspeak can emerge and disappear with such rapidity suggests that is it not, in fact, a new and separate language, but a different way of using language as it exists at present, as one commentator intimates: "[Irigaray's] punning titles suggest that the multi-layered perception she attributes to women can be teased out of language as it stands" (Jones, 1985, p87). In fact, Irigaray provides a model which allows conceptualisation of the way that women writers can undermine patriarchal discourses, especially discourses of femininity, even while working within those discourses. Her work specifically names, enacts and occasionally describes, a strategy by which women writers can both work within and subvert dominant ideas about feminine writing and identity. That strategy is mimicry.

Mimicry is, for Irigaray, a way to circumvent the problem that feminist critique of any patriarchal discourses, including discourses of femininity, must operate within those discourses. It is not possible to stand outside of patriarchy or patriarchal discourses and create alternatives to them, therefore subversion from within is necessary. In particular, subversion of discourses of femininity cannot be achieved by women who attempt to stand outside of femininity and align themselves with the masculine:

There is, in an initial phase, perhaps only one "path," [to destroy the discursive mechanism] the one historically assigned to the feminine: that of mimicry. One must assume the feminine role deliberately. Which means already to convert a form of subordination into an affirmation, and thus to begin to thwart it. Whereas a direct feminine challenge to this condition means demanding to speak as a (masculine) "subject," that is, it means to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual indifference. (Irigaray, 1985b, p76)

For Irigaray, deliberate assumption of the feminine role makes it clear that a

woman is more than just the role, that she cannot be reduced to the position imposed upon her. The important point is that in using the role imposed upon women but using it in an exaggerated form, the role becomes clearly that - a role - and not a natural facet of femaleness. In other words, exaggeration breaks down the illusion that the feminine is naturally synonymous with the female:

To play with mimesis is thus, for a woman, to try to recover the place of her exploitation by discourse, without allowing herself to be simply reduced to it. It means to resubmit herself - inasmuch as she is on the side of the "perceptible," of "matter" - to "ideas," in particular to ideas about herself, that are elaborated in/by a masculine logic, but so as to make "visible," by an effect of playful repetition, what was supposed to remain invisible; the cover-up of a possible operation of the feminine in language. It also means "to unveil" the fact that, if women are such good mimics, it is because they are not simply resorbed in this function. They also remain elsewhere... (Irigaray, 1985b, p76)

Mimicry, then, is a strategy of deliberate submission to "masculine" ideas, particularly ideas about femininity. However, it appears that mimicry can involve the exaggerated adoption of either a feminine or a masculine role.³⁵ For example, one instance of mimicry is that of the mystic who, for Irigaray, represents the ultimate example of deliberate female surrender to an extreme version of the feminine role in order to escape the otherwise inescapable mundane version of femininity.³⁶ On the other hand, Irigaray's own apparent

³⁵ It is the exaggerated, therefore, by implication, the deliberate nature of the role-playing which is crucial. Irigaray distinguishes between such deliberate mimicry and the unselfconscious role-playing which she calls "masquerade". Women, for Irigaray, can only assume an identity by adopting a role defined for them by patriarchy. "Mimicry" is the deliberate and exaggerated adoption of such roles for political effect while "masquerade" is the daily process of role-playing forced upon women (see, for example, Irigaray, 1985b, p84).

³⁶ For a discussion of Irigaray's views of the female mystic see Moi, 1985, pp136-37.

adoption of masculine modes of theoretical discourse can also be seen as a strategy of mimicry: "This technique of quoting from the male ordering of things in order to reveal its flaws is exactly the mode adopted by Irigaray in re-examining the ideas of the Greek philosophers [...] By mimicking the authorial voice in such a way as to deflate it, her text can challenge the assumptions on which its text rests" (Mills et al, 1989, p176). In this view, employing femininity as a disruptive force through use of mimicry would seem to involve quoting from canonical thinkers in a context which reveals their limitations and also involves parodying those thinkers by creating exaggerated versions of their own arguments. For Toril Moi, this is what Irigaray does in her doctoral thesis, Speculum of the other Woman (1985; 1st published in French, 1974):

the academic apparatus of the doctoral thesis, still perceptible in Speculum, may be an ironic gesture: coming from a woman arguing the case Irigaray is presenting, her impeccably theoretical discourse is displaced and relocated as a witty parody of patriarchal modes of argument. If as a woman under patriarchy, Irigaray has, according to her own analysis, no language of her own but can only (at best) imitate male discourse, her own writing must inevitably be marked by this. She cannot pretend to be writing in some pure feminist realm outside patriarchy: if her discourse is to be received as anything other than incomprehensible chatter, she must copy male discourse. The feminine can thus only be read in the blank spaces left between the signs and lines of her own mimicry. (Moi, 1985, p140)

If, as Moi suggests, mimicry leaves the feminine confined to the blank spaces between the mimicked masculine words, then it would appear that it is not a strategy which lets the feminine speak unfettered. Nevertheless, mimicry is a way to undermine masculine discourse and even if only that it would be an important stage in creating a space for feminine speech. However, I would argue that the revolutionary potential of mimicry is greater than Moi suggests. It does, as Moi

points out, involve acting out roles which are imposed on all women under patriarchy but, as Moi admits, acting out a role does not mean accepting its validity:

[Irigaray's] is a theatrical staging of the mime: miming the miming imposed on woman, Irigaray's subtle specular move (her mimicry mirrors that of all women) intends to undo the effects of phallogocentric discourse simply by overdoing them. Hers is a fundamentally paradoxical strategy that reflects that of the mystics: if the mystic's abject surrender becomes the moment of her liberation, Irigaray's undermining of patriarchy through the overmiming of its discourses may be one way out of the strait-jacket of phallogocentrism. (Moi, 1985, p140)

Moi appears to be arguing that the strategy of mimicry is effective only in particular circumstances. Specifically, the fact of it being a woman speaking does not in itself subvert the dominant discourse.³⁷ For Moi, Irigaray fails to perceive that mimicry can only be an effective strategy if the ironic impersonation is recognised as such, therefore it can only be successful if there are textual markers which point the reader towards an ironic interpretation of the performance or text (Moi, 1985, p142). To be convinced that mimicry is an effective political strategy, Moi appears to be looking for guarantees that the mimicry will be received as it is intended to be. There are no such guarantees. The implication of Moi's argument would appear to be that only those texts

³⁷ Moi cites Irigaray's mimicry of Plotinus (Irigaray, 1985a, pp168-79), which she sees as highly successful in undermining his thought because it is preceded by anti-sexist analysis ["How to Conceive (of) a Girl" (Irigaray, 1985a, pp160-67)]. Irigaray's use of Marx, "Women on the Market" (Irigaray, 1985b, pp170-91) is, for Moi, set in no such critical context, and Irigaray reads like any other marxian thinker. Moi also cites the essay "The Mechanics of Fluids" (Irigaray, 1985b, pp106-18) which, she feels, in mimicking the patriarchal equation of women with fluidity, merely reinforces that equation (Moi, 1985, p141).

which exhibit a clear authorial stance can have any political efficacy, but it is part of Irigaray's critique of patriarchy that authority and univocal meaning should be undermined. Taking Moi's argument to its extreme, then, would suggest that Irigaray's project is doomed from the start.

Moi's argument is, I would argue, unnecessarily pessimistic. An Irigarayan concept of mimicry allows us to view gender as a performance. As Irigaray's distinction between mimicry and masquerade makes clear, all gender is a performance. The question is how and why that performance can be used to unsettle traditional notions of gender. I have said that it is the deliberate nature of the performance which distinguishes mimicry from masquerade, but Moi points out that *since the intentions of the performer are rarely, if ever, recoverable*, then it is very easy for those watching the performance to miss the point that the gender of the performer is a deliberate act on her part. If gender performance is to have any subversive effect, that effect must stem from factors other than simply the intentions of the performer.

In recent years, the most influential theorist of gender as performance has been Judith Butler. Although the theories of Butler and Irigaray are not entirely congruent, reading each through the other does illuminate the notion of gender as performance. Butler highlights the radically performative nature of gender. In fact, for Butler, it makes no sense to define gender as a cultural construction in opposition to sex as a biological fact. Butler points out that "sex" itself is a mutable and shifting concept, and is already a cultural construct. Given this, our conceptualisation of what gender is requires to be radically rethought:

Gender ought not to be conceived merely as the cultural inscription of meaning on a pre-given sex (a juridical conception); gender must also designate the very apparatus of production whereby the sexes themselves are established. As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which "sexed nature" or "a natural sex" is produced and established as "prediscursive", prior to culture, a politically neutral surface on which culture acts. (Butler, 1990, p7)

For Butler, then, sex is a cultural construction and gender is the discursive process by which that construction is not only produced, but made to appear "natural", pre-cultural. Already Butler's sophisticated re-working of the sex/gender distinction begins to suggest ways in which theorising gender as performance may yield subversive strategies. Since gender is the process by which sex is made to appear natural, then it can surely also become a process by which sex is shown to be profoundly "unnatural", cultural, contingent. Gender then becomes an active process by which the binary distinction of male and female, masculine and feminine, might be broken down:

If sex does not limit gender, then perhaps there are genders, ways of culturally interpreting the sexed body, that are in no way restricted by the apparent duality of sex. Consider the further consequence that if gender is something that one becomes - but can never be - then gender is itself a kind of becoming or activity, and that gender ought not to be conceived as a noun or a substantial thing or a static cultural marker, but rather as an incessant and repeated action of some sort. If gender is not tied to sex, either causally or expressively, then gender is a kind of action that can potentially proliferate beyond the binary limits imposed by the apparent binary of sex. (Butler, 1990, p112)

Characterising gender as "an incessant and repeated action" throws some light on why gender should be so difficult to define. More radical than a mere claim that gender is more than one thing, Butler is claiming that gender is not any thing. Gender is not a thing, but an act, not a noun but a verb. I said in my introduction to this thesis that I felt that the construction "to do femininity" was

an enormously helpful one when thinking about the relationship between women and femininity. Butler's argument provides a theoretical justification for this.

Butler also provides an explanation of how and why the performative character of gender can be put to subversive effect. Firstly, she explains, since gender is performative, then it involves constant repetition. However, repetition brings the possibility of disruption:

The abiding gendered self will then be shown to be structured by repeated acts that seek to approximate the ideal of a substantial ground of identity, but which, in their occasional discontinuity, reveal the temporal and contingent groundlessness of this "ground". The possibilities of gender transformation are to be found precisely in the arbitrary relation between such acts, in the possibility of a failure to repeat, a de-formity, or a parodic repetition that exposes the phantasmatic effect of abiding identity as a politically tenuous construction. (Butler, 1990, p141)

Because gender is an act which must constantly be repeated, there is always the possibility that the repetition will fail. This possibility, which may be highlighted by parodic gender acts which reveal the contingency of the acts themselves, mean that gender is literally a baseless concept, which has to be constantly re-acted and re-asserted in order to achieve its effect of being the "natural" ground of identity. What Butler suggests is that far from being an immutable natural fact, gender is a profoundly unstable category which is ripe for subversion. A parodic gender act, like drag, radically unsettles the ideas of original and imitation upon which notions of gender rest and reveals that gender, far from being the natural ground of identity, is always already an imitation of an imitation:

This perpetual displacement constitutes a fluidity of identities that suggests an open-ness to resignification and recontextualization; parodic proliferation deprives hegemonic culture and its critics of the claim to naturalized or essentialist gender identities. Although the gender meanings taken up in these parodic styles are clearly part of the hegemonic, misogynist culture,

they are nevertheless denaturalized and mobilized through their parodic recontextualization. (Butler, 1990, p138)

Gender parody, like Irigarayan mimicry, involves adoption and exaggeration of the gender meanings of hegemonic culture. Through that repetition, by placing those dominant gender meanings in a culturally unfamiliar context and exposing the repetition for what it is, it is possible to undermine the very meanings which one is repeating.

Butler's stress on the subversive effects of gender parody like drag, and her discussion of the inherent subversiveness in lesbian identity (Butler, 1991) might suggest that a subversive use of gender performance is only open to those whose gender identity is very obviously multiple and, to the dominant order, problematic. It might suggest that there can be no space for the subversive power of gender performance in the "proper", heterosexual world of Rosamond Lehmann's novels. However, it is the opposite which is the case. No-one can escape gender performance because there is no identity outside of that performance. Since no-one can escape gender performance, the subversive potential of that performance is open to everyone:

To enter into the repetitive practices of this terrain of signification is not a choice, for the "I" that might enter is always already inside; there is no possibility of agency or reality outside of the discursive practices that give those terms the intelligibility that they have. The task is not whether to repeat, but how to repeat or, indeed, to repeat and, through a radical proliferation of gender, to displace the very gender norms that enable the repetition itself. (Butler, 1990, p148)

Identity is constituted in and by gender performance. There is no identity outside of this performance. Both Butler and Irigaray provide cogent justification for the argument that it is not possible to create alternative gender

meanings and identities which are intended to challenge dominant gender discourses from outside. Their work convincingly shows that it would be impossible to try to discuss women outside of their existing link to patriarchal constructions of femininity. In Butler's words: "There is no self that is prior to the convergence or who maintains "integrity" prior to its entrance into this conflicted cultural field. There is only a taking up of the tools where they lie, where the very "taking up" is enabled by the tool lying there" (Butler, 1990, p145). Thus, the reading strategy which is suggested by the work of Butler and Irigaray is to read the texts for the way that their characterisation constitutes a repetition of dominant gender meanings, for the way that they represent gender as performance. This representation, or rather repetition, may be radically subversive, or it may be more conservative. Nevertheless, if the repetition is obviously that, if the reader's attention is drawn to the fact that the characters are performing gender as a role, then the texts are subtly undermining dominant discourses of gender even as they draw upon them. Identity necessarily involved repetition of dominant gender discourses, but as Butler suggests, there is always "the possibility of variation on that repetition" (Butler, 1990, p145). Within this variation lies the subversive power of gender acts:

If the rules governing signification not only restrict, but enable the assertion of alternative domains of cultural intelligibility, ie, new possibilities for gender that contest the rigid codes of hierarchical binarisms, then it is only within the practices of repetitive signifying that a subversion of identity becomes possible. The injunction to be a given gender produces necessary failures, a variety of incoherent configurations that in their multiplicity exceed and defy the injunction by which they are generated. Further, the very injunction to be a given gender takes place through discursive routes: to be a good mother, to be a heterosexually desirable object, to be a fit worker, in sum, to signify a multiplicity of guarantees in response to a

variety of different demands all at once. The coexistence or convergence of such discursive injunctions produces the possibility of a complex reconfiguration and redeployment... (Butler, 1990, p145)

My readings of Lehmann's texts will be attentive to the ways in which the characters react to the variety of different gender demands placed upon them. I will discuss their failures to meet these demands, and the incoherent gender configurations which result from these failures. I will also show the methods which some characters employ in order to manipulate for their own ends the contradictory gender discourses which they are asked to negotiate. Reading Lehmann's texts, I will show how her characters accept, reject, exaggerate or revise the given gender roles they are given to perform. While not claiming that all repetitions of femininity in Lehmann's work are necessarily subversive repetitions, I will contextualise and draw attention to the way that the texts, through characterisation, implicitly or explicitly present femininity as a performance. Indeed, this is the strategy which I have already begun to adopt in my reading of The Ballad and the Source, where I discussed the links between the maternal role, feminine identity and storytelling/performance (see Chapter 2, above). In my readings of Invitation to the Waltz, Dusty Answer and The Echoing Grove, I will point to the way that Lehmann's characterisation can be read as destroying the illusion that femininity is natural to females. I will further show that characters are presented at moments of varying levels of understanding of their own performance of femininity - from those who seem, at points, to be trapped within what Irigaray might call a "masquerade" of femininity, to those who learn that they can perform aspects of different femininities (and, to a lesser

extent, non-feminine gender identities) for their own purposes.

Having said that, my readings will not be solely character-based. I will also attempt to show the ways in which the texts themselves constitute performances of femininity. Reading the texts as gender performances, my reading itself must become a gender performance, for the text's gender performance exists not in the inert words on the page but in my act of reading those words. In the performance of my reading, femininity as traditionally defined is repeated and celebrated, but also mimicked and revealed as a deliberate strategy. Its status as a "natural" and essential facet of being female is therefore undermined. My extended and deliberate repetition of aspects of dominant definitions of the category of the feminine is intended to show the way in which and the extent to which Lehmann's work (or rather my reading of it) plays with and upon traditional definitions of the feminine in order to move beyond those definitions and evade the circular (or more accurately figure-of-eight) association of female = feminine = second-best. This is the strategy which I have already adopted in reading "When the Waters Came" and The Ballad and the Source: in both of these readings, I have used the term "femininity" and discussed Lehmann's use of the concept, precisely in order to draw attention to the shifting and uncertain nature of the concept.

Drawing upon dominant gender discourses and attempting to subvert them from within is, of course, a risky strategy. The risks are inevitable as long as society remains patriarchal, but far from invalidating the strategy, we should accept that the most potentially productive strategies are often the riskiest.

Dorin Shumacher argues that the feminist critic cannot create an entirely new set of concepts for her own use, for if she did these would carry little intellectual and cultural weight and would be easy to ignore. To be really threatening to the dominant order, as Schumacher feels feminism is, requires using dominant ideas (Schumacher, 1975, pp34-35). For Schumacher, the most productive ideas used by the feminist critic will necessarily carry masculinist assumptions which she must challenge before using the ideas. Thus, Schumacher argues, "For all of these reasons, feminist criticism is fraught with intellectual and professional risks, offering more opportunity for creativity, yet greater possibility of error" (Schumacher, 1975, p34). Conceptualising gender as performance provides a useful model for the way that feminist criticism can draw upon conventional discourses of femininity while challenging their masculinist assumptions. Characterising a feminist reading of femininity in a text as a performance of that femininity does not remove the risk that the reading will appear to confirm the existence of a natural association between femininity and femaleness but it certainly reduces that risk.

In attempting to formulate a feminist re-reading of Lehmann's work, then, it would seem impossible to approach her fiction through articulating an entirely new critical language. Instead, I want to work with (and against) the terms of existing critical discourses on Lehmann and examine the nature and effects of the "femininity" of her work by mimicking that femininity, performing a reading which plays upon the femininity and points to the need for a concept not of femininity as an entity or attribute but of multiple performances of femininity.

Earlier in this thesis, I argued that a strategy of revaluation of femininity is not enough, since it is not femininity itself which is undervalued, but femininity as used by women. What I propose to do is to reclaim some types of feminine performance as valued attributes of a woman writer. My aim is not revalue femininity, since it can already be valued in a number of different ways, but to revalue Lehmann's work by reclaiming for it some of those aspects of femininity which are already positively valued in our culture without identifying those aspects of femininity with any "natural" femaleness. Defining femininity as performance allows me to re-appropriate femininity in this way while simultaneously questioning and revising the meanings which I appropriate. What I will dispute, then, is not that Lehmann's work exhibits some of the qualities which have been labelled "feminine" but the interpretations, associations and valuations which have accompanied those feminine qualities. Defining femininity as performance, my readings will re-appropriate femininity as an active feminist strategy of the woman writer and a valuable interpretative technique for the feminist critic who performs the readings of the texts.

Adopting this strategy serves my purposes of wanting to revalue an undervalued woman writer while accounting for the pleasure of her texts for feminist readers. I am attempting both to celebrate the femininity of Lehmann's work and to undermine notions of femininity. In attempting to revalue her work, I am also attempting to claim for her a place in a masculinist literary canon.³⁸

³⁸ Although I accept that there are several problems, for feminists and non-feminists alike, with the issue of canonicity. Unfortunately, there is no space in this thesis to discuss these issues.

Thus, the strategy meets my needs. However, I would not want to claim that this strategy is the only valid one for feminist criticism or even that it is sufficient for all the purposes of that criticism. Any strategy which repeats the feminine always runs the risk of simply consolidating dominant discourses of gender, and even when a gender parody or mimicry of femininity is intended, it is possible, as Moi suggests with regard to Irigaray's own work (see above), for the performance to be read as simply confirming dominant gender meanings. A performance of femininity, no matter how radical, will always require to be supported by complementary strategies.

In this respect, Kristeva furnishes a useful analysis of the necessary elements of feminist struggle.³⁹ She sees the feminist project as being divided into three overlapping phases. In the first, women demand power in the symbolic order; in the second, women reject the symbolic order in the name of difference and celebrate female specificity by revaluing the feminine; in the third, women reject the dichotomy between masculine and feminine as metaphysical (summarised in Moi, 1989, p128). These are often described as stages of feminism, as if they were mutually exclusive, historical developments. However, it is more useful to view them as historically concurrent, mutually supportive strategies, which at this historical moment, are all needed at once.⁴⁰ The third

³⁹ See "Women's Time" (Kristeva, 1986, pp187-213).

⁴⁰ I have already shown that Kristeva can be hostile to feminism of the first two tiers. However, that she is not always so is borne out in Of Chinese Women in which she describes "an initial phase - no doubt necessary- of searching for our identity" and warns that the danger is in seeing this as more than a phase, thus locking ourselves inside that identity (Kristeva, 1977, p14).

phase does not obviate the need for the other two, as it seems to do, but simply makes us aware of the risks involved in taking the first two strategies as aims. Thus, claims Toril Moi, "An adoption of Kristeva's 'deconstructed' form of feminism therefore in one sense leaves everything as it was - our positions in the political struggle have not changed; but in another sense, it radically transforms our awareness of the nature of that struggle" (Moi 1989, p129). In one sense, then, adoption of Kristeva's theory of the dissolution of gender identity does not change what we do, merely how we view what we do. In other words, it alerts us to the theoretical assumptions behind our practice and reminds us that the means is not the end. In effect, the third phase becomes the end and the first two the means to that end. I would argue that my strategy of simultaneously subverting femininity while celebrating Lehmann's textual performances of femininity is an amalgam of the first two phases. What Kristeva convincingly suggests is that such celebration and subversion of femininities are necessary strategies but that the ultimate aim of feminism is to render such strategies unnecessary. This is a question to which I will return, but first, I want to turn to Invitation to the Waltz to analyse how that text both celebrates and subverts notions of femininity by explicitly presenting femininity as a performance.

CHAPTER 3: PERFORMING FEMININITY IN INVITATION TO THE WALTZ

In Invitation to the Waltz (1981; 1st published 1932), the narrative is internally focalized¹ on the central character, Olivia Curtis, much of the story being presented in free indirect speech (though occasionally, Olivia's thoughts are presented directly). Such use of free indirect discourse in itself problematises the notion of unified identity, since the teller of the tale cannot be fully distinguished from the tale being told.² This chapter will perform a reading of Invitation to the Waltz which emphasises the ways in which that text, while appearing to be operating with the now commonplace fictional convention of the authentic self behind the public mask, utilises that convention in order to explore strategies of gender performance. We will see that, while drawing upon conventional discourses on feminine roles, Invitation to the Waltz draws attention to the performative nature of those roles and begins to suggest ways in which female characters can take active control of their own gender performances.

The novel centres on two days of Olivia's late teenage years, days in which

¹ In Narrative Fiction, Schlomith Rimmon-Kenan defines internally focalized narratives as those in which the perceptions presented by the narrative are the central character's, although the words are not always hers (Rimmon-Kenan, 1989, pp71-73).

² See Barbara Johnson, who argues that in texts which make frequent use of free indirect discourse "the inside/outside boundaries between narrator and character, between standard and individual, are both transgressed and preserved, making it impossible to identify and totalise either the subject or the nature of the discourse" (Johnson, 1987, p171).

she has a birthday and goes to a dance. On neither day does anything extraordinary happen to her, nor does she change very much in the course of events. The force of the novel comes, rather, from the interplay of Olivia's public and private selves. In focusing on this interplay, on one level the text simply continues a fictional tradition which explores the potential conflict between the private authentic self of the main character and the public masks that character must assume in order to function in the fictional society presented. However, following my contention in my introduction to this section that Lehmann's work tends both to conform to certain fictional conventions and to experiment with more radical forms and ideas, I will show that in its presentation of female characters Invitation to the Waltz also goes beyond the conventional notion of the private self behind the public façade. In fact, as we will see, the text suggests that feminine identity straddles public and private realms. This is done both in the presentation of Olivia and in descriptions of subsidiary female characters. I will examine each of these elements in turn.

The chief vehicle for the critique of notions of an authentic self is Olivia herself, in that in using Olivia's point of view the narrative presents all characters as filtered through Olivia's imagination, and offers no final, "objective" word on what the "true" nature of any character might be. Moreover, the text frequently draws attention to the fact that, as a bookish and imaginative teenager, Olivia tends to fictionalise and fantasise about those around her, without framing or placing those "fictions" against an insight into the real. Like Sibyl Jardine in The Ballad and the Source (see Chapter 2, above), Olivia also habitually indulges in

self-fictionalising, and it is this element of the novel that I will analyse first.

One example of Olivia's self-fictionalising is related in a passage which describes an incident in her childhood when she had proved a source of amusement to grown-ups. Olivia's reaction to this humiliation was to think of turning it into fiction: "That had been the beginning of self-consciousness, of failure of confidence. Some day I'll write a story about it" (p128). The word "self-consciousness" suggests that Olivia's response to the humiliation is to think about how she represents her self. This self-representation develops into full-blown narrativisation when she plans to write a story about it. In this way, Olivia's response shows signs of the text's and her own, characteristic blurring of the distinction between the creation of a self-image and fictionalisation. As such, the quotation provides hints that the text will present identity construction as a process of fictionalisation. As Rita Sullivan points out, this pattern operates in much of Lehmann's work, as well as in the work of Lehmann's contemporary, Elizabeth Bowen; discussing Dusty Answer, and Bowen's The Hotel (1943: 1st published 1927), Sullivan notes that, "In the course of [their] attempts to belong, each character looks for control or power by making up stories about her life, creating herself as a character in her own fiction" (Sullivan, 1985, p36). Thus, Sullivan claims, in Olivia's case turning life into fiction is an attempt by a powerless character to gain some power over her own life and identity. I will show that Sullivan is right to suggest that fictionalising herself is something that Olivia does in order to preserve her own sense of self-worth and that such fictionalisation appears not to undermine the self, but to protect it. Moreover,

such self-fictionalising is not only a reaction to public humiliation: Olivia also uses it as a strategy of self-preservation when talking to her sister.³ Indeed, Olivia makes it clear that she sees it as a duty to fictionalise the self for the benefit of one's relatives. As part of the first entry in her diary, she writes: "Advice to Young Journal Keepers. Be lenient with yourself. Conceal your worst faults, leave out your most shameful thoughts, actions and temptations. Give yourself all the good and interesting qualities you want and haven't got" (p103). In this diary entry, Olivia is describing her own strategy for self-construction. The details of that strategy confirm what I have already suggested, that in Invitation to the Waltz such self-construction characteristically involves an explicit and deliberate fictionalisation of the self. It appears that Olivia's diary is the medium through which she will turn her life into a story in the process of trying to gain control of the social construction of her identity. Fictionalisation of the self is presented less as a falsification of that self than as a means of gaining a degree of self-determination in a world which defines women as the passive creations of others.

In fact, in writing her diary, Olivia is creating herself as something to be seen or read. Or, perhaps a more accurate metaphor would be that she is creating herself as a performer in the drama of her own life. In this, then, the presentation of Olivia's character begins to suggest that the process of identity-

³ However, Kate is too astute to let Olivia hide her humiliations. See, for example, the incident with the lace collar, when "Olivia felt her pretences snatched away, Kate's finger pointing the way inexorably to surrender, to truth" (p92).

formation which is described might be akin to an Irigarayan or Butlerian performance of femininity. At first, the motive behind Olivia's performance strategy appears to be the traditional diarist's motive of protecting one's posthumous reputation: "If you should die young, what comfort would it be to your relatives to read the truth and have to say: It is not a pearl we have lost, but a swine?" (p103). In thus fictionalising the effects of the future reading of her diary, Olivia shows her concern that her relatives should not find out the "truth" about her and thus acknowledges that the self which she exhibits in her daily affairs with those closest to her is not a true self but a role, a performance, as it is even in her conversations with Kate. Thus, the diary is an acknowledgement that the self of everyday living is a performance. Additionally, however, the self presented in the diary is acknowledged as a fiction. And, in fictionalising a situation which shows what the relationship between these two fictional or dramatic selves should be, the diary also acknowledges that the dual fictional selves cannot be simply rejected, but that manipulation of the fictions, or deliberate gender performance, is necessary in order to create a strong sense of self-worth. Rita Sullivan suggests that diary-keeping is necessarily an activity which splits Olivia from herself: "She is Olivia experiencing her life and at the same time she is Olivia watching herself experiencing life" (Sullivan, 1985, p86). However, my reading of Olivia's journal entries suggests that Sullivan's description requires some modification, for what Olivia watches is not herself unproblematically experiencing her life, but her self performing the role of "Olivia Curtis". Thus, the treatment of Olivia's diary-writing in Invitation to the

Waltz not only exposes the gap between Olivia's private self and the public roles which she plays in order to protect that self, but also suggests that the self which is protected by the public "mask" is itself a performance.

One passage which appears to reinforce the idea that the public roles serve the purpose of protecting the private self is the section where Olivia is preparing for the dance. During her preparation, Olivia imagines what the dance will be like and thus creates a proleptic fictionalisation of the coming situation. Examination of this passage supports the conclusion that the motive behind Olivia's self-fictionalising is a desire for self-protection:

Why go? It was unthinkable. Why suffer so much? Wrenched from one's foundations; neglected, ignored, curiously stared at; partnerless, watching Kate move serenely from partner to partner, pretending not to watch; pretending not to see one's hostess wondering: must she do something about one again? - (but really one couldn't go on and on introducing these people); pretending not to care; slipping off to the ladies' cloakroom, fiddling with unnecessary pins and powder, ears strained for the music to stop; wandering forth again to stand by oneself against the wall, hope struggling with despair beneath a mask of smiling indifference... (pp126-27)

Olivia feels sure that she will be left without partners while Kate dances every dance. Her defence, the passage makes clear, will lie in adopting "a mask of smiling indifference", that is, in "pretending", a word which occurs three times in the course of one sentence, suggesting that Olivia anticipates self-consciously playing out a role. Olivia's self-esteem is so low that she cannot imagine going to the dance and being a success, but more than this, she feels that to let anyone see the side of her which is hurt by slights and snubs would be to open herself to a double humiliation. At this point, then, the text might be read as presenting the fairly conventional notion that young girls lack confidence and must indulge

in role-play in order to protect their sense of self. Yet the conventional notion must be somewhat modified if one reads the passage through Irigaray's theories of femininity, for Olivia's role-play is not a masquerade of femininity, but is instead a self-conscious and deliberate strategy and, as such, would appear to be making more radical suggestions about the nature of Olivia's identity. Olivia's difficulty is not just that she has no confidence in herself; more than this, the text suggests that she lacks confidence because she has no clear sense of her own identity: "She experienced a sudden distress of spirit, thinking in a half-conscious way that she hadn't - hadn't yet found herself... couldn't - could not put herself together, all of a piece" (p126). Again, this might appear to be making the rather commonplace observation that adolescents are engaged in a process of identity-formation. However, the passage adds something to this received idea when it makes it clear that Olivia lacks confidence because she has difficulty performing the stereotypical feminine roles which delineate the socially acceptable limits within which she feels she must perform her gender identity. Thus, comparing herself to her sister Kate, Olivia feels femininity to be a goal which requires hard work rather than being a "natural" part of herself: "All these dainty devices, so natural to Kate, seemed when she performed them to become unreal, like a lesson learnt by heart, but not properly understood. Something in her fumbled, felt inharmonious, wanted almost to resist" (p126).

In this way, Olivia recognises that the femininity which she is meant to perform is not a "natural" facet of her character. In fact, further analysis suggests that it might not be a natural facet of Kate's character either. Although the

passage says that these acts are "so natural to Kate", it would appear that these words are Olivia's rather than the narrator's, for the descriptions of Kate's "dainty devices" which the narrator furnishes make it quite clear that Kate's femininity is not the product of nature but of long hours of study and work. For example, she has read and follows the advice of articles which advise on "choosing scents and colours to suit your personality" (p124). She has ordered "Lasholene", which supposedly makes eyelashes grow, from a newspaper advertisement (p125), and has spent an hour manicuring her nails (p126). She has sewn herself feminine cami-knickers, finished off with diamanté and appliqué butterflies (p124) and has copied from Vogue an apple-green dress, also appliquéed with motifs from nature, this time "flowers, buds, leaves of all colours" (p133).⁴ The apparent naturalness of Kate's femininity is a carefully contrived effect. Thus, when the text tells us that the "dainty devices" are, to Olivia, "like a lesson learnt by heart, but not properly understood" it is pointing to the fact that the difference between Olivia and Kate is not that Kate did not need lessons in femininity but that she has learnt the lessons and understood them - mainly, it seems, through more thorough application to the study of femininity. For both Olivia and Kate, then, femininity is an image which must be studied and worked at. In this, the passage anticipates Irigaray's analysis of conventional femininity as a masquerade "imposed upon women by male systems of representation", which requires from each woman "an effort on her part for which she is not

⁴ Compare Kate's use of motifs from nature with that of Mrs Earle in Dusty Answer (see Chapter 5).

compensated" (Irigaray, 1985b, p84).⁵

It appears that Kate does not question the masquerade and thus can learn how to perform femininity unselfconsciously. However, Olivia's process of feminine identity-formation is hampered by her conscious realisation that the consequences of her work to attain femininity are more far-reaching than just the creation (or failure to create) a "naturally dainty" image. For Olivia, working to achieve femininity involves a degree of self-awareness which effectively splits the self in two. In one passage, where she is briefly successful in feeling feminine, Olivia looks at her reflection in a mirror and sees herself as a mysterious stranger: "Was it the frock that did it? Her body seemed to assemble itself harmoniously within it, to become centralized, to expand, both static and fluid; alive" (p12). In this description, Olivia is presented standing outside her own body, looking at the image it presents, as if that body were not part of the self which is thinking about it. On one of the few occasions when her body appears to have achieved a cohesive image, Olivia attributes its success to her dress and does not appear to feel that the image is intrinsic to her character. She experiences this as a positive image, but by attributing the achievement of that image to the donning of a new dress, the text again suggests that Olivia's process

⁵ For more detailed analysis of how projecting an image of "natural" femininity requires study and work, see Smith, 1990, pp195-202. Smith's analysis encapsulates the nature of the process which Kate goes through in order to perfect her image of femininity: "The texts of the discourse of femininity index a work process performed by women. Its character as work is not highly visible because it is not paid work nor is it recognizably a hobby. None the less it is consciously planned, takes time, and involves the use of tools and materials and the acquired skill of its practitioners" (Smith, 1990, p197).

of self-construction involves role-playing. She must put on her costume before she can begin her performance. For Rita Sullivan, Olivia's reaction is typical of the adolescent process of identity-formation. Discussing Olivia alongside a character in a novel by Elizabeth Bowen, she claims that "both see themselves at a developmental moment when the self seems not a familiar face, a known if sometimes mysterious part of a person, but a choice, a role, an ever-changing series of identities to try on and discard. Both are, that is, adolescents" (Sullivan, 1985, p1). Sullivan here seems to be suggesting that Olivia's character is only fluid and changing because of her age, but, as I suggested earlier, I would argue that Lehmann is doing something more radical than presenting the commonplace that adolescence is a period in which character is formed through particular processes.⁶ It is true that in the above passage from Invitation to the Waltz Olivia's self is, as Sullivan says, a role. But, as I have already shown, it not so much a role that she can choose or discard at will, as one that she has learnt to feel duty-bound to work at. The fragmentation of Olivia's identity is more radical than that normally associated with adolescence, since there is no suggestion that these fragments can ever be consolidated into an authentic self. And, in referring to Olivia's difficulties in learning how to play feminine roles, and in attributing the temporary fusion to the dress Olivia wears (which is, incidentally, a very traditionally feminine dress) the text suggests that the splitting

⁶ In her conclusion, Sullivan partially acknowledges that her own argument is inadequate: "The adolescent identity search described in Chapter One is, for these characters, fluid and continuous. Their selves remain strangely unfinished, subject to adjustment long after their ages would mark them as adults" (Sullivan, 1985, p197).

of Olivia's self is not to be read as an adolescent characteristic, but as a feminine one.⁷ Furthermore, the fusion of self which Olivia temporarily achieves is seen to be illusory, in that in the very moment of its achievement, the cohesive self is riven by division, for while Olivia's body and self are identified with each other, the self also watches this identification taking place. Fusion with the body splits the self in two, and in recognising her body as both "fluid" and "centralized" Olivia is recognising something important about her self as well.

That it not only her body, but also her self which is to be read as encompassing contradictory qualities is confirmed later in the passage. At this point, the novel's characteristic free indirect speech appears to be more or less directly reporting Olivia's thoughts as she thinks back on that fleeting moment when she achieved a positive self-image: "It was the portrait of a young girl in pink. All the room's reflected objects seemed to frame, to present her, whispering: Here are You" (pp12-13). This almost Lacanian passage tries to identify Olivia, not just Olivia's body, with the reflection she sees in the mirror.⁸

⁷ As Judy Simons points out, ten years later, in The Weather in the Streets, Olivia borrows a dress from Kate to go to another party at the Spencers'. This time Olivia can mimic femininity and despite being twenty-seven, the reflection she sees in the mirror is that of a pretty young girl (Simons, 1992, p87). It is not her age, but her ability to play the feminine role which counts, so that when she dons a "floating, transparent and fragile" white evening dress she is "able to suit it", although it is very unlike her usual style, as Kate points out (WS, p64). As Simons argues, it is the feminine image of her in this dress, or, one might add, her ability to perform the femininity which suits the dress, which captivates Rollo Spencer and allows Olivia her entry into the world of heterosexual romance (WS, p124).

⁸ In many ways, the description of Olivia at the mirror is itself a mirror-image of Lacan's theory of the mirror-stage in which, in Elizabeth Wright's summing up of Lacan, "The child looks in the mirror and is delighted by several

For a moment, at least, Olivia appears to accept what the room is trying to tell her, and she seems to have become the image of herself that she sees. Indeed, Olivia wants to become that image and is disappointed when the moment passes: "She went on staring; but soon the impression collapsed; the urgent expectation diminished flatly [...] Nothing exciting was going to happen" (p13). At the moment when Olivia had (mis)recognised herself in the mirror, "hope had sprung up, half-suppressed, dubious, irrational" (p13). Thus, Olivia willed herself to be the image that she saw - yet, at the same moment, in recognising that the self which she has willed herself to be has the static quality of a portrait, Olivia recognises the socially created nature of that self. Indeed, she experiences the moment as "the completion of some grand inevitable freeing design which she both created and took part in" (p13). Again, she recognises that her own self is a performance, but here she also begins to recognise that she can take conscious control of that performance, and can create the role which she is to play. Looking in the mirror, Olivia confronts the ideology of femininity which makes

qualities of its own image simultaneously. Whereas before it had experienced itself as a shapeless mass it now gains a sense of wholeness, an ideal completeness, and all this without effort" (Wright, 1984, p108). In Lacan's theory, this sense of wholeness is achieved only through misrecognition of the self in the mirror-image, therefore the sense of wholeness is achieved only by the identification of the self with the image. For Lacan, this process is necessary for the psychological maturity of infants of both sexes. But although the process described in Invitation to the Waltz may have certain affinities with a Lacanian mirror-stage, it is not presented as a generalised psychological process. References to Olivia's dress, to the colour she is wearing, to the image as "portrait" all make it clear that in confronting her own identity in the mirror, she is forced to confront social stereotypes of femininity. (For further discussion of the differences between the feminine "dressing-up" mirror ritual, and the Lacanian mirror-stage, see Frith, 1991.)

a woman's body into an aesthetic object to be displayed and admired. The objects in the room seem to conspire to reduce her identity to a purely physical one, but in simultaneously welcoming the resultant self-image and recognising the deliberately created nature of the image, Olivia takes her first steps towards finding a means of escaping the coercive force of such images of femininity even while actively drawing upon those images for her own sense of self-worth. The description of Olivia looking in the mirror exposes the fact that the complete self Olivia sees is not only a portrait but an image which her self evades at the very moment when it seems to be most clearly captured by it. Invitation to the Waltz thus begins to suggest the possibility that Olivia might find a sense of self in conventional discourses of femininity without having to be trapped within those discourses.

The presentation of these moments in Olivia's dramatic self-creation in Invitation to the Waltz suggests that the notion of identity being manipulated in the text is more complex than a simple duality of public role and private authentic self. Specifically, this presentation of Olivia suggests that the construction and definition of her private self depends upon successful negotiation of the public conventions of acceptable feminine performance. It appears that Olivia's self might inhabit the space between public and private. To further explore the nature of the relationship between a feminine self and public conventions of femininity, as presented in Invitation to the Waltz, I propose now to analyse and compare the presentation of two of the minor characters, Mrs Curtis and Mrs Skinner.

In this novel, as in many other novels, by Lehmann and others, the presentation of minor characters is used as a counterpoint to the presentation of the central character. A key strategy in the text's characterisation of both major and minor characters is exposition of the tension between public and private selves. For example, the praise of the public beneficence of Sir John and Lady Spencer is clearly ironic: "Sir John and Lady Spencer were on the board of, in the chair of, at the head of every committee in the county, an admirable couple, shedding a wholly beneficent public glow" (p34). Through its repetitions and exaggerations this description makes fun of the moral pretensions of the aristocracy and suggests that the public image which Sir John and Lady Spencer present is far from being a "true" one. In thus opening up a gap between public image and private self, Invitation to the Waltz is, of course, very much in the tradition of Jane Austen, perhaps owing a special debt to Emma (1966; 1st published 1816). However, as I have shown with regard to the character of Olivia, in its presentation of female characters and the relationship between their private selves and public images of femininity Invitation to the Waltz both exploits and modifies that conventional strategy of social fiction. In Lehmann's novel, there is no private identity hidden behind the public performance, but only another layer of performance.

A striking example of the way Invitation to the Waltz goes beyond the conventional fictional strategy occurs when Olivia's mother indulges in a few dreamy reminiscences of her own youth, thus forcing her daughters to reconceive their image of her:

And with these words she had risen up suddenly before her daughters, not as she was - not matronly, dignified, rather ponderous in action, not absolute domestic dictator, censor, not queller of giggling-fits, detector of subterfuges, swift snubber, just admonisher - but fond of a laugh, flirtatious; whirling round flushed in a waltz and lancers; but light, slight-waisted, with her hair piled up on top of her head: stooping in her low-cut puff-sleeved ball-dress to smooth and pat herself in the glass, thinking: 'Yes - pretty...' slipping out to post a letter on the sly, letting somebody in with laughter and whispers by the side door at Bournemouth. (pp34-35)

In this passage, the girls are forced to contrast an image of their mother as she exists for them at present with how they imagine her to have been in her youth. They have never before acknowledged their mother as a person who might have had a girlhood but have seen her only in relation to themselves. In this, the text might be doing no more than recording, with a fair degree of psychological veracity, a moment in the maturing of the two sisters when they recognise that their mother is a human being with a personal history which is not wholly defined in relation to themselves. However, close analysis of the passage reveals a more radical insight into the nature of femininity. That the girls are surprised to imagine her as anything other than their mother is indicated by a series of "not this, but this" constructions. Each repetition of "not...but.." further opens the gap between the sisters' old image of their mother and their new image of her. Imagining these past facets of her character forces them to acknowledge that she is not what she had previously seemed to be. Mrs Curtis is imagined as being, at each stage in her life, that which she is not. She is not the matriarch she had seemed to be, but equally she is no longer the flirtatious girl whom Olivia and Kate imagine her to be. Furthermore, although Mrs Curtis's daughters can decide that she is not as she seems, yet in imagining what she might have been,

the sisters simply substitute one stereotyped image of femininity for another. Indeed, the images that they draw upon are so stereotyped that it appears that the reader is being invited to see both as received fictional constructs of femininity which the girls simply project onto their mother. Each image of femininity is a recognisable one, and while each may be applied to Mrs Curtis, it is their status as images or roles which is stressed. In this way, the narrative presents different images of femininity without identifying Mrs Curtis with any one of them. In fact, there is no way of knowing whether any of the images fit Mrs Curtis because the text does not offer another narrative level which describes her "real" character. All the reader has to go on is her daughters' fictional dramatisation of their mother's character. However, the fact that this dramatisation is based upon such obviously stereotyped images suggests that it is inadequate as a representation of Mrs Curtis's self. The stereotyped image of the flirtatious young girl is the only picture of their mother's past which the sisters can visualise, and the text draws attention to their incomprehension of her more complex past motives and actions:

Time gaped behind them, severing her from them, illuminating the shape of a lively Miss West of Bournemouth, who, accidentally meeting a middle-aged Mr. Curtis at a complicated junction, had got carried away irrevocably with him along a new line to the place where she was now. Perhaps she looked back and thought with a sense of loss: how happy I was then; comparing all she had now - husband, home, children - unfavourably with having nothing. And they experienced a faint uneasiness, rather as if the eiderdown had slipped off in the night, half waking them in dim discomfort. What on earth had caused their parents to marry? (p35)

Olivia and Kate can only wonder about Miss West's motives for marrying Mr Curtis. And yet, without realising it, in their incomprehension they hit upon

an important insight into the feminine roles open to their mother (and themselves). They recognise that while in her single state she might be deemed to possess nothing, yet after marrying and gaining husband, home and children, the loss of that "nothing" is likely to appear to her as the loss of something valuable. They appear to be groping towards an understanding that feminine roles as conventionally defined present women with a series of "no-win" alternatives. As Irigaray suggests, each of the conventional feminine roles appears to offer Mrs Curtis no recompense for the work she must put into playing those roles. This insight is only hinted at in the quotation, since for Olivia and Kate to fully reach this understanding would not only be difficult, but also uncomfortable - as the image of the eiderdown suggests. It would constitute the loss of a presence which hitherto had been an important comfort to them, for to suggest that their mother could have no motive for marrying their father is not only to suggest that his existence seems an inadequate recompense for the loss of her girlhood identity, but also that their existence is, too.

In pointing to the girls' failure to understand their mother's motivations, Invitation to the Waltz not only suggests that their stereotyped feminine images of her are inadequate as representations of her character, but also that such images are unrewarding as modes of feminine identity. Moreover, Olivia and Kate cannot fully understand their mother's nature for a variety of reasons which I have described, but perhaps most significantly, what they cannot understand is

her sexuality.⁹ It is her supposed flirtatious sexual duplicity which most shocks them about their new image of her, and it is the nature of the intimate relationship between their parents which most fully evades their imagination: "What relationship lay buried beneath the appearance of temperate esteem, the habitual amicability with which they treated one another?" (pp35-36). Yet this is not a question which Olivia, and therefore the text, dwells upon at any length, perhaps because it does make her feel so uncomfortable to think about her mother's sexuality. Where the text does allow Olivia a more direct confrontation with the relationship between conventional feminine roles and female sexuality is in her imaginative construction of the character of Mrs Skinner.

Mrs Skinner, like Mrs Curtis and indeed most of the characters in the novel, is presented only through Olivia's imaginings. Olivia is not allowed to visit her because she "had a past" (p70) and still dresses and behaves in ways which are taboo in the Home Counties' village in which the novel is set, therefore Olivia can only "meet" Mrs Skinner through her powers of imaginative dramatisation. Both Olivia and the more conventional Kate are attracted to Mrs Skinner and long to be able to go to tea with her. It appears that they project their own

⁹ Olivia appears to be a little afraid of learning about sex, although clearly the topic exerts a horrific fascination for her. For example when her dressmaker begins to make vaguely lewd remarks about women's bosoms, Olivia is temporarily horrified: "An inner Miss Robinson seemed to peer out suddenly, give a lewd nudge, whisper: Come on now! How much do you know? And for a moment a whole train of surreptitious words (such as fornication, and White Slave Traffic), shameful images, obscure warnings (such as, Never travel alone with a man in a railway carriage) seemed - horrors! - about to become pieced together into the Facts of Life and slipped furtively into her hand by Miss Robinson" (pp50-51).

longings onto Mrs Skinner, and when they meet in the street, they read their own desire in her manner and imagine that she knows exactly the position which she, and they, are in:

Each time she seemed to shrug her shoulders: though all she did was to greet one in passing with a friendly but ironic smile, a tiny shake of the head at once humorous and dignified; and straight on she went, leaving in her wake more than a whiff of camelia [sic]: something impalpable that seemed to surround her always, to trail after her, making hunger: a promise of comfort; as if, heaping the fire, drawing curtains, lighting soft lamps, she were saying in that voice of hers: Yes. Yes. How foolish. What a pity. Never mind. Drink. Eat. Rest. I know. I know... and so smoothing out furrows of thought, brushing away anxious questions. (p72)

This passage, like the description of Mrs Curtis, uses a long sentence which stretches out to include a list of details about Mrs Skinner. Multiple use of the colon and semi-colon makes the sentence divide and subdivide. One might expect each image to move closer to Mrs Skinner, beginning with the general and ending with specific details, like a camera zooming in on its subject. This is not exactly what happens, however. The sentence does have affinities with a cinematic convention, but it is the convention of the tracking shot which follows a character walking along the street, then cuts to that character upon arrival at his or her destination, in this case, her own home. We have seen that Lehmann describes her work as cinematic in a way which specifically allies cinematic qualities with a fragmentary vision which offers no synthesizing truth (see Chapter 1, above). In the context of the above description of Mrs Skinner in Invitation to the Waltz, the cinematic style blocks the passage to "truth" because it is a reminder that the passage is a fiction: the mixing of media, that is, the use of cinematic conventions in a written text, foregrounds the constructed nature of

the image and emphasises its fictionality. Furthermore, like the description of Mrs Curtis quoted above, the passage is narrated in free indirect speech, so that it seems as if we are at least partially getting Olivia's viewpoint as well as the external narrator's - as an image in Olivia's daydreams, the character of Mrs Skinner is a doubly fictional creation. In addition, Mrs Skinner is like a Hollywood idol to Olivia: remote, mysterious, promising excitement and revelations of forbidden sexuality.¹⁰ The role which Olivia imagines for herself is the conventional masculine role of being soothed by a seductive female who provides a refuge from the harsh realities of life outside her home. This is one similarity between Olivia's images of Mrs Skinner and Mrs Curtis, for although Mrs Skinner's seductiveness is very different to Mrs Curtis's matronly domesticity, in both of the stereotypes of femininity which Olivia is drawing upon, the female is expected to fulfill the role of soother, refuge-provider, haven from the world.

So, the first sentence of this passage presents Olivia's imaginative grasp of Mrs Skinner's status. However, despite ending on the word "Yes", the tone of the sentence is not one of triumphant homing in on the truth: the "as if" makes it clear that this imagined picture can only be tentatively linked to Mrs Skinner's character. The exclamations, imperatives and claims to "know" which are attributed to the voice of Mrs Skinner are pure speculation on Olivia's part.

¹⁰ The book was first published in 1932. In that year, cinema audiences totalled 60 million, the big production companies had recently switched to talkies, and the star system was booming (see Wood, 1985, pp16 & 19 and Ellis, undated).

Olivia reads meaning into Mrs Skinner's casual greetings and gestures and in the reading process becomes the writer, the creator, of a dramatic image of Mrs Skinner. Olivia's reading strategy is an active one in which she is as much the creator of the text of Mrs Skinner as she is the recipient of the signs which Mrs Skinner seems to give out. However, active as Olivia's reading of Mrs Skinner might be, what she does is to recycle conventional codes and clichés of femininity. I want to suggest, however, that these codes and clichés are, once again, in what I suggest is the characteristic strategy of this novel, being questioned in the very moment when they seem to be simply recycled.

Making Olivia into reader and writer foregrounds the fact that her view of Mrs Skinner is a fictional one. However, some of Olivia's "knowledge" about Mrs Skinner has clearly come from sources outside her own imagination: "Mrs Skinner was absolutely taboo. For she had a past: twice married, twice divorced; literally dozens of co-respondents; cause of at least one suicide among Indian army subalterns [...]" (p70). The use here of such a clichéd and euphemistic phrase as "she had a past" is a signal that Olivia has picked up this image of Mrs Skinner from gossip, either from her parents or in the village. The information is just the sort that is the stuff of gossip and the fragmented nature of the sentence gives the impression that these are snatches of whispered sentences which Olivia has overheard. So, this description of Mrs Skinner, although filtered through Olivia's consciousness, almost certainly originates in village gossip. Thus, it is not just in Olivia's mind that Mrs Skinner's identity is constructed; the community in which she lives has also written a part for Mrs

Skinner to play, that of the "woman with a past". It is significant that this is precisely what shocks Olivia about her mother - that she, too, though in a different sense, "had a past". Both of Olivia's fantasy dramatisations centre around questions of feminine sexuality, almost as if she were imaginatively exploring the possibilities in order to be able to recognise where the line between appropriate and inappropriate expressions of that sexuality might conventionally lie. Thus, while Olivia appears to be drawing on very different stereotypes of femininity to create her images of her mother and Mrs Skinner, and while in some ways the past that each is supposed to have had is very different from that attributed to the other, in other ways it is the same kind of past. Each involves the expression of female sexuality through forbidden relationships with the male sex. Olivia imagines her self occupying the male role in her imaginary relationship with Mrs Skinner, perhaps because in the society in which she lives the male role is the only one which appears to present possibilities of expressing sexuality and securing the gratification of one's own desire. Yet, alternatives are envisaged: through her imaginative dramatisation of the "pasts" of Mrs Skinner and her mother, Olivia explores a continuum of possibilities for the expression of her own feminine sexuality and may be groping towards an understanding that Mrs Skinner's scandalous behaviour is simply one stage beyond Mrs Curtis's apparently innocent flirtations and subterfuges.¹¹

The differences between these two images of women is not just that Mrs

¹¹ In Chapter 5, on Dusty Answer, I will discuss more fully the connections between apparently very different images of femininity.

Skinner apparently allowed her sexuality freer expression, but that she resolutely refuses to "settle down" and conform to the image of the respectable, middle-class "lady".¹² Indeed, Olivia appears to imagine that Mrs Skinner deliberately flouts her unconventionality. So, even though she now lives "blamelessly" with her husband, "somehow she had not contrived to become at all respectable" (p71). The word "somehow" appears to be Olivia's, and its use exposes her naïvety to the reader. However, the irony is also directed at the community, whose judgments Olivia repeats. Thus, the irony in the word "somehow" suggests that while both Olivia and the village residents may be surprised that Mrs Skinner does not behave "respectably", the reader should not be so. The inference is that, at least in Olivia's view, Mrs Skinner scorns the community's self-righteous moral judgements, even though to do so leads to her being further ostracised. In some ways, Mrs Skinner is literally limited and contained by the language which the village uses to describe her, since the easy judgement that she is "absolutely taboo" restricts her social life. However, it appears that Olivia imagines Mrs Skinner as a character who deliberately lives out her society's fictional version of her life: the role of the "woman with a past" is one which is created for her by convention, but she uses the conventional role to flaunt her

¹² That society would forgive some "giddiness" in young girls which it cannot stomach in mature women becomes clear in the presentation of Olivia and Kate in The Weather in the Streets. Kate, who as a teenager rebels against her mother, for example by ignoring her mother's charge that her underwear is indecent, becomes a respectable middle-class matron herself. The teenage Olivia, on the other hand, lacks Kate's "courage" to defy her mother's code of decency (IW, p129) but it is Olivia, in the later novel, who fails to conform to the code, publicly by separating from her husband and privately by taking a married lover and aborting their child.

contempt for the society which imposes it upon her. In effect, Olivia projects onto her image of Mrs Skinner the strategy which she has already partially realised that she herself must adopt, the strategy of performing femininity like a theatrical role. And while this strategy remains implicit both in Olivia's self-representation and in her representations of other women, in her attempts to make sense of Mrs Skinner's behaviour it appears that the idea of identity as a deliberately assumed role is taking a firmer grip in Olivia's consciousness. In effect, Olivia's image of Mrs Skinner is one of a woman employing an Irigarayan strategy of mimicry, assuming one stereotype of femininity as her identity, not in acceptance of the limitations of that stereotype, but as a strategy to flaunt difference, and ultimately, to challenge convention.¹³ Olivia's "Mrs Skinner" opposes convention by flaunting the marginal position which society's dominant values assign to her. Thus, in her imaginative construction of Mrs Skinner's character, Olivia begins to envisage possibilities of a feminine self which may be strengthened by exploiting conventional discourses of femininity in order to undermine those very conventions.

Crucially, in its presentation of both Mrs Curtis and Mrs Skinner, the text gives us only Olivia's imaginative dramatisations of their characters. There is no

¹³ It is this which Marie-José Codaccioni is suggesting in the conclusion of her article on the socially marginal status of Lehmann's female characters: "in most of the works of this author, her feminism is not strident, but she wants to show the prison of conventions, between the wars, and to explain the need for a certain form of opposition in marginality" (Codaccioni, 1983, pp145-46). (My translation. The original reads "*la plupart des oeuvres de cet auteur, dont le féminisme n'est pas virulent, mais qui a voulu montrer le carçan des conventions, entre les deux guerres, et expliqué le besoin d'une certain forme d'opposition dans la marginalité.*")

higher textual level where the "real" identities of these characters may be said to exist. There is no level on which their identities are not fictional. Furthermore, they are fictionalised by a character whose own identity is seen as fundamentally and irreducibly a matter of multiple fictions. Thus, the presentation of the minor characters in Invitation to the Waltz goes beyond the commonplace novelistic convention of exposing the public persona as a mask behind which the "true" self is hidden, for in Lehmann's text there is no "true" private self behind the fictionalised public image and even while making use of fictional conventions, the descriptions of Mrs Curtis and, more particularly, of Mrs Skinner, exaggerate some of the social conventions of feminine identity and, in so doing, expose their conventionality.

Again, though, this could be read as a fairly commonplace fictional device, and if the novel does no more than expose the inauthenticity of minor characters in order to contrast that with the authenticity of its central character, then it is doing nothing radical. But while appearing to conform to this conventional fictional technique, Invitation to the Waltz modifies the technique quite significantly. As I have shown, the presentation of Olivia's character not only fails to valorise the notion of an authentic self, but also, at points, radically critiques that notion. This is not a case of inauthentic marginal characters being presented to the reader through the perceptions of an authentic central character. Moreover, this fictional strategy of drawing on established paradigms even while challenging those paradigms is mirrored within the text in the presentation of Mrs Curtis, Mrs Skinner and Olivia. By imagining the ways in

which other female characters perform stereotypes of femininity (the woman with a past, the beautiful, light-headed young girl, the sober matriarch, the dutiful daughter), Olivia explores the images which set the limits within which she may perform her own gender identity. It seems that even her private self must be formed from the public roles which she is invited to play. But although these conventional feminine roles set limits on Olivia's self-construction, by taking active control of the process she would be able to partially break through the limits, just as she imagines Mrs Skinner doing.

I have already shown that Olivia's diary and her response to her reflection in the mirror suggest that she is groping towards an understanding that feminine identity consists of a series of fictional performances. But these private actions are only preparation for the main public event of the novel - Olivia's first ball. More than half of the novel is devoted to description of the evening of the ball, presenting Olivia's actions, thoughts and feelings with a detail which has been claimed as one of the novel's main attractions for its readers.¹⁴ Olivia and Kate are to play the most important roles of their lives to date - that of *débutantes*. The theatrical nature of the evening is underlined from the start of their preparations, with descriptions of the meticulous attention being paid to costume and toilette, not just by the two girls, but by all the members of the household. For it is a role they will play - they are being treated "as if they were authentic *débutantes*" (p117) but their class and economic position means that they are not,

¹⁴ See, for example, the introduction to the Virago edition of the novel, where Janet Watts praises the novel's detailed evocation of the thoughts of a young girl (Watts, 1981, esp ppvi-vii).

in fact, *débutantes*, and throughout the evening their differences from the upper-class guests are continually underlined.¹⁵

Nevertheless, the role is played. Nannie lays out their clothes and runs them a bath, just as if she were a ladies' maid (p117) and their costumes are assembled with the care of performers going on stage. Olivia has practised doing her hair "nightly for the past week" and now, at last, "this was its public *début*" (p129).¹⁶ And it is during the preparations that Olivia reflects upon how difficult it is to achieve the femininity which Kate appears to achieve effortlessly. Hence, while Kate has created an image so perfect that Olivia comments "You look like the girl on the cover of a Special Spring Number" (p133), Olivia is reduced to hanging her head out of the window in order to let the breeze blow away her mistake in pouring perfume on her hair (p135).¹⁷

¹⁵ For example, the girls realise that now that their schooldays are behind them they will no longer be close friends with Marigold Spencer, the daughter of Lord and Lady Spencer: "The friends she flew to join now were not their friends. They were those who would tread with her the prosperous, mapped road of coming out..." (p161). Later, Olivia experiences difficulty carrying on conversations because she does not go to the theatre, has no idea what Brooklands is, and makes some apparently unforgivable *faux pas* about hunting (pp185-86 & 208-9).

¹⁶ The Weather in the Streets describes Olivia's next visit to Meldon, ten years later. Then, sitting at the Spencers' dinner table, she thinks, "Now all was presented as in a film or a play in which one is at one and the same time actor and infinitely detached spectator" (WS, pp73-74). Dinah Burkett in The Echoing Grove also imagines herself as both actor and spectator of a film (see Chapter 6, below).

¹⁷ Judy Simons argues that Olivia's ideas about femininity are drawn from Daily Mirror serials (Simons, 1992, p70). It is in one of these that she gets the idea of scenting her hair. Kate, on the other hand, has been reading articles in that newspaper which describe how to create a feminine image (see p124, quoted above). Thus, Olivia's failure to perform conventional femininity appears to be

Because Olivia has such difficulty constructing an appropriate identity for herself from conventional images of femininity, when she gets to the ball she allows other people to define her. Each person who engages in conversation with her appears to be talking to a different Olivia. At first she is not conscious of this process, but as the evening wears on she begins to be aware that she has played a series of public roles, none of which could be described as "authentically" hers.¹⁸ Olivia begins the evening with doubts about how she looks and whether she can dance (p178) and when the distant cousin whom her mother has dredged up as a partner for the two girls proves to be an embarrassment, Olivia's sense of self suffers a crisis: "she felt herself turning and tossing on a dark feverish sea, all bearings lost: a worse disintegration even than she had envisaged. Keep calm. Carry it off. Here against the statue, just at the cold spot of contact, she felt a core begin to reassemble. I am still here. Her beating heart quietened down" (p180). Olivia's identity has completely deserted her here, so much so that it takes the cold marble touch of the statue to convince her that she is still there at all. Yet already the phrase "carry it off" suggests that she has begun to realise that she must play a role to hide her vulnerability.

Nevertheless, a little later, when Lady Spencer finds her alone and introduces her to a young man called Peter Jenkin, Olivia cannot carry it off sufficiently to engage him in polite conversation and Jenkin takes advantage of

linked to "faulty" reading habits. I will return to this point later in the chapter.

¹⁸ In The Weather in the Streets, she is allowed some understanding of this and describes herself as "so peculiar that evening - so in a flux.... seeing myself in dozens of distorting mirrors...." (WS, p134).

her obvious naïveté in order to offload all of his self-pitying and arrogant fantasies about himself. After discussing his writing at some length (I will return to this discussion later) Jenkin finally deigns to talk about Olivia, but when he does so he quite blatantly projects his own views about femininity onto her character. Firstly, he decides that he is going to rename her (apparently something he does for all of his friends). Olivia fails to see that by renaming her he is trying to make her into the kind of woman he wants her to be, and thinks, "Berenice [the name he has chosen for her] was an uncommon name too. Was it meant in a complimentary way? One must just hope" (p196). But after making some very critical remarks about the other people in the room, Jenkin expresses his distaste at the lack of sex-appeal of English virgins, and turns his attention to Olivia's image. He tells her to wear make-up to hide her schoolgirl complexion and claims that she should meet his friend Inez, whose style in make-up and clothes he claims to dictate. At this point, for the first time, Olivia has the strength of mind not to blindly accept what he says, although she does not have the courage to tell him so: "She was silent, thinking how much she would prefer not to meet Inez" (p198). Mercilessly, Jenkin goes on to destroy any vestiges of confidence which Olivia has managed to retain:

'That dress of yours, now,' he said. 'It won't do, will it? Honestly...?'

She attempted a smile; but she felt strangled.

'I'm afraid it doesn't fit very well.'

He went on:

'Besides, the colour. So crude. I never let Inez wear anything but black at night. Occasionally white.'

'I don't like black,' she said in weak, high, defiant voice. He disregarded this and continued unmoved:

'I dare say it's not your fault. You've never been taught. It takes a

man to teach a woman how to dress. The majority of them don't develop a clothes-sense till they've had a lover. Or a face either, for that matter. No woman under twenty-five's worth looking at.' (p199)

For Jenkin, the only valuable feminine role is that of the sexual siren, that is, it is a role which is a direct response to the sexual drives of men. This is why he does not like chaste-looking young girls with schoolgirl complexions, because their obvious sexual purity still holds possibilities that they will refuse to allow their identities to be shaped by the sexual appetites of men. A woman who is not actively heterosexual is described as literally faceless - to Jenkin, she is nothing.

Olivia's response to this diatribe is submissive:

He wasn't studying her any more - that was the only comfort. Oh, to rip off this scorching dress, to sink through the carpet! Of course it was absurd to take him seriously. What could a man like him know about clothes? Kate would have known how to put him in his place in two two's. But I don't feel like that. I can't feel indignant at his awful rudeness.... His cold and somehow acid voice was like a probe searching into sore places: but she must bare her breast. She was his appointed and - yes- in the last recoil his willing victim. She had to hear, had to suffer him, because he was so certain. That was the truth about the dress, then - about the whole business: I'm ludicrous, a sort of bungling amateur. I can't compete with the real thing. (pp199-200)

There are two interesting points about Olivia's reaction. The first is that she appears to have accepted the traditional feminine role of masochistic victim of masculine sadism. This is Olivia at the lowest point in her search for identity. Jenkin has found her weak spot, which lies precisely in her lack of certainty about her own identity and worth. To be completely without identity is to leave herself vulnerable and open to attack. The second interesting point about the passage is the way Olivia chooses to characterise her lack of a stable sense of

self: firstly, she thinks of herself as an amateur. Implicit in this description is a continuation of her earlier explicit comparison between herself and Kate, who would have challenged Jenkin's judgement. I would suggest that the reason for Kate's ability to stand up to others who try to shape her lies in her self-confident and practised assumption of a feminine identity which she feels is hers. However, as we have already seen, and as the word "amateur" suggests, the difference between Kate and Olivia is that Kate treats her feminine identity like a job. If Olivia is an amateur, then Kate must be a "professional" woman - that is, she has accepted a position in which her chance of success in life will lie in her ability to fulfill appropriate feminine roles.¹⁹ Olivia, on the other hand, feels that she "can't compete with the real thing" (p200). It is those who have a firm grasp of how to perform the work of femininity that Olivia cannot compete with; by characterising these women as "the real thing" Olivia appears to be assenting to the viewpoint which equates femininity with femaleness and regards the less-than-perfectly-feminine woman as "not a real woman".

Olivia pulls herself out of the trough of masochism and passive acceptance of Jenkin's judgements by thinking about the aspects of her life which bring her fulfilment. These include fairly conventional feminine comforts: "home; and my hyacinths that'll bloom by Christmas", but go on to list very unfeminine ones: "books; and Monsieur Berton saying, My favourite pupil; and writing poetry...."

¹⁹ Kate's acceptance of traditional feminine roles perhaps explains why she cannot choose a career for herself and why Mrs Curtis allows her indecision to continue when Olivia, by contrast, must study and prepare herself for work: "For all young girls should be fitted for a career; though Kate's remained by tacit consent unspecified" (p64).

(p200). In reading, learning and writing will Olivia's strength lie - activities which, while encouraged "in moderation" are not thought to be appropriate as the driving force of a young women's life (see Chapter 5, on Lehmann's Dusty Answer).

Armed with the thought of these things, Olivia can begin to ignore the blow to her self-confidence that Jenkin's attack on her femininity has wrought: "She began to bleed secretly in her self-esteem. She felt it: a lesion through which virtue was going to seep away unstanched. But it must be disregarded. She felt quite composed again, unusually so, in a surface way" (p200). Olivia regains the strength to play the role again, but as she plays it it is subtly revised. After leaving Jenkin, she is willing, at first, to say anything to win approval, even to claim that foxhunting sounds like fun, "Denying acute feelings about foxes to curry favour" (p210). These words are not directly attributed to Olivia, but it does begin to seem as if she is again starting to watch and listen to herself playing the game of femininity and to reflect on her own performance. Later, when her cousin Etty's partner admits that he has danced with Olivia on instructions from Etty so that Etty and Kate can go off and talk without her, Olivia appears to accept the insult again, but this time she is conscious of what she is doing: "'It was very kind of you both.' (What am I saying? What's the matter with me?) 'You really shouldn't have bothered'" (p219). She begins to lose her naïve way of accepting at face value everything that is said to her and gradually gains some insight into what other people might be like behind their social masks. With Peter Jenkin, she had accepted his judgement of her as

almost entirely accurate. With this partner, she realises that the man is not reacting to her personally and is able to assert herself a little. When he tells her, "You jeunes filles are rather pets", she replies, "I'm not so young as all that" and when he does get personal by saying that she is a "joke" she is at least able to realise that his view of her is a completely false one coloured by his own conceit: "He thinks I like him so awfully" (p233).

Despite her dawning understanding of social and sexual relations, Olivia does still fail to understand all of the references to the complications of the adult world and she does still court favour. Her need to be liked is most obvious when she dances several dances with an elderly man called Mr Verity. At first, her attention to him appears to be genuine, then as he starts to try to elicit her sympathy and flattery, she begins to realise that she is not supposed to answer honestly, but that he has prepared her script in advance. Her first inkling that this is the case comes when she enquires if he is getting tired. Having unwittingly insulted him, she has to soothe his ego: "She looked up at him admiringly, for he was still a bit put out, suspicious" (p233). The text does not tell us that this is a deliberate act of role-play on Olivia's part, but there is a hint that this is the case. A little later, she realises that he is looking for predetermined answers, and tries to correct another mistake: "But this wasn't the right answer. A silence ensued, and she amended" (p234). For a short time, Olivia plays the role he wants her to play, but soon it gets more difficult to do so: "She tried to give him a look of bright interest, but it was getting harder. He does need so much bolstering up" (p235). In the second sentence of this

quotation, the move into the present tense indicates that this is a direct report of Olivia's thoughts and that she now knows exactly the role she should be playing. That this role of soother, comforter, flatterer of the male ego is a feminine one is confirmed when Mr Verity tells her, "I knew you were sympathetic. Your voice told me so. Gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman" (p236).²⁰

Eventually, Olivia begins to recognise the old man's self-centredness, his literary pretensions and his snobbishness, and her spirit rebels against becoming his victim:

Her senses shrank away from him. They seemed to shout their frantic distaste into his heedless, his leathery ear. I don't like you. I don't like touching you. I hate dancing with you. I can't bear you. She gave up smiling; almost gave up answering. Her face set stiffly, in utter dejection. Next dance I'll say I'm booked and go and hide in the cloakroom. But he'll know it's an excuse. It'll hurt his feelings. He'll go away and think, I'm a lonely old man. Oh, help! help! Will no one help? (p239)

Olivia cannot take control of the situation and do what she knows would be best for herself, but in realising that she need not always try to please other people, she has taken her first step towards determining the roles which she will play. She has settled on a firm viewpoint of her own here, even if she cannot express that view.

Thus far, then, Olivia's behaviour at the dance suggests that she cannot yet put into practice her earlier insights into the performative nature of feminine identity. This is hardly surprising, given the tentative way that she groped

²⁰ This is the aspect of femininity which Olivia imagines her mother and Mrs Skinner have in common (see above).

towards those insights when writing her diary or looking at her reflection in the mirror. At the dance, she seems gradually to become more conscious of her own involvement in a feminine masquerade, but she cannot yet turn that into a strategy of mimicry as she had imagined Mrs Skinner doing. Part of the reason for this is clear: Olivia's love of reading, which others seem to regard as obsessive and self-indulgent, shapes her reactions, so that she reacts to the world as to a piece of literature and to other people as to characters in the slightly melodramatic Victorian novel which she most enjoys.²¹

The first sign that Olivia's reactions to other characters and situations are coloured by her melodramatic reading habits occurs at the start of her conversation with old Mr Verity, when at his first hint that she should feel sorry for him, she thinks, "He must have had a Great Sorrow, and put it behind him" (p232).²² Here, the capitalization of "Great Sorrow" indicates that the narrator is making fun of Olivia, and her reaction is certainly shown to be inadequate in the old gentleman's case. However, Olivia's bookish reactions are most obvious when she dances with a young man who has been blinded in the First World War and here they are not made fun of in quite the same way. Olivia looks over to the young man's wife, expecting to find traces of the Victorian heroine in her:

²¹ For example, two local girls call Olivia a "slacker" when they ask her why she missed the last meeting of the Guides, and Olivia is afraid to admit that the reason she missed it was "Because I preferred to spend the afternoon on the schoolroom sofa reading East Lynne and eating nut-milk chocolate...." (pp214-15)

²² Simons argues that Olivia's first diary-entry exhibits "the literary influences that have helped to muddy her grasp on her own identity" (Simons, 1992, p72).

"Olivia searched in vain for traces of spiritual intensity, renunciation, suffering, such as might fitly mark the face of one devoting, sacrificing all to a blind husband" (p249). Thinking of his situation, of the fact that he has never seen his wife and child, Olivia thinks, "One must try not to let that seem too pathetic. It was the sort of thing that brought a too-easy sob in her throat" (p253). This seems to mirror exactly her reaction to David Copperfield:

In a trance of voluptuous anguish, and for the fifth time, Olivia read David Copperfield. Her throat ached. Loudly she sniffed. She lay dead, his mother: so beautiful, so girlish, with the dead baby in her arms. Peggotty had given him her last message. And now he was alone in the world - a broken heart, helpless, misunderstood: no, worse than alone - in the relentless grip of fiends. Oh, those Murdstones, those Murdstones!... Oh, what ghastly suffering. And ghastlier to follow. Peggotty, last support, to be taken from him. Hot tears dripped on to her jumper, on to the page. Her nose swelled. No more, no more. But more there must be. Read on one must. She read on. Agony sank to mere discomfort. Relief came. It was over. No more crises till Dora dies.

'Enjoying yourself?' said Kate.

'Mm.' She laid down the book and blew her nose. 'Oh dear! I wonder if I shall howl over it just as much when I'm seventy.' She sighed, felt suddenly cheerful. (pp97-98)

Olivia's enjoyment of her anguish is being gently mocked here, but the detailed nature of the description of her thoughts also invites the reader to sympathise with her, even identify with her, while smiling at her. Yet although this is clearly an inadequate way to react to real situations, and is shown to be so with Mr Verity, her melodramatic thoughts about the blind man, Timmy Douglas, do not block her passage to understanding him and reacting to him with more genuine care than anyone else does.²³ Helping him, she loses her self-consciousness and

²³ Thus, while the novel makes fun of a text and a reader's reaction to that text which could both be called sentimental and over-emotional, Invitation to the Waltz appears to suggest that derision of that text and reader would be harsh

feels "important, self-assured" (p257) and is able to "chat[ed] to him without effort or embarrassment" (p258).

In fact, the text suggests that it is through literature that Olivia will find her own identity. Crucially, it was by thinking about her books and her writing that Olivia was able to gain her composure after Peter Jenkin's attack on her (see above). And despite his cruelty, she recognises in Jenkin, who claims to be a poet, something which she has already glimpsed in herself, so that when the others laugh at his intellectual pretensions, she thinks:

If sides must be taken, it was not their side one could take. Of course he was awful, a mass of affectation; and then so cruel; and doing his hair in such a dreadful way. He looked as if he took no exercise. He was an outcast, made for hatred and derision. But - what was it then that made one feel that, with just a few more clues provided, one could get to know him, understand his language? I should soon feel at ease with a person like him; receive his confidence,. Be sorry for him. Not think him absurd and contemptible at all. There must be something shady in me too, then, something decadent. I'm different from them, though they don't know it. She felt the cleavage, deep, uneasy. I'm not going to do the things they'll do. (pp213-14)

Olivia did not dare to tell Jenkin that she, too, writes both poetry and prose but although she thinks of her own writing as "paltry efforts" (p193) it does appear that it is in writing, or at least as part of the literary world that Jenkin inhabits, that Olivia will find her own feminine identity.²⁴ Not insignificantly, when she

and unfair. Indirectly, then, this novel of Lehmann's comments on the reception of her own works.

²⁴ However, it would appear that it will not be in writing modernist texts. Jenkin describes the review he set up at Oxford, The Attack, claims that "Our aim is of course to create an entirely modern aesthetics - assert the new forms" (p194). Since little sympathy is elicited for Jenkin's character, it would appear that the text is inviting the reader to view some intellectually pretentious exponents of the modernist movement with just as little favour.

again suffers an identity crisis and imagines that she hates life and that she is "nothing" (p270) what saves her is Rollo Spencer coming along and taking her into his father's library. She describes her reading tastes to Rollo: "I like poetry specially. The Brontes and Dickens are my favourite novelists, but I like Thackeray too, specially Vanity Fair - and George Eliot and Jane Austen. I don't like Scott" (p277).²⁵ A shared love of literature allows Olivia to "penetrate[d] suddenly to the innermost core of the house" and although she is embarrassed and can think of little to say when Sir John shows her his signed first editions by "Wordsworth, Byron, Dickens and other celebrities" (p280) she is able to hold a direct and genuinely friendly conversation with Rollo and his father.

When they leave the library, it is not long before Rollo is summoned by the beautiful young woman who has been his partner for most of the evening, but Olivia no longer feels vulnerable and afraid to be alone. She goes back to Timmy Douglas, the blind man. This time the free indirect speech is impossible to attribute - it could be Olivia's, or it could be the narrator's: "And they waltzed together to the music made for joy. She danced with him in love and sorrow. He held her close to him, and he was far away from her, far from the music, buried and indifferent. She danced with his youth and his death" (pp287-88).

²⁵ Rollo, on the other hand, claims to "rather enjoy a tussle with old Scott" and that his two favourite books are Tristram Shandy and Tom Jones (p277). In The Weather in the Streets, Olivia tells Rollo that Tristram Shandy is "one of the things men try to make one feel inferior about" (WS, p18). And in A Note in Music, Tristram Shandy is one of the texts in Hugh Miller's very conventionally masculine library (NM, p66). In Chapter 4, I will discuss the way that The Swan in the Evening assigns gender to texts.

If these words come directly from Olivia, then she has reverted to her rather literary way of reacting to Timmy - but if they are the narrator's words, then it is the narrator who is presenting these romanticised images. Either way, the romanticism is not so overdone as before and the narrator does not appear to be making fun of it. And, in fact, Olivia follows her dance with Timmy with an action which shows insight and compassion, when she runs to tell Marigold that Timmy is waiting to dance with her (pp288-90).

There is no point in the evening at which Olivia could be said to have "found herself", yet she reaches a degree of composure, calm and self-reliance which has been uncharacteristic of her. She finds an armchair on a landing and sinks into it:

She heard the last reverberations of the dance roll far away from her. Not one blown flurry from one wave of it will reach me any more. I don't care anymore. I don't mind in the least. To have come to a place of not caring was very soothing, very peaceful.... I've come to it because I'm not going away empty. I've had a lot really, one way and another. What was it that, at the last, had made almost a richness? Curious fragments, odds and ends of looks, speeches.... Nothing for myself really. Rollo leaving me to go off to Nicola. Rollo and his father smiling at one another. Peter crying, saying, 'Are you my friend?...' Kate looking so happy.... Waltzing with Timmy. Marigold flying downstairs to him. Yes, I can say I've enjoyed myself. (pp291-92)²⁶

Olivia has had the kind of evening which Kate could never understand. Having spent the whole evening with Tony Heriot, Kate, measuring social success by heterosexual success, can only think "Poor Olivia" (p295). Yet Mrs Curtis recognises that Olivia has had the more successful evening : "Really, Olivia

²⁶ In fact, Olivia's worst fears about the dance (see p127, quoted above) have proved to be grounded, yet she has discovered ways to cope with social "failure" and alternative sources of satisfaction.

seemed to have done extremely well" (p299). When, next day, Kate is asked to the Hunt Ball, Mrs Curtis realises why Olivia seems to have met more people and spent more time with the Spencers and Olivia also recognises that in beginning her heterosexual career, Kate has left her behind, but she also feels as if a new phase of her own life is about to begin:

Oh Kate! She's not going to tell me. Everything's changing, everything's different [...] I'm left behind, but I don't care. I've got plenty to think about too. Everything crowded into her head at once. Timmy, Marigold, Rollo, Nicola, Archie, Peter, Maurice - words, looks, movements - simply extraordinary. Life - She felt choked. Oh Kate! We won't tell each other.... She leapt across a mound. Everything's going to begin [...] A winged gigantic runner with a torch was running from a great distance to meet her, swooping over the low hills, skimming from them veil after veil of shadow, touching them to instant ethereal shapes of light. On it came, over ploughed field and fallow. The rooks flashed sharply, the hare and his shadow swerved in sudden sunlight. In a moment it would be everywhere. Here it was. She ran into it. (pp301-2)

Kate has had the traditional feminine success of dancing every dance and attracting special attention from a member of the male sex, but Olivia recognises that this is not the only kind of success which she could achieve, nor, it is implied, is it the only kind of growing up which teenage girls can do. Confirmed in her traditional feminine role, Kate is now separate from Olivia and, Olivia believes, they will never again be as close. For Kate did not choose to run away to gossip with Etty simply because she felt that Olivia was too young to join in (pp218-19). Kate chose Etty's falseness (see, for example, p169) over Olivia's company because she knew that Olivia will never quite be one of the feminine "club". By the end of the novel, Olivia appears to know this, too. Olivia has been allowed glimpses into the masquerade of femininity, and there is a hint in the novel's conclusion, as in her own thoughts when thinking about Peter Jenkin

(see above), that the life she runs to greet will not be one of adherence to the traditional feminine roles which Kate will embrace.²⁷

We have seen, then, that in Invitation to the Waltz, we are presented with a sustained and detailed critique of conventional feminine roles, both through the presentation of Olivia herself and through Olivia's fantasies about other female characters. She is allowed some insight into the nature of feminine roles but in the episode at the dance Olivia continues to struggle with available discourses of what constitutes appropriate gender performance, sometimes under more or less explicit coercion by men. By the end of the dance, she has not been able to create for herself such an obviously defiant performance of gender identity as she imagined for Mrs Skinner, but the fact that she was able to imagine that alternative, performative mode of identity, and the fact that it is hinted that her own identity will be very different to the traditionally feminine one which Kate will assume, suggests that the possibilities for Olivia are more open. At times Olivia seems to see through the masquerade of femininity, but it is only in her diary that she is able to perform a self-conscious and deliberate mimicry of the identity which others believe should be hers. This, and the fact that it is her reading habits which appear to bolster her fragile sense of self and her

²⁷ As I have already suggested, this is confirmed in The Weather in the Streets. In the later novel, Kate has settled down to become the wife of a country doctor and mother of several children while Olivia has transgressed the codes of appropriate behaviour for one of her class and sex by separating from her husband, leading a rather unconventional life with a group of artists and ultimately, by having an affair with Rollo Spencer and aborting his child. (Interestingly, her affair with Rollo appears to get in the way of her attempts to write.)

imaginative capabilities which allow her to read and write Mrs Skinner's defiant gender performance, are hints that a subversive performance of femininity might be intimately allied with writing. The next chapter of this thesis will explore that alliance.

CHAPTER 4: THE SWAN IN THE EVENING AND THE FEMININE

WRITING SELF

I have shown that in Invitation to the Waltz conventional definitions of acceptable feminine roles are both accepted and revised. In particular, the text delineates a notion of femininity as an Irigarayan performance. While Kate comes close to an unselfconscious masquerade of femininity, Olivia is much more aware of her own and others' processes of identity-construction and in her moments of deepest insight she seems to see feminine identity as a series of performances which women can consciously decide to play. For Olivia, those moments of insight come chiefly from her powers of reading and of writing, but Invitation to the Waltz does not specify exactly how those activities help her to be conscious that femininity consists of a series of roles. Nor does that text provide a full picture of what the feminine identity thus played might be like, for although by the end of the novel Olivia appears to be about to embark upon a process of identity-construction, in the course of the novel she takes only small and tentative steps towards doing so. As a feminist critic I am particularly interested in how a sense of a strong feminine identity can be built by women engaging in the processes of writing and reading. What I propose to do now is to look at a text which develops and makes more explicit some of the earlier text's hints about how women writers and readers may forge strong identities as writers and readers from the available resources of feminine roles. Specifically, I will analyse in more detail the status of the writing self in Lehmann's

autobiographical work, The Swan in the Evening (London, revised edition 1982; 1st published 1967).¹

1. FEMINIST THEORIES OF FEMALE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

There is a tendency for some feminist critics, particularly those who value "authentic" representations of female experience, to take female-authored fiction as straightforwardly autobiographical. Such critics tend to read backwards and forwards from fiction to life in a way that recognises no distinction between the two.² It will be part of my argument that female writers often do break down the distinctions between fiction and "true" autobiography, but to theorise this it is not sufficient to discuss autobiographical elements in female-authored fiction - additionally, it is necessary to examine the ways that female autobiography makes use of techniques and devices more conventionally thought of as the province of fictional texts. Like Olivia Curtis, in telling a story about her self, the female autobiographer blurs the distinction between self-construction and

¹ Analysis of the relationship between a writer's life and work is an important strand in feminist criticism of female writing, and often provides the motivation for that criticism. See, for example, Hanscombe and Smyers, who justify their biographical account of female modernists by invoking a model of art and artist's life as a seamless whole: "I remember becoming instantly obsessed by the sense of connections: the interdependence of their actual lives and of the work they produced and provided; the interdependence between 'art' and 'life' which resulted in so much autobiographical fiction; the interdependence between personal bonding and aesthetic theory which resulted in so much new poetry" (Hanscombe & Smyers, 1987, *xiv*).

² See, for example, Elaine Showalter's discussion of Dorothy Richardson's life and work (Showalter, 1982, pp248-62).

fictionalisation, so that feminine identity becomes a matter of story-telling.³ In particular, it is necessary to analyse the way that the very act of writing an autobiography involves constructing the "story" of a life. However, before I go on to do that for The Swan in the Evening, I need to make brief reference to some feminist theories of autobiography.

It is a commonplace of recent theories of autobiography, both feminist and otherwise, that it is in the very nature of the genre to open up a gap between the writing self and the self being written, despite the fact that a text's status as autobiography rests on the two being presented as identical.⁴ Linda Anderson summarises such theories: "What these critics are stressing is the tautological nature of autobiography; the idea that emerges in their work is that the autobiographical self is a fictional construct within the text which can neither have its origins anterior to the text nor indeed coalesce with its creator" (Anderson, 1986, p59). Describing the autobiographer's writing process, Anderson suggests that "instead of referring to himself he [sic] creates himself at every moment afresh within the text" (Anderson 1986, p59). As I have suggested with reference to Olivia Curtis's diary-keeping and her other self-fictionalising activities, writing about the self both creates a self and at the same

³ This story-telling is a radical performance of femininity, in that it is a deliberate and sustained attempt to make use of received definitions of feminine identity in order both to build a strong sense of self and to critique those available definitions of what that self should be. However, in this chapter I will stick to the term "story-telling" rather than "performance" to avoid clumsiness.

⁴ For a brief discussion of this trend in recent theories of autobiography see Anderson, 1986, pp58-59.

time divides that self into at least two "selves". Rita Felski points out that such a fragmentation of the self, accompanied by a refusal to tell a linear, teleological story of one's life, has been identified by some feminist critics as the distinguishing quality of a particularly female form of autobiography. However, in the modern period, Felski argues, the subjectivisation and fragmentation of texts, and the breakdown of generic norms, has meant that autobiography in general has assumed these qualities. Thus, "Modern autobiographies are often fragmented and highly subjective, and the boundaries between fiction and autobiography become difficult to demarcate" (Felski, 1989, p87). I will show that this is the case in Lehmann's work, but it is also important to note that Felski seems to be arguing that in the modern period both male and female autobiographers exhibit some of those qualities which have been identified as "feminine". This again raises the problem of how to reclaim those often devalued feminine qualities as not only characteristic, but also as valuable aspects of female-authored texts.

Anderson offers some help here. She argues that female autobiographers, because of the nature of their social status and the effects of dominant definitions of appropriate feminine behaviour, are engaged in a gender-specific activity when they write their autobiographies: "It is necessary to take into account the fact that the woman who attempts to write herself is engaged by the nature of the activity itself in re-writing the stories that already exist about her since by seeking to publicise herself she is violating an important cultural construction of her femininity as passive or hidden" (Anderson, 1986, p59). As

I have already argued, women's relationship to subjectivity is different from that of men: for a woman, writing the story of her life is always at least partially an act of defiant self-construction and self-assertion. Like Olivia Curtis, women autobiographers may turn their lives into stories as a way of gaining control of the social construction of their identities. In doing so, they necessarily violate the code which defines feminine identity as passive. Hence, although in this century both male and female autobiographers may make use of the more fragmentary manifestations of the autobiographical genre, such as the episodic diary, their reasons for doing so, and the effects of doing so, may be quite different in the case of male and female writers.⁵ The woman writer, as I have suggested, could be seen as less engaged in rejecting the concept of self through this fragmentation and more engaged instead in trying to create a consciously constructed self from the fragments. This is not to claim that a woman autobiographer works through her own life in order to find her "true" identity.

Quite the contrary, as Anderson makes clear:

The myth of the self which recent theorists have questioned may not be present for [the female autobiographer] in the same way; it is more difficult for her to believe in a self that can exist before writing, a self that is unified and continuous. Autobiography may self-consciously exist for her as an alternative place of identification. This means that there may be a greater formal awareness in her writing, an emphasis on the self-reflexiveness of the writing, the idea of the self as written. In writing herself the woman is also reaching into writing and her story will more obviously be informed by a dynamics of self-becoming. But there is not a point of arrival; she can neither transcend herself nor attain to some authentic fullness of being. (Anderson, 1986, pp59-60)

⁵ For detailed discussion of the fragmentary nature of women's autobiographical writing, see Anderson, 1986 and Felski, 1989, pp96-100.

Here, Anderson is arguing that women writers show a gendered awareness of the nature of the self as written, as constructed through writing. The "dynamics of self-becoming" to which she refers is, I suggest, closely related to the dynamics we have seen operating in the presentation of female characters in Invitation to the Waltz. Such a dynamics may be employed in a process of creating and re-creating a strong, socially effective, sense of feminine self, while, simultaneously foregrounding the way that self is constructed in language and ideologies which attempt to predefine and devalue femininity. In that text, the "dynamics of self-becoming" is, in effect, a dynamics of performance in which femininity is consciously played (with/upon) to strengthen the self while simultaneously making it clear that the self cannot be fully contained within that notion of femininity.

As I have suggested, in Invitation to the Waltz, the presentation of Olivia's diary-writing blurs the distinction between self-construction and fictionalisation by drawing upon notions of femininity as performance. In terms of the distinctions between genres of writing, we will see that a "dynamics of self-becoming" necessarily blurs the distinction between autobiography and fiction. In her reading of Colette's work, Nancy Miller provides further clues as to the relationship between this erosion of barriers between autobiography and fiction and the renegotiation of definitions of femininity. Miller argues that Colette reformulates the autobiographical genre by inserting a space between the textual and the referential "I" of her autobiography, thus challenging the reader's competence to interpret the "truth" of the life depicted (Miller, 1980, pp 260 & 259). In thus breaking down the boundaries between "true" autobiography and

fiction, Miller argues, Colette is writing "the story of a woman who sees conventional female self-definition as a text to be rewritten" (Miller, 1980, p266). Thus, Colette's crossing of the boundaries between autobiography and fiction is, for Miller, precisely what allows Colette to redefine femininity. Miller argues that Colette's fictionalisation of herself challenges the reader's competence to distinguish life from art (Miller, 1980, p259). Reading autobiography no longer involves finding out the "truth" of any life, since the text is not a description, but an inscription of a self which recognises itself to be a projected and approximate cultural fabrication (Miller, 1980, p271). Destabilising the narrative voice of the text thus allows the writer to question the cultural context which governs the production of feminine identity. I would reformulate the terms of Miller's argument and argue that in telling a story which plays with a feminine self, the female autobiographer is able both to point to the constructed nature of conventional definitions of feminine identity and to exert some control over those constructions. This is a useful formulation, for thinking of the feminine autobiographical self in this way means that although criticism of such autobiography must necessarily discuss "the writer", that writer is not to be viewed as having existence prior to the text, since the writing self is created only through the process of inscribing or playing the self in the text. The reader must therefore recognise that the author she reads off from a text is a construct of that text and of that reading and cannot necessarily be identified with an individual existing prior to the text. However, the reader does still have a concept of "the writing self" which facilitates discussion of the feminine identity inscribed in the

text. So, what reading of autobiography can offer is a way to analyse the identity of the feminine writing self. It is this aspect of Lehmann's work which will be the focus for this chapter. Throughout the chapter, I will refer to the self who is played through the telling of the life-story as "the autobiographer". This term, I use to designate a feminine writing self who both is, and is not, the living author of the text.

2. THE SWAN IN THE EVENING

Lehmann wrote one work which is classified as autobiography, The Swan in the Evening. The text bears the subtitle "Fragments of an Inner Life" which suggests that this autobiography meets the first of Felski's criteria of the modern autobiography (that it is "fragmented and highly subjective" (Felski, 1989, p87)). We will also see that The Swan in the Evening meets the second of Felski's criteria - that is, that it makes "the boundaries between fiction and autobiography [...] difficult to demarcate" (Felski, 1989, p87).

It is in its structure that The Swan in the Evening makes its first break with autobiographical conventions. The work is divided into four separate sections, which between them deal with the youths of three different women: Lehmann herself, her daughter, Sally and her grand-daughter, Anna. All of the sections relate the autobiographer's thoughts and feelings, while events in the lives of the two younger women are related only insofar as they affect the autobiographer. Nevertheless, to structure the work around the lives of three women, and not just

one, is to break from the expected autobiographical pattern. The first section, dealing with the autobiographer's childhood, consists of a series of apparently unconnected memories. At the beginning of the second section, the autobiographer attempts to analyse the fragmentary content of the preceding section:

What I have put down so far might almost be called sub-autobiographical. It has been like a descent into a vault or cave or crypt, where all is darkness when you first penetrate. Then a torch flares, light is thrown here on a painted fresco, there on a carving or bas-relief; figures in a landscape, real and recognized, yet each with the mystifying impact of symbol in itself, pure of interpretation and interpreter; and able to be caught only just on the outward side of verbal or pictorial existence. Any attempt to treat the findings, or to expose them to more air and light might cause them to vanish altogether. (p65)

This passage suggests that the text is not working in the way that autobiography is conventionally understood to operate, but is working instead at some level beneath that of the public actions which would conventionally be considered to make up a "life". In this text neither life nor autobiography are clear-cut entities. Specifically, the idea that a life, and the autobiographical story of that life, can be separated from art is undermined by the metaphors of the passage. Memories which the narrator dredges from her subconscious are frescoes, carvings, works of art. Similarly, the events of a life are symbols, apparently "pure of interpretation and interpreter", pictures to be viewed without interpretive preconceptions. However, that is not to say that the reader, or the reminiscer, can arrive at a true, unbiased interpretation of these events, for their existence is not fully within the realm of language: they are "only just on the outward side of verbal or pictorial existence". Any attempt to analyse and interpret, to assign

definitive meaning and value, to these memories will potentially destroy them.⁶

So, Lehmann's autobiography claims that its own opening section works at a subconscious, evanescent level at which the distinction between life and art is broken down. Yet the phrase "so far" appears to suggest that what will follow will be different. However, what the autobiographer actually tells the reader about what is to follow is this: "In between this subterranean record and what is still to come lies, I suppose, all the material for an autobiography proper; but it will never be written" (p65). So, she appears to be claiming here that although the following sections of the text may not appear to be working at the same evanescent level as the opening section, yet they will not be "autobiography proper", not autobiography as conventionally understood. The word "proper" provides an important clue as to how this autobiography will be different, for we will see that The Swan in the Evening leaves behind notions of autobiography as the expression of an individual bearing a proper name. Explaining why she has not written "an autobiography proper" (p65), the autobiographer admits that,

so much of my 'life story' has gone, in various intricate disguises, and transmuted almost beyond my own recognition, into my novels, that it would be difficult if not impossible to disentangle 'true' from 'not true'; declare: 'This is pure invention. This partly happened, this very nearly happened, this did happen' - even if I could conceive it to be a worthwhile operation. (pp65-66)

In this passage, the autobiographer makes it clear that she sees the attempt to try to separate life from fiction as both an impossible and an invalid activity.

⁶ The narration thus seems at least partially to be inhabiting a realm which has affinities with a Kristevan semiotic. Indeed, the first memory narrated comes from "so far back that it is much less visual than tactile" (p14).

Even before the construction of the autobiography, her life was a story which she used to inform other stories. In this way, the writing self is identified as that which blurs unremediably the distinction between fact and fiction. The consequence of this for the autobiography is that the possibility of determining the truth of the life being described is radically undermined. Yet elsewhere the autobiographer does seem to be claiming the status of "truth" for her document: "What I am writing is purely a personal testament, based upon experience; scrupulously recorded, and, I trust, consistent" (p31). Or again, "The only question that you will really feel like asking is: 'Is it a true story?' - and I promise you it is true" (p141). In these quotations, the autobiographer appears to be claiming for her text at least one of the attributes of "autobiography proper" - that is, faithfulness to the life being recorded. She seems to want to stress that this is one of the properties (or proprieties) of autobiography as conventionally understood which she will accept. In some ways, then, this text operates in the same way as Invitation to the Waltz, that is, by appearing to conform to some of the conventions of an established genre even while undermining those conventions. The autobiographer's claims about the "truth" of her story draw a clear line between truth and falsehood. What she is saying is, "I have not told lies". However, she does not say that she has not fictionalised her life, for fiction is not synonymous with lies. Indeed, elsewhere, the text undermines its own claim to hold the status of truth. For example, the adult autobiographer comments on the version of her childhood experiences that she has narrated as follows: "of course it is only one aspect of the truth, or of illusion" (p52). In such

statements the text radically unsettles ideas that truth and illusion can be distinguished from each other. Telling the story of one's life, it is suggested, will simultaneously involve telling the truth and creating an illusion.

In The Swan in the Evening, as we will see, the sex of the writer assumes great significance and such breaking down of the distinctions between autobiography and fiction appears to take place in the name of a creativity specifically claimed as female. For example, the autobiographer describes the constraining forces of discourses of femininity and tells the reader of her own childhood assent to Mrs Gaskell's view that woman's prime sphere is the domestic and of her attempt to fit the model of femininity embodied by her own mother (p68). Furthermore, the autobiographer gives the impression that her position as a woman writer surprises herself: "now all at once, good heavens, one of the new post-war young women writers" (p68). Her place in a tradition of women writers is an explicit concern:

In those days I knew no other female writers, young or old; with the exception of May Sinclair whose novels excited me, I was singularly ill-read in fiction published in the twentieth century. With the Victorians I was well-acquainted. I thought of the nineteenth-century literary giants as my great ancestresses, revered, loved, and somehow intimately known. So I remembered how acutely they had suffered from censorious and sententious critics, and when hot flushes, faintness, nausea, loud rapid heartbeats afflicted me, it was a drop of comfort to feel, if in no other sense their match, at least sisterly in suffering with such noble souls. (pp68-69)

Whereas in Invitation to the Waltz, Dickens and Thackeray are ranked with the Brontes, Eliot and Austen as Olivia's favourite authors (IW, p277 - see Chapter 3, above), here the nineteenth-century literary tradition is made up of ancestresses only. As we will see, this concern with fiction as produced by

females will be important for the way The Swan in the Evening constructs a feminine writing identity. At this point in the text, the autobiographer is concerned to place herself in the tradition of the nineteenth-century female novelists. She feels akin to these writers because of their shared experience of the critical pressures exerted on a woman writer. Her description of her own physical symptoms could have come from a life of Charlotte Bronte.⁷ These physical symptoms are not explicitly attributed to the effects of censorious criticism, but the description of her own "hot flushes, faintness, nausea, loud rapid heartbeats" is embedded in a long passage which is clearly concerned with the common characteristics of criticism of female-authored writing and with the constraints which operate on women writers and, as we will see, the description of these symptoms is immediately followed by a description of a possible strategy to escape critical censure. It seems beyond doubt, then, that her physical malaise was the result of adverse criticism. Identifying herself with her literary ancestresses, the autobiographer tells us that her younger self did not despise her ancestresses or herself for their feminine weakness but instead felt that their suffering elevated them to "noble" status, feeling that their common sensitivity

⁷ Bronte's nervous headaches and biliousness tended to be brought on more by social functions than by the effects of negative reviews (see, for example, Fraser, 1988, p305) but the latter certainly did oppress her. Fraser describes Bronte's reactions to various harsh reviews (for example, Fraser, 1988, p321) but most striking is the description of Bronte's response to reviews of Shirley, published shortly after the deaths of her brother and sisters: "She [Bronte] returned home to receive the first review of Shirley in the Daily News. It sickened her, she told Mr Williams [one of her publishers] almost hysterically [...] Still weakened by grief, she found it impossible to take adverse criticism calmly. She admitted that she felt defenceless; any shock had the force of a knock-out blow" (Fraser, 1988, p343).

made them sisters.⁸ However, the description of her "hot flushes, faintness, nausea, loud rapid heartbeats" piles symptom upon symptom until it becomes clear that the autobiographer is caricaturing her younger self. Moreover, there is a faint suggestion that looking back, the autobiographer feels that her reaction was a little extreme and the over-inflated language of her younger self as "sisterly in suffering with such noble souls" is bathetic. The autobiographer is gently mocking her younger self for allowing herself to be duped by stereotypical notions of feminine weakness.

Yet, while mocking her own acceptance of the constraints of femininity, the autobiographer also seems to be questioning her own earlier wish to escape some of the constraints associated with being a woman writer:

I thought with yearning of the androgynous disguises, the masculine masks they had adopted for the sake of moral delicacy; of the unimpeded freedom to immerse in the creative and destructive element which anonymity had bestowed on them ... might have bestowed on me? - on me, in whom rectitude, stern puritanic principles inculcated by my mother strove ever with an ardent, pleasure-enjoying, love-hungry nature [...] (p69)⁹

Society's expectations of what is appropriate in women's writing clearly constrained her as a young writer yet the autobiographer appears not to fully endorse her own earlier wish to escape into androgyny. Indeed, she appears to find it a little absurd that her younger self should have been so concerned about

⁸ In a letter to her publisher, Bronte herself described women as "the noble sex" (see Fraser, 1988, p308).

⁹ One of the things she wants to escape is the passivity which ideologies of femininity attempt to impose upon women. For a discussion of ways in which this passivity might be used against itself, see Anderson on Alice James (Anderson, 1986, pp61-62).

social and critical judgments on her femininity (or lack of it). Hence, when she describes the furore which followed the publication of her first novel, Dusty Answer, she is aware that part of the reason it so shocked readers and reviewers was because it transgressed the rules laid down for genteel young ladies: "It was discussed, and even reviewed, in certain quarters as the outpourings of a sex-maniac. Of those who had known me as an innocent child some were utterly dismayed. How could I have so upset my mother?" (p67) Yet, the autobiographer claims, "It seems comical in retrospect that this impassioned but idealistic piece of work should have shocked a great many readers" (p67). Looking back, she knows that her work shocked people because it transgressed codes of appropriate feminine behaviour: "Girls should be pretty, modest, cultivated, home-loving, spirited but also docile; they should chastely await the coming of the right man and then return his love and marry him and live as faithful, happy wives and mothers, ever after. All this I knew and was by temperament and upbringing fervently disposed towards" (p68).

Like Olivia Curtis, the autobiographer's younger self appears to have been aware of what conventional femininity might mean, but also like Olivia, she appears to have had difficulty following the pattern of passive acceptance of this definition of what her identity should be:

But I seemed already to be losing grip on the dual responsibilities of my destiny. Unhappily married, childless, separated, wishing for a divorce; and now all at once, good heavens, one of the new post-war young women writers, product of higher education (Girton College), a frank outspoken upon unpleasant subjects, a stripper of the veils of reticence; a subject for pained head-shaking; at the same time the recipient of lyrical praise, of intense envy, of violent condemnation, in the contemporary world of letters: a world I had burst into unawares. (p68)

The autobiographer seems to be claiming that her challenges to conventional definitions of appropriate feminine behaviour happened unconsciously, without deliberate action on her part. Yet it is at this point that she turns to consideration of her literary ancestresses and the androgynous disguises they adopted in order to escape from the dichotomised reactions which appear to be characteristic of responses to a successful woman writer. And, it is hinted, she turns to consideration of her ancestresses to find support for more than just her literary efforts. Escape from critical censure is not the only benefit of androgyny which the younger autobiographer envisaged. In all of the passages I have quoted, reactions to her work appear to the autobiographer to be intimately bound up with reactions to her feminine identity. Androgyny, she appears to have felt, might have offered her a way out of the coercive nature of conventional definitions of that identity. Crucially, though, she is aware of the contradictions inherent in such conventional definitions. Like Charlotte Bronte, the autobiographer's younger self felt the twin pulls of duty and passion, felt two very different definitions of femininity pulling her in opposite directions: "rectitude, stern puritanic principles inculcated by my mother strove ever with an ardent, pleasure-enjoying, love-hungry nature". At this point in the text, the adult autobiographer offers no explanation of how she had managed to negotiate her way through this mass of conflicting notions of feminine identity. The text does not say that she did escape into androgyny. Indeed, it is suggested that the proliferation of definitions of her identity paralysed her, so much so that she is paradoxically described as feeling simultaneously that she existed in "a far more

unmanageable amount than ever" and that "I was nowhere" (p69). It seems that with so many different versions of femininity to come to terms with, like Olivia Curtis she finds it impossible to position herself, to construct a manageable identity which might become her own.

In the description of her reactions to early censure of her work, then, the older autobiographer of The Swan in the Evening confronts the danger that female identity might never be anything but fragmentary to the point of meaninglessness given the confusing and contradictory nature of the discourses of femininity which women must negotiate in order to construct a socially acceptable self. This is especially so for the woman writer who, in the very act of writing for publication, finds herself transgressing several of the laws of femininity. And yet, the fact that the autobiographical speaker looks back on her past troubles with a certain irony and distance indicates that she has found a way to construct her own writing self. As I have suggested, it does not appear that this writing self was constructed with recourse to the strategy of escape into androgyny, since this is one of the aspects of her earlier concerns which the autobiographer treats with a degree of ironic distance. I will show that the writing self which is constructed in The Swan in the Evening is not androgynous, but is explicitly a feminine writing self. The process of constructing this self does not involve escaping from femininity but, on the contrary, involves utilising and developing aspects of conventional definitions of feminine identity while simultaneously constructing a self which transcends those definitions.

To consider how the autobiographer achieves this transformation, I propose

to begin with the fragmented "stories" about her childhood which are told in the first section of the text. This section shares one very important characteristic with several of Lehmann's fictional works, that is, its use of free indirect speech, so that while sometimes it is clearly the adult autobiographer whose voice is coming through, at other times the autobiographer's younger self takes over and tells her story directly and at others still it is impossible to tell whether it is the child or the adult who is narrating.¹⁰ One of the autobiographer's earliest confrontations with discourses of femininity occurred when she called upon the moon to save her from the horrors she imagined would overtake her at night. This passage is told from the point of view of the child sitting at her bedroom window waiting for doom to engulf the country:

The moon is my inconstant saviour; when she is in the sky she will carry me to dawn and safety. I mount guard at the bedroom window, wrapped in my eiderdown, intently studying her in all her phases. When, at the full, she queens it, I gaze long at her illustrious face. I cannot see the man in the moon. For me she is maternal, a story-book archetype like Mother Goose; yet at the same time she looks stricken, even aghast. Her rounded crooked open mouth is sending forth a call - one note, sustained, full-throated, that I strain to catch but never do. The whole world hears her in its sleep and never hears her. (p37)

The free indirect speech allows the child's voice to be infused with an adult understanding that the moon is a "story-book" archetype of many different femininities: she is inconstant, always changing; she is vain and arrogant and she is maternal. For the child, the moon is a goddess, but she is also more than this: the moon is also "a story-book archetype like Mother Goose". Crucially, Mother

¹⁰ This not only multiplies the narrative voices, but also unsettles the text's time-scales, since the present tense can indicate the "present day" of any of those voices, which represent the autobiographer at various stages of her life.

Goose is both part of a story and a teller of stories. The image is entirely apt in a child's narration, but it is perhaps the adult autobiographer's voice which has taken over in the suggestion that the multiple layers of story-telling go unheard. For it is also a story-book archetype of women that they speak too much, and that their speech is inconsequential. Hence, the moon voices her call, but no-one ever hears it, not even her acolyte straining to do so. I would argue that the moon can be read as an image of the dilemma of the woman writer: just as femininity and speaking aloud, or rather being listened to, seem incompatible, so also are femininity and writing, or having serious critical attention paid to that writing, incompatible. The child straining to hear the voice of the moon can then be read as an image of a feminist critic listening carefully and attentively in order to catch the subversive message of feminine writing.

Yet the passage cannot be pinned down to a single interpretation. The moon is, as the passage explicitly suggests, many things: she is an image of the woman writer but she also remains the child's maternal goddess, and in that respect, as I will show, she is a metaphor for the unfulfilled potential of female-to-female relationships. The moon is the child's protector and saviour from the terrors of the night, but she is a saviour who cannot be relied upon: "She wanes inexorably, she is nowhere; and then I am alone with terror. The last trump will crash out and pull the black sky down and we shall all be buried" (p37). Here, the terror the child fears is the end of the world as envisaged in a patriarchal religion. She turns to her female deity for support, and is often saved by her, but the goddess is "inconstant" and just as often leaves her alone and powerless to

resist the terrifying forces of patriarchy. The description of the moon as an "inconstant saviour" suggests that as well as being an image of story-book archetypes of femininity and of the position of the women writer, it can also be read as symbolic of the effects of conventional images of femininity upon female friendship. That the child's relationship with the moon offers some potential for support is evident in the choice of the word "saviour". Yet this saviour is "inconstant" - the potential cannot be realised because the conventional feminine attribute of inconstancy blocks the path to a fully supportive relationship. Later, indeed, the child reiterates this: "The moon remained, my semi-constant mistress" (p40). Such a sense of the failure of female-to-female relationships to provide the support which they might sets the tone of the first section of The Swan in the Evening.

The work opens by relating the story of the autobiographer's relationship with her first teacher, a Miss Davis. It is not her first memory, to which she returns in the next section, but seems chosen because it epitomises many of the themes which are to be important in the work as a whole.¹¹ The atmosphere of this section is fixed by the opening description of Miss Davis, which presents female relationships as potentially supportive and enriching but as actually disappointing and characterised by loss (as is the child's relation to the moon). In this episode, the autobiographer's younger self is searching for a female figure

¹¹ The second short section describes the narrator's first memory, which is of a female acquaintance who had obviously adored her as a child, but towards whom she felt only loathing (pp14-15). The narrator's preoccupation appears to be with the "dislocation" (p13) of relationships between mothers, or mother-figures, and children.

to whom she can turn for "status and protection" (p10). The adult foregrounds the fragility of her childhood self, what she calls "the dark backward of my identity" (p9). To shore up this fragile self, the child tries desperately to gain recognition and approval from Miss Davis. She appears to feel that support from another female is necessary for her to build a strong sense of self-worth. However, her first attempt to gain Miss Davis's approval fails, and "Pretty Miss Davis, whom I adore, to whom I have publicly, gratuitously offered my passport, lays it down, patiently, as an irrelevance" (p9). Her second attempt is more successful, and the child rejoices, "For lo! I am absolutely on the map, the sweet surprise of it! - I am linked with Miss Davis, middle one of the family, I am the jam between the bread slices, given status and protection" (p10). However, her rejoicing is relatively short-lived, for Miss Davis leaves to get married, and the child is forced to face her loss: "She is going to live in Birmingham, and have lots of children of her own to look after. Then, shall I never see her again?" (p12)¹²

The child's longing for approval from Miss Davis is more than just a pupil's hero-worship of a teacher. Placing her description of this unfulfilled longing in the first two pages of the work, the adult autobiographer establishes that "most of us are born lost, and searching, - I for one" (p81). She does not say so, but it becomes increasingly clear that what both child and adult woman are searching for is a bond with other females which will strengthen and support her. Without this bond, she can form no strong sense of her own identity. As a child, her

¹² In Chapters 5 and 6 I will explore in more detail some of the ways that adherence to conventional feminine roles blocks bonding between women.

search for support from other females appears to stem from the inadequacy of her own relationship with her mother, which seems distant and strained. For example, she describes an incident which took place at a party, when her failure at sports had upset her so much that she had hidden under a tree and refused to come out. Her mother, who comes to fetch her out, is far from sympathetic, has "an unpleased face" and tells everyone else to take no notice of "Rosie" (p17). When the time comes for the children to collect their prizes, Rosie, of course, is not allowed to choose until last. However, the last remaining prize is the one which she would have chosen for herself anyway, and she is delighted. When she tells her mother so, her mother tells her that she didn't deserve it. The prize is spoiled: "I clasp my consolation prize, but it feels cold now, tarnished" (p18). The overall impression of the mother, then, is of a woman who cares more for "good form" than for her child's feelings.

This description of insensitivity and coldness from her mother is the only detailed description of an incident in which she and her mother were together. The autobiographer describes a typical Edwardian upper-middle-class childhood in which children spend most of their time in the nursery, separated from their parents. It is servants who provide her with most of the primary care a child needs and, more importantly, servants who provide the admiring attention necessary for children to build a sense of self-worth: "in the servants' hall was perpetual kindness, willingness to listen, exclaim, explode with laughter, declare that we were cautions, cough-drops" (p21). However, although the child searches for a mother-substitute, she does appear to have a close, if intermittent,

relationship with her father. Of her parents, it is he who is the more vivid figure in her recollections. It is her father who feeds her childish imagination by secretly putting on shows of "fairy dancing" in the garden (pp54-55), her father's jokes which, "in times of crisis, or illness [...] still pop up from nowhere and go echoing through my head" (p59). Her father's literary status fascinates the child, and she imagines him in the library in perpetual voiceless communication with Robert Browning, "weaving me also into the sacred web. Robert Browning is a great poet, and I consider my father a great poet, and I am going to be a great poetess" (p55).¹³ Her father encourages her poetry, and although the adult autobiographer knows that the first piece she shows him is "a banal bit of doggerel" (p56) and that her other "serious" works rarely rise above that initial level, the narrator reports that "my father had faith in my talents" and that "only once did he hurt my feelings during that period of peak fertility" (by laughing aloud at a particularly bathetic line). Her father's encouragement involves teaching her about the mechanics of poetry, encouraging her to read poetry, and even taking one of her humorous poems to read aloud at one of the weekly Punch dinners which, as a member of staff of that publication, he attends (p58).

Yet despite the care and attention given by the servants and her father the child retains a strong sense of lack - hence the adult autobiographer's claim that she was born "lost - and searching" (p81, quoted above). Crucially, though, her own daughter, Sally, is one of the few people who is "born found" (p81). I would

¹³ Later, she tells us that her father was a regular contributor to Punch and distinguished writer of light verse (see p58).

suggest that this difference between the two females can be attributed to the fact that one lacks close physical and emotional contact with her mother while the other has a mother who offers her a secure bond from the moment of her birth, if not before, so that the first time the mother speaks to her child, the child stops crying and "recognition started to vibrate, like a fine filament, between us" (p95).¹⁴

The bond which she forms with her own daughter is the major structuring element of the autobiographer's story: "Nowadays I measure my life by Sally, not by dates" (p87). At the point in time when she tells her life-story, the autobiographer measures that story by Sally. Sally's presence provides the structure within which the life-story is constructed. This splits it into three sections: "there was the time before her birth; the time of her life span; the time I am in now, after she slipped away from us" (p87). Thus, the text is physically divided into sections which separate these different parts of the story: Part One is about the time before Sally's birth, that is, the autobiographer's own childhood; Part Two is about Sally's childhood; Part Three is about Sally's death and asserts a faith in a mother-daughter bond which is so strong that it endures beyond that death. Part Four, the final part of the work, is called "Letter to Anna" and takes the form of an extended dedication, directly addressed to the autobiographer's grand-daughter, Anna (Sally's niece) describing the consolation which the

¹⁴ The autobiographer remembers fondly a serious childhood illness because this brought her mother close. She also remembers fondly the attention paid to her by her "uncle", the doctor, suggesting that while her father has obviously nurtured her imagination and her mental life, both her parents have failed to satisfy her longing for physical and emotional comfort (p39).

autobiographer had received from the small child after Sally's death and expressing a wish that she, too, should believe that "Sally doesn't forget you" (p155). In the epilogue, added fourteen years after the first edition, the autobiographer describes how another writer's suggestion that she should divide the book "into three youth-times - my own, Sally's, Anna's" had proved the turning-point in the writing process by providing the story's pattern (p160). However, as I have pointed out, the book is actually divided into four parts, the central two of which are about Sally (one about Sally's life and one about the autobiographer's discovery of Sally's after-life). Furthermore, awareness of Sally's death is the structuring element of all four sections. The first section, as well as dealing with the autobiographer's relationship with her own parents, dwells extensively on death, especially on dead children. Most poignant is the story of one of the family's grooms, who cannot come to terms with his young daughter's death from diphtheria. The story is included not because it had a great impact on her childhood but because half a century later, when Sally died, the autobiographer's receiving "living pictures" of Mr Moody and his daughter, in crude terms, being visited by their spirits, is one of the first signs that there is another life from which she will be able to draw comfort for Sally's loss (p29). The story of Mr Moody and his loss is only the most striking example of the way Sally's death shapes the narrative of the first part of The Swan in the Evening. Similarly, but more obviously, in the second, third and fourth parts, awareness of Sally's death lies behind everything that is said. Most significantly, the final part and the last words of the book, addressed to Anna, suggest that it is not

from the autobiographer that Anna is expected to draw strength, but from Sally: "Sally doesn't forget you, or any of us. How she might help you to put on your armour for the life before you, you must discover for yourself" (p155). Sally is the pivot who draws both the book, and the generations of women, together. This book, classified as Lehmann's autobiography, and sub-titled "Fragments of an Inner Life", does not, in the final analysis, tell the story of her own life, either inner or public. This autobiography tell the story of a woman's "pursuit of one loved being" (p129), the story of an enduring bond between mother and daughter.

Yet The Swan in the Evening is more than just a book "about" a mother-daughter bond. As I have shown above, it also tells the story of the autobiographer's formation as a writer, from her first childhood efforts at poetry, to her reactions to the reception of her first novel, to the "strangulating spiritual blockage" which prevented her from writing after Sally's death (p89). It is at this point that the narration of the autobiographer's development as a writer is most intimately bound up with the story of her bond with Sally. The blockage occurs because she both longs to write a book about Sally, and is afraid to do so: "how could I ever expose myself, or her, or the forbidden subjects, Death and Survival of Death, nakedly in print? Yet the forbidden subject, with her as the beating heart of it, engrossed me altogether, day and night" (p88). She also describes how she started writing again, thereby rebuilding her sense of self and vocation, initially by simply collecting fragments of material about herself and Sally:

They made up an underground hoard I fed on, brooded over, starved on furtively; and although there seemed no possibility of fusion and

proliferation in the fragments, nothing that reminded me even faintly of my one-time identity, my former capacity to energize them, at least, when pressed, I could say: 'I am writing', without feeling much more than usually disheartened by the equivocation. (p90)

There are several things worth noting in this passage. The first is that being unable to write gives the autobiographer the feeling that she has lost her "one-time identity". Losing Sally has meant losing the ability to write, which in turn has meant losing her own identity. It is in writing that the autobiographer constructs her own identity, but that writing and therefore that self-construction, depend upon having a sense of Sally's presence. Secondly, the autobiographer reports that she felt at the time that her collecting of fragments was not really writing, that if her friends knew what she was really doing they would think her guilty of "equivocation" in her claim that she was now writing again. But whether or not the fragments collected at that time were the same fragments which make up The Swan in the Evening, it is clear that this was the beginning of the process in which this book was written and, moreover, that this is the book about herself, Sally and "Death and Survival of Death" that she had longed to write. At this point, then, the book turns to telling the story of its own writing.

Yet in its initial development, it is suggested, The Swan in the Evening did not conform to its author's definition of "writing". However, comparing this passage to a description of the process of writing fiction which opens the short story "The Red-Haired Miss Daintreys" (in The Gipsy's Baby, 1982; 1st published 1946, pp55-90) reveals several similarities. The short story, which also claims for itself autobiographical status (although it is packaged as fiction) and also, to some extent, tells the story of its own writing, begins with a long passage in the

first person which describes the narrator's creative processes and reflects upon the nature of much modern fiction.¹⁵ The short story's narrator describes the way that her mind operates "as a kind of screen upon which are projected the images of persons -known well, a little, not at all, seen once, or long ago, or every day" (p57). This description appears to place the root of artistic inspiration in the narrator's own experience, but later she makes it clear that these images from experience are dead images until her creative capabilities get to work to transform them: "the shadowy and tranquil region which harbours their play is a working-place, stocked with material to be selected and employed" (p57). The short story, like the autobiography, describes a creative process which involves constructing a story out of fragments. The earlier work describes how these fragments become a text: "Suddenly, arbitrarily one day, a spark catches, and the principle of rebirth contained in this cold residue of experience begins to operate. Each cell will break out, branch into fresh organisms. There is not one of them, no matter how apparently disconnected, that is not capable of combining with the rest at some time or another" (GB, pp57-58). In The Swan in the Evening, what the autobiographer feels is missing is the "possibility of fusion and proliferation" and her "former capacity to energize" the fragments. What she seeks is precisely the process of creative rebirth which is described in

¹⁵ This passage has often been taken as an unproblematic statement of Lehmann's artistic creed, as if the story's fictional status could be completely set aside. For example, James Haule slips from attributing the opening to "Lehmann's narrator" to claiming that in the passage, "Lehmann forms a kind of alliance with the great exponents of psychological realism of her own time" (Haule, 1985, p194).

the above quotation from the short story. It is a rebirth in which "experience", that is, her memories, take on their own life in a process which mirrors conception, in which elements fuse, proliferate, and grow into a new creature. The writing of The Swan in the Evening becomes almost like a process of pregnancy and childbirth, in which the book becomes both a replacement for Sally and an opportunity for self-birth, or more precisely, for the autobiographer to construct a self by actively combining the fragments of her life to make a story.

The autobiography, like her fictional texts, will involve a "transmutation" of the events of her life (see p65, quoted above). However, what is most interesting is that in The Swan in the Evening the elements which are combined remain "apparently disconnected" to each other. In particular, the fragments of childhood memories which make up the first section appear, at first reading, to have no connection to each other or to the rest of the book. However, there is a connecting element. That element is Sally, or more particularly, Sally's death and the autobiographer's discovery of the strength of the bond between them. The news of Sally's death is related at the book's half-way point - which reinforces the fact that it is the pivot on which the book turns. The connections between the episodes narrated in the first section of the book become apparent only on re-reading with the knowledge of Sally's death. Thus, just as the autobiographer is only able to construct the story of her life by structuring it around Sally's presence, so also the reader can only (re)construct that story after gaining knowledge about Sally. In effect, the reader cannot read, cannot

decipher the story without Sally's presence, just as the autobiographer cannot write the story without Sally.

This "autobiography", then, does not follow the familiar pattern of producing a chronological, linked narrative of important, mainly public events in the autobiographer's life. What it does instead is to tell the story of the loss of her daughter, so that all of the story up to the point of loss appears to be leading to that point, and all of the story after the point of loss is an attempt to come to terms with the loss. For example, the autobiographer describes how, for a year after Sally's death, she had vivid dreams, often of her own early childhood. Again, the book becomes the story of its own writing, for these dreams centre on the very incidents described in Part One of the book. These dreams, in which she is a child and Sally is not yet born are intimately linked to darker, less specific dreams, and the whole process appears to her to be one of "looking in' on moments of peak intensity, always with a tragic undertone, in the history of my long, long relationship with Sally " (p131). Writing this book involves writing the story of the "long, long relationship" between the autobiographer and Sally.¹⁶

The mother-daughter bond thus underlies both the writing of the life and the reading of it. And, crucially, the mother-daughter bond appears to underlie not just the writing and reading of this text, but also the processes of writing and reading themselves. The description of her bond with Sally, alongside the account of her attempts to bond with other women, suggests that the potential

¹⁶ The text calls this a "history". Modern feminism gives us the term "herstory" which would appear to be entirely apt here.

left unrealised in the autobiographer's early relationships with other women was fulfilled in her relationship with her daughter. This relationship appears to be intimately allied to how the autobiographer feels about herself as a writer. Yet, I have shown that it is her father who is the main influence on the autobiographer's early development as a writer. On what grounds, then, can I claim that the autobiography links writing and reading to female-to-female bonding? As a child, the autobiographer had thought her father, herself and Robert Browning were connected in a circle of "great poets". As an adult, although she does not explicitly say so, she is aware that neither she nor her father were anything of the sort. It appears to be the adult autobiographer's voice which tells us that her father was "a writer of superb light verse" (p58) and the word "verse" seems instantly to draw a distinction between what her father writes and "poetry". Indeed, the examples of her father's work which she quotes are not his published works but the limericks which he inserts in the family Visitors' Book beneath the signatures of various visitors (see p59). As for her own status as a poet, the adult narrator is quite definite about that. On writing her first stanzas, she had shown them to her father and asked him if she had written a piece of poetry. His reply is that "you could certainly call it a piece of poetry" (p56) which, like the autobiographer's own distinction between poetry and verse, begins to suggest that there are different kinds of writing which could conceivably be labelled "poetry" not all of them "the real thing". The adult autobiographer herself makes the distinction explicit when she describes that first poem as "a banal bit of doggerel" (p56) and later she makes fun of her own

inability to see the banality of her own creations, for example, when she describes her father's laughter at the bathetic line in her long narrative poem. The line runs, "Oh for some lemonade!" sighed the King" (p58). She also describes how she had felt aggrieved when the only poem which her father had selected to read aloud at one of his Punch dinners was "a frivolous poem [written] to amuse my sisters [...] a mere bagatelle in my estimation". The adult autobiographer imitates her childhood self when she says "This was trivial stuff. Why not have presented one of my serious works - Poppy Fields, for instance, or Fairy Gold?" After the earlier comments about the banality of her poetry and particularly after the quotation of the line above, it seems clear that the adult autobiographer is using the word "serious" ironically, pointing to her own childish inability to judge the worth of her poetic creations.

In fact, what the adult autobiographer appears to be doing in the passage where she describes her father's encouragement of her poetry-writing is to characterise poetry as a masculine gift which she cannot share. Indeed, her poetry seems to conform exactly to the story-book characterisation of the moon's female speech or writing as loquacious and inconsequential:

I need no pressing, I go on and on. No sooner a pencil in my hand than the tap turns and out flows another innocuous tinkle. Strange that this pouring out of words, this manipulating of rhymes and rhythms should so powerfully affect me - at times with fever and nausea - considering the superficiality (in retrospect) of the results. (p57)

Males, on the other hand, are presented as having an instinctual grasp of poetic succinctness and the autobiographer quotes and praises the spontaneous childhood compositions of her brother and her son. Comparing her own

creations to theirs, she tells us, "I composed nothing comparable in economy to a couplet of my brother's at the age of six [...] And nothing from the same deep level as some lines spoken spontaneously by my son Hugo, around the age of four and a half" (p57). After quoting their poems, the autobiographer admits "I wrote nothing of this quality" (p58). Thus, poetry is characterised as a masculine realm from which she is excluded. Robert Browning and her father she considers to be "great poets" but she is going to be "a great poetess" (p55, quoted above). The very use of the word "poetess", the diminutive feminine form, suggests a frivolity and lightness and indeed, the juxtaposition of "great" and "poetess" amounts almost to oxymoron. Ultimately, her father's lessons in prosody and exhortations to memorise the works of the poetic canon (p58) can be of no use to her because she lacks the masculinity which appears to be a prerequisite of being a "great poet".

Nevertheless, the autobiographer does know that she has a gift for "energizing" fragments of experience. Her characterisation of her moon goddess as Mother Goose, the archetypal story-teller, suggests more precisely what the feminine writing gift is. If poetry is presented as masculine in The Swan in the Evening, then story-telling is presented as feminine. The literary ancestresses whom the autobiographer had called upon to provide her with a tradition in which to insert her writing were nineteenth-century ancestresses and therefore, by implication, wholly or mainly writers of prose fiction in that heyday of both the novel and the woman novelist. In The Swan in the Evening, then, poetry is masculine, prose fiction is feminine. This text weaves together the story of the

autobiographer's development as a writer with the story of her relationship with her daughter and, by suggesting that her process of identity construction depended simultaneously upon her ability to write and on her bond with her daughter, the book embodies an intimate connection between writing fiction, female-to-female bonding and feminine self-construction. The autobiographer of The Swan in the Evening takes two fairly conventional feminine roles - that of garrulous storyteller and loving mother and transforms them by constructing from them a feminine writing identity which transgresses conventional codes of femininity by taking active control of its own self-construction.

The connection between writing and female-to-female bonding in the process of feminine self-construction is, I believe, vital to an understanding of The Swan in the Evening. Patricia Waugh claims that women writers of the modernist period exhibit a need for "human connection via meaningful affection, communication, or ethical belief" (Waugh, 1989, p20), and that much women's writing is an attempt "to discover a collective concept of subjectivity which foregrounds the construction of identity in relationship" (Waugh, 1989, p10). In The Swan in the Evening, written after the modernist period but apparently influenced by some of the concerns of women's writing contemporary with that literary movement, the autobiographer foregrounds the construction and reconstruction of her own writing identity through her relationship with her daughter. In doing so, she certainly exhibits her own need for "meaningful affection, communication, or ethical belief", but she also does more than this. The over-riding concern of this book is the strength which can be gained through

female bonding. It is this strength which renews the autobiographer's religious faith (see p136), and which lies behind all the advice about right and wrong which she addresses to her granddaughter (see, for example, p148). Thus, reading The Swan in the Evening necessitates a modification of Waugh's claim that women writers sought "affection, communication, or ethical belief" (my emphasis). In The Swan in the Evening, the high valuation of connection and affection between women is the ethical belief.

That this ethical belief is present in The Swan in the Evening makes it a book which is a joy to read for a feminist such as myself. I have suggested that the structure of The Swan in the Evening makes Sally's death a pivot in the reading process, compelling the reader to re-interpret the events of the first section and construct the story around Sally in the same way as the autobiographer has done. In that sense, the book invites the reader to join with the autobiographer in constructing her life-story as simultaneously the story of female bonding and the story of a woman writing. This might suggest that the autobiography invites the reader to become part of the autobiographer's process of feminine self-construction through female-to-female-bonding. Rita Felski argues that women's confessional literature of the twentieth century foregrounds "the relationship between a female author and a female reader" (Felski, 1989, p88).¹⁷ She suggests that this is achieved through a dual process in which the

¹⁷ Felski distinguishes such confessional literature from the "more consciously stylized and 'literary' examples of twentieth-century women's autobiography" (Felski, 1989, p88), arguing that only the former foregrounds the relationship between the woman writer and the woman reader. My reading of The Swan in the Evening suggests that Felski's distinction is, in some ways, a

writer seeks both to describe what is unique in her own life and to stress the elements of her life which are characteristic experiences of many women. Such texts thus break down the distinction between the individual and the collective:

Feminist confession exemplifies the intersection between the autobiographical imperative to communicate the truth of unique individuality, and the feminist concern with the representative and intersubjective elements of women's experience. In other words, the shift towards a conception of communal identity which has emerged with new social movements such as feminism brings with it a modification of the notion of individualism as it is exemplified in the male bourgeois autobiography. (Felski, 1989, p93)

For Felski, what feminist confession does is to break through boundaries which define the self as a unique, individual entity. She suggest that such boundary crossing is the result of, and results in, a new type of contract between writer and reader, one in which the sense of a communal identity is more important than the specific facts of the writer's or the reader's situation or life. Felski discusses confessional literature, which makes an explicit contract between writer and reader. The Swan in the Evening, on the other hand, exhibits a more complex authorial position and therefore such a contract between writer and reader is implied but not explicit. In The Swan in the Evening, the autobiographer invites the reader to share in the process of self-construction which takes the form of telling the story of female-to-female bonds. It invites the reader to position herself as part of a circle of female bonding. I infer from Felski's argument that a communal identity between writer and reader is built through new kinds of interpretive contracts. Before leaving The Swan in the Evening I want to briefly

misleading one.

examine what the nature of those contracts might be and, in particular, to explicitly consider what "truth" consists of in a text which is avowedly about events which most westerners today would dismiss as impossible.

I have already discussed the text's own blurring of the distinctions between truth, falsehood, fiction and illusion. This crossing of the boundary between truth and fiction is very important in determining the reader's relationship to the text. In the quotations in which the autobiographer is concerned to assert the "truth" of her text: "What I am writing is purely a personal testament, based upon experience; scrupulously recorded, and, I trust, consistent" (p31) and "The only question that you will really feel like asking is: 'Is it a true story?' - and I promise you it is true" (p141), she addresses herself firstly to those whom she assumes will ridicule her text, and secondly to her grand-daughter who she hopes will share her beliefs and draw support from them. For both public and private audiences her concern is to justify her subject matter, which is that life continues beyond death. She is claiming a kind of truth for her text, but it is a truth which transgresses ideas which we have come to regard as laws of nature, for the truth expressed is that "death considered as extinction is an illusory concept" (p29). Admitting that people will say that her own desire for her dead daughter has "induced my subconscious (useful portmanteau word!) to think up all the rest" (p144), Lehmann (and I use this term consciously now) asserts:

All I wish to place on record is that, almost from the first moment of finding myself a mother without a daughter, the idea that such an exceptionally vital and richly endowed being as Sally should be suddenly reduced, in other people's minds, to such a sickly category [a memory, ghost, or part of an undifferentiated eternal being], should be thus cut off from her actual identity - the idea seemed to me grotesque. (pp143-44)

This text is a conscious and deliberate attempt to break down taboos, and to express the kind of "truths" which simply cannot be encompassed by the dominant linguistic and philosophical systems of our society. In doing so, Lehmann knows that she is risking her reputation as a writer, and indeed as a sane human being (see Part Four and Epilogue). In response to this, I must also take risks, since, for me, the only possible response to this taboo-breaking and boundary-crossing text is to break the taboo which decrees that there is no room for the personal in an academic response to a text. As I discussed in my introduction to this thesis, the boundaries between the personal and the academic response can be particularly difficult to determine for a feminist critic who writes out of love of women writers. Strong emotional responses to texts appear to be antithetical to distant academic responses. But I also argued that I believe it is possible to find way to transgress that boundary productively, to theorise the personal, emotive response in ways which diminish neither the emotion nor the closeness of the reader to the text. This chapter is an attempt to do just that. As part of this attempt to theorise the emotive in ways which do not diminish the power of that emotion, I feel I must express my emotional response as directly as possible. It is a response which comes from me, not primarily as a literary critic but as my mother's daughter and my daughter's mother; it is a response not to an autobiographer or narrator, but specifically to Rosamond Lehmann, mother of Sally Kavanagh. Seeking experience as a guarantee of authenticity is a very limited way to judge texts, but in this case it is (at least partially) appropriate. As a daughter and as a mother who has had

the good fortune to experience in those two relationships emotions of breathtaking strength, I would find a fictional text on this subject moving, but it is partially this text's status as non-fiction which makes it elicit quite the passionate response which it does. And yet, what is also most affecting about this text is the way in which it breaks down the fences which mark the boundaries between fiction and truth, life and death, reason and emotion. This text is about individual survival after death, a concept rarely taken seriously in contemporary Western society. It is a concept which I, as a confirmed atheist and sceptic can lend no credence to. But none of this diminishes in any way the intensity of my response to this text. If I can explain why this should be so then I will have gone some way towards accounting for my love of Lehmann's work in ways which transgress the boundary-lines between passionate and academic readings. To formulate such an explanation, I propose to turn to the work of Hélène Cixous.

Cixous is perhaps the feminist theorist who has done more than any other to delineate the relationship between femininity and the transgression of boundaries between apparently oppositional terms. Cixous argues that all of western patriarchal thought is underpinned by patterns of binary logic which are deathly patterns, since one concept in the opposition must always be negated so that the other may be taken as having priority: "And the movement by which each opposition is set up to produce meaning is the movement by which the couple is destroyed. A universal battlefield. Each time a war breaks out. Death is always at work" (Cixous, 1980a, p91). Since, for Cixous, these binary oppositions are all based on the opposition masculine-feminine, then this deathly

pattern ultimately works to kill, that is, to efface the importance of the feminine in language: "The hierarchization subjects the entire conceptual organisation to man. A male privilege, which can be seen in the opposition by which it sustains itself, between **ACTIVITY** and **PASSIVITY**. Traditionally, the question of sexual difference is coupled with the same opposition: Activity/passivity" (Cixous, 1980a, p91). For Cixous, then, a system of thought which is predicated upon binary oppositions is, at base, a deathly system, and what is killed in such a system is the feminine. A radical feminine textuality must undo these oppositions, not by trying to assert the primacy of the feminine side but by unbinding the deathly struggle of binary thought:

writing is precisely working (in) the in-between, inspecting the process of the same and of the other without which nothing can live, undoing the work of death - to admit this is first to want the two, as well as both, the ensemble of the one and the other, not fixed in sequences of struggle and expulsion or some other form of death but infinitely dynamised by an incessant process of exchange from one subject to another. (Cixous, 1980b, p254)

For Cixous, women's capacity to give and to transcend her own ego boundaries give her a privileged relationship to such radical feminine textuality which can undo death by transgressing the boundaries set up by binary thought:

Wherever history still unfolds as the history of death, she does not tread. Opposition, hierarchizing exchange, the struggle for mastery which can end only in at least one death (one master - one slave, or two nonmasters = two dead) - all that comes from a period in time governed by phallogocentric values. The fact that this period extends into the present doesn't prevent woman from starting the history of life somewhere else. Elsewhere, she gives. She doesn't "know" what she's giving, she doesn't measure it; she gives, though, neither a counterfeit impression nor something she hasn't got. She gives more, with no assurance that she'll get back even some unexpected profit from what she puts out. She gives that there may be life, thought, transformation. (Cixous, 1980b, p264)

In The Swan in the Evening, Lehmann describes her grief after her

daughter's death and her feeling that conventional patterns of thought represented a deathly void which she must avoid falling into: "When you get men separating subjects, separating sciences, separating science from religion, religion from psychology, philosophy etc., the vital link is lost. To insist on separating subjects is to insist on death for them because it involves ignoring what is, ultimately, their breath of life" (p93). At first, all that prevents this deathly rationalistic voice from engulfing her is her belief in the connectedness of human beings: "loving was connectedness, and this was as essential to staying alive as bread and water. The state of not loving was the state of atrocious exile from the human situation" (p92). Looking back, she describes what she was seeking as the insight that "Only from a metaphysical standpoint do things make a whole" (p93). I suggest that the insight she is groping for is akin to Cixous's insight that a feminine capacity for love allows the distinctions of phallogocentric thought to be broken down:

Wherever she loves, all the old concepts of management are left behind [...] When I write, it's everything that we don't know we can be that is written out of me, without exclusions, without stipulation, and everything we will be calls us to the unflagging, intoxicating, unappeasable search for love. In one another we will never be lacking. (Cixous, 1980b, p264)

The Swan in the Evening is, I would argue, just such a piece of writing, born of an "intoxicating, unappeasable search for love". For Cixous, it is women's acceptance of loss which allows her to write texts which cross boundaries and break taboos. Men, Cixous argues, mourn and therefore reincorporate the lost object. Women, on the other hand, do not mourn and therefore never accept loss:

Woman, though, does not mourn, does not resign herself to loss. She basically takes up the challenge of loss in order to go on living; she lives it, gives it life, is capable of unsparing loss. She does not hold onto loss, she loses without holding onto loss [...] This is taking loss, seizing it, living it. Leaping. This goes with not withholding: she does not withhold. She does not withhold, hence the impression of constant return evoked by this lack of withholding. It's like a kind of open memory that ceaselessly makes way. And in the end, she will write this not-withholding, this not-writing: she writes of not-writing, not-happening She crosses limits: she is neither outside nor in, whereas the masculine would try to "bring the outside in, if possible." (Cixous, 1981, p54)

Withholding nothing, the strength of Lehmann's love makes her refuse to mourn Sally; instead, she crosses the most final of boundaries, that between life and death: "I had gone through death with her and would have done so gladly a hundred thousand times - still as far as ever from surrender; still in my pursuit of one loved being, one alone, self-separated from the source" (p129). The strength of her refusal to mourn takes her into a visionary world where inanimate objects become suffused with light and love: "The beauty of each one of them was fathomless, - a world of love. I leaned out, they leaned towards me, as if we were exchanging love. I saw, I saw their intensity of meaning, feeling "(p115). Just as Cixous describes, grasping and living loss gives Lehmann the capacity to be simultaneously inside and outside of natural laws; "I was outside, watching the animating, moulding eternal principle at work, at play, in the natural world; and at the same time I seemed to be inside it, united with and freely partaking in its creativity" (p115).

Writing of her experiences, Lehmann risks everything that she values, for it is not only herself but Sally who will be exposed to "derision, cynicism, scepticism" (p160). This willingness to take risks, to eschew detachment and leap

into the unknowable is, for Cixous, a further feature of the feminine text:

A woman-text gets across a detachment, a kind of disengagement, not the detachment that is immediately taken back, but a real capacity to lose hold and let go. This takes the metaphorical form of wandering, excess, risk of the unreckonable: no reckoning, a feminine text can't be predicted, isn't predictable, isn't knowable and is therefore very disturbing. It can't be anticipated, and I believe femininity is written outside anticipation: it really is the text of the unforeseeable. (Cixous, 1981, p53)

For Cixous, then, a feminine text exhibits a detachment from norms which are imposed by rational systems of thought. However, in other ways, it is precisely a lack of detachment which makes the feminine text disturbing, for it is attachment to others which allows the feminine writer to detach herself from those norms and stray into the realms of the traditionally unknowable. The source of this attachment lies in women's relationships with each other, the metaphorical mother-daughter relationships which they share:

There is hidden and always ready in women the source; the locus for the other [...] Text: my body - shot through with streams of song; I don't mean the overbearing, clutchy "mother" but, rather, what touches you, the equivocal that affects you, fills your breast with an urge to come to language and launches your force; the rhythm that laughs you; the intimate recipient who makes all metaphors possible and desirable; body (body? bodies?), no more describable than god, the soul, or the Other; that part of you that leaves a space between yourself and urges you to inscribe in language your woman's style. In women there is always more or less of the mother who makes everything all right, who nourishes, and who stands up against separation; a force that will not be cut off but will knock the wind out of the codes. (Cixous, 1980b, p252)

This source is the one which Lehmann seeks in her pursuit of her "one loved being", and, it appears, it is a force of the kind which Cixous describes which causes mother and baby to recognise each other after Sally's birth so that Lehmann finds herself launched into an unknowable space: "I swung in living darkness, emptiness; in the beginning of the deepest listening of my life" (p95).

It is presumably this sense of deep listening which caused her to promise the five-year-old Sally that she would always hear her, and that death would never separate them: "One day I might call you and call you and call you ... over the whole world. Over the whole world, and you might not answer. What shall I do then?" Her voice seemed to toll. Taken aback, I quickly promised her that I would always answer" (p80). Lehmann describes how Sally had refused to come to terms with her own death and had called her mother to help her:

It was her fierce struggle to get back that, within a few days of earth time, woke me up: she shouted for me, and in the darkness we shared I heard her; and then I was able (though with what bungling and confusion!) to go through her death with her, rather in the same turbulent, inept (on my part), stepped-up, breath-stopping way in which we went together through her birth. (p94)

The mother-daughter relationship which Lehmann describes is one which "stands up against separation" of the most final kind, what Lehmann calls "the ultimate in unsupportable reality" (p71) and "knocks the wind out of the codes" by transgressing the most sacred taboo. And, as we have seen, it is that mother-daughter relationship which allows Lehmann to write that transgression.

Cixous's concept of feminine writing, then, provides an interesting and fruitful way to theorise the way in which The Swan in the Evening transgresses some of the boundaries of rational thought. But there is, of course, a fundamental difference: while Cixous appears to be speaking metaphorically of a feminine textuality, product of motherhood, which undoes death, Lehmann appears to be describing literal experiences of a strength of bond between mother and daughter which brought one back to the other after death. I have already quoted Lehmann's assertions that her story is true, but she also describes

the resistance which she knows many people have to the idea of individual life after death. Her motive in telling her story and asserting its truth is not to convince anyone, for she believes that scientific proof of life after death will one day be available, so that "the proof seekers will have proof of it, once and for all; but I also suspect that when it is there, at last, under their very eyes and ears, they will refuse to accept it" (p141). In any case, her own experience is so little use in convincing sceptics that even psychic researchers themselves would have rejected it:

I had embarked upon my researches because of an unassailable conviction; therefore I could not be acceptable to try-blue psychical researchers. They were austere scientific sceptics, and it was natural that they should regard me as a suspect case; cracked, credulous, unhinged by catastrophe. Had I confided to them my reasons for believing Sally to be still living and death not the end but simply a change of consciousness their verdict of non proven would have chilled me even more depressingly perhaps than ridicule or bigoted disbelief. (p129)

Her motive in writing the story is not, then, to convince anyone who might approach with scepticism. Instead, her "overriding motive is the longing to bring comfort to those in affliction as measureless as mine was when joy so suddenly surprised me" (p87). The "truth" which Lehmann wants to express, like Cixous's feminine writing, is not subject to logical proofs:

I tell myself how terrible it is that we spend precious months of our existence trying to give 'proofs', falling into the trap of critical interpellation, allowing ourselves to be led before the tribunal where we are told; give us proof, explain to us what feminine writing or sexual difference is. And if we were more courageous than I am, we would say; a flute for your proof, I am alive [...] it is true that the truest is like this: either you know without knowing, and this knowledge which does not know is a flash of joy which the other shares with you, or else there is nothing. We will never convert someone who is not already converted. (Cixous, 1988, p20)

This knowledge, like religious faith, does not involve proofs or evidence. Its

"truth" is not diminished, but increased by a lack of such proofs, because faith is precisely about taking a leap in the dark knowing and accepting that one is in a state of extreme ignorance, but trusting in some other force: "I had Sally by the hand and we took a great leap together" (p110). The kind of truth which both Cixous and Lehmann envisage involves non-appropriative knowledge. It is not about possessing a list of facts, but about being in a state of open-ness. And what one must be open to is one's need for others: "All we need to do is need and we have. All we need to do is not to be afraid of needing and we have" (Cixous, 1988, p24). For me, this is precisely the kind of truth which is expressed in The Swan in the Evening. It is a text about one woman accepting her need for another. The result is not loss, but the gaining of a place in "love's true circle"(p166). The literal truth of this text is completely irrelevant to my relationship to it. I need not judge it against any standards of logical proof. To experience its "truth" I need only be prepared to make a leap in the dark along with the text and not allow myself to be closed in by what I already "know". As Cixous argues, we can only make contact with others if we leave behind our knowledge:

One of the first lessons about living is the one about knowing how to not know, which does not mean not knowing, but knowing how to not know, knowing how to avoid getting closed in by knowledge, knowing more and less than what one knows, knowing how to not understand, while never being on the side of ignorance. It is not a question of not having understood anything, but of not letting oneself get locked into comprehension. (Cixous, 1988, p22)

The Swan in the Evening asks of the sympathetic reader just such a refusal to be "locked into comprehension". The reward it offers is that the reader is then

herself drawn into "love's true circle", invited to become part of the circle of female bonding which is described and enacted by the text. The nature of that bond is passionate and mystical; it defies academic analysis and transgresses the boundaries of rational understanding.

Reading a text in which feminine identity is created through female-female bonds which undo the distinction between life and death, between logical knowledge and emotional truth, my discussion has necessarily transgressed the boundaries between detached academic analysis and personal, emotional response. But in transgressing those boundaries I hope that academic argument has illuminated passionate response and vice versa. The third and concluding section of this thesis will continue to theorise my own intense emotional pleasure in reading Lehmann's work by further analysing the way in which her texts represent and enact strong female-female bonds which allow characters and readers to question and resist received "knowledge" about themselves and their femininities.

SECTION 3: WOMEN TOGETHER

INTRODUCTION: A NEW MORALITY?

I have argued that The Swan in the Evening presents connection and affection as moral imperatives. I have also suggested that there are hints in that work that the idea that identity requires individuation and separation from others is inadequate. The identity which the narrator of The Swan in the Evening describes as her own is one based upon her bond with another woman - it is thus a relational identity. Moreover, there are elements in the structure of the work which suggest that the reader, too, is being invited to define her own identity in relation to the women portrayed in, and who speak through, the book. The reader is thus being invited to share in the commitment to an ethic based upon connection between women. In the concluding section of this thesis, I want to analyse further the ways in which Lehmann's texts explore relationships between women and present those relationships as a sound basis for women's moral lives. In this introduction, my aim is to set Lehmann's vision in a feminist context by summarising the ideas of some of the theorists who have examined the connections between women, relatedness and ethics.

One would imagine that a commitment to relationships might be universally valued. This is not so, as I will show. On the contrary, whether one is discussing the field of philosophy, of psychology or of literary criticism, those who exhibit such a commitment are universally undervalued. Indeed, it is possible to see an

ethical commitment to forging a collective identity as one of the factors which causes many women writers to be excluded from the literary canon, particularly in the modernist and post-modernist periods. As Suzanne Clark argues, when the dominant aesthetic criteria value impersonality above all else, then women writers who are committed to the idea of a collective feminine identity tend to be excluded from the mainstream. In particular, those women writers who continue to try to communicate with their readers and to build a sense of community between women are likely to be rejected as naïve and sentimental. As Clark suggests, "modernism assumes an estrangement between the poem and the reader - difference, not familiarity. Exile, not community" (Clark, 1991, p71). A woman writer who uses details of a familiar world which she assumes her readers share, who uses that familiarity to build a sense of community between writer and readers, is, for Clark, operating in direct opposition to the central tenets of modernism. Clark takes Edna St. Vincent Millay as an example: "Millay, marginal as a woman poet in the age of modernism, writes her own authorship into her poems as the speaker of a community-making creation, daughter of a motherly tradition. It is a stance of contradiction, including her in the readership of women as it excludes her from the critics" (Clark, 1991, p74). In other words, Clark suggests that it is Millay's very popularity with her women readers, achieved through her concern to connect with those readers, which renders her marginal to the critical establishment and to the twentieth-century canon.

I have argued that much of the attraction of Lehmann's work lies in its

apparent direct appeal to its readers . Like Millay, Lehmann's popularity with her women readers is arguably one of the reasons why her work tends to be judged to be "second-rate" (see my introduction to Section 1, above). In Lehmann's case, the tendency to assume that works which are popular with women readers must be trivial is exhibited in critics' inability to credit her with any power of serious thinking. The ethic of connection which is at the basis of her moral vision goes unrecognised as such, to the point where she is typically judged to be completely lacking in moral vision, or indeed vision of any sort. In criticism of Lehmann, such judgements are often based upon the assumption that to exhibit a clear authorial vision, texts must contain direct authorial comment on the action portrayed. For example, Diana LeSturgeon claims that Lehmann's "major characters are almost without exception feeling, not thinking, people; and, since Miss Lehmann does not act as commentator on their points of view, one is left with the conclusion that the vision of life represented by the characters is that of the author too" (LeSturgeon, 1965, p26). In this assertion, LeSturgeon betrays her assumption that the emotions are mere ways of feeling rather than knowing. Rosemarie Tong calls this "the so-called 'Dumb View' of the emotions, according to which they are entirely noncognitive responses to environmental stimuli" (Tong, 1993, p70). This "Dumb View" of the emotions lies at the basis of judgments like LeSturgeon's which clearly assume that reason is superior to emotion. Tong suggests that in the modern period such views have become intimately bound up with associations of reason with masculinity and emotion with femininity (as Clarke argues with regard to Millay):

Traditionally, reason has been associated with the universal, the abstract, the mental, the impartial, the public and the male, whereas emotion has been associated with the particular, the concrete, the physical, the partial, the private, and the female. Although traditional philosophers did not always split reason totally from emotion, glorifying the former and denigrating the latter, modern thinkers have come to interpret emotion as the opposite of reason. If reason is objective, then the emotions are subjective; if reason brings us closer to the facts, then the emotions simply reflect our values; and if reason is something to develop, the emotions are something to overcome. (Tong, 1993, p70)

Following the kind of logic which Tong describes, and finding only emotions in Lehmann's work, LeSturgeon suggests that Lehmann "has no discernible moral or intellectual, social or political philosophies" (LeSturgeon, 1965, p23). By examining the ways in which Lehmann's texts present a moral vision which is nevertheless not abstract and mental, I will show that LeSturgeon's criticism of Lehmann is unjustified.

Unjustified LeSturgeon may be, but she is not alone in making this kind of judgment on Lehmann's work. Like LeSturgeon, J. M. Haule assumes that moral vision must reside in explicit, rational authorial comment. Failing to find such comment, he, too, assumes that Lehmann's work lacks moral vision. Quoting from the description of the creative process at the beginning of Lehmann's short story, "The Red-Haired Miss Daintreys", and taking this as an unproblematical statement of Lehmann's artistic credo, Haule writes that the way it seems to locate "both artistic inspiration and control in the unconscious precludes both the requirement of authorial explanation and the potentially disastrous necessity for moral responsibility" (Haule, 1985, p194). Haule clearly associates moral responsibility with the presence of authorial explanation; failing to find the latter, he concludes that Lehmann's work shows no trace of the

former. It appears that Haule is seeking conscious, rational, generalised judgments on the characters and situations presented in Lehmann's work. Such judgments, he assumes, would provide the only valid evidence of moral responsibility in the works. In contrast to this, I will argue that moral responsibility, or rather a morality of responsibility for others, lies at the heart of Lehmann's work and my feminist pleasure in it. As Tong points out, any ethics which is grounded in an ontology which characterises the self as individual and separate will tend to be based upon notions of rights. On the other hand, "If we define the self in terms of her/his relationships to others, then responsibility becomes the primary moral notion" (Tong, 1993, p52). I will show that without any authorial comment or explanation of characters' behaviour, Lehmann's work nevertheless does present a clear moral vision, one which far from evading moral responsibility, actually valorises responsibility as the most valid basis for morality. In this introduction, I will argue that such a moral vision, "which stresses people's responsibilities to a variety of caring communities rather than their rights as autonomous individuals" (Tong, 1993, p158) is a feminine vision. Reading Lehmann's Dusty Answer and The Echoing Grove, I will show that those texts present such a morality as not only feminine, but also female.

LeSturgeon and Haule identify moral vision in texts with explicit authorial explanation and judgment. This is hardly surprising given that they are arguing within the confines of a dominant traditional view of ethics in which, for layperson and philosopher alike, "ethics" denotes the elaboration, evaluation and

justification of moral codes, rules and principles: "To the layman the word 'ethics' suggests a set of standards by which a particular group or community decides to regulate its behaviour - to distinguish what is legitimate or acceptable in pursuit of their aims from what is not" (Flew, 1979, p105). Professional ethicists, it seems to be generally agreed, are engaged in a very similar activity, except that they subject the rules and principles to more systematic scrutiny: "'Ethics' (or 'moral philosophy', as it is sometimes called) will be used to designate the systematic endeavour to understand moral concepts and justify moral principles and theories" (Pojman, quoted in Tong, 1993, p13). In a moral universe structured by such assumptions about the nature of ethics, to engage in moral judgment is always a morally good activity and, following Kant, to be truly moral, such explicit judgments must accompany behaviour (see Tong, 1993, p19). Judging her work against these dominant discourses of ethics as explicit and relatively rigid rules and principles, LeSturgeon and Haule are quite justified in finding Lehmann's texts lacking. That explicit and final moral judgment is not to be found in Lehmann's work is widely accepted: for example, Cox argues that "Miss Lehmann has rigidly refrained from passing moral judgement on socially unacceptable modes of conduct" (Cox, 1977, p127), and Gindin states that "Miss Lehmann's fiction relentlessly refuses to judge" (Gindin, 1974, p210). It is absolutely accurate of these critics, whether condemning or not, to comment on the lack of explicit moral judgments in Lehmann's work. However, as Cox's "rigidly" and Gindin's "relentlessly" suggest, this absence of judgment is itself a moral stance. It is a determined refusal to pass sentence on the actions of any

of her characters. I will show that this refusal to judge is not a failure in moral vision but actually represents a different kind of moral vision, in which the activity of judgment is not always, if ever, ethically justifiable. This refusal to accept the value of moral judgment-passing is intimately bound to what I have called an ethics of connection, which, I have suggested, is a feminine ethical mode.

In my reading of "When the Waters Came" in Chapter 1, I showed that Lehmann refuses to make moral judgments on the central character of the story. The story points to the inadequacy of available frameworks for helping the central character to make such judgments for herself and the shifting perspective of the piece makes it very difficult for the reader to make such judgments on her. Story, character and reader are all positioned in a moral universe in which moral judgment-passing should be avoided. This moral vision is represented by the text, but also enacted in its constant shifts in narrative point-of-view. Bonnie Costello uses the term "humility" to describe such writing, which refuses moral certainties: "At the level of the sentence, 'humility' does not mean that one should be silent, but rather that language should continually be revised in the presence of what it cannot accommodate" (Costello, 1980, p227). "Humility" may eschew moral judgments, but that does not reduce it to moral silence. On the contrary, for Costello, "humility" is the key to "survival and freedom" for women (Costello, 1980, p227). Humility is a practical and moral imperative.

Earlier, I argued that dominant discourses of ethics, both "commonsense" and philosophical, tend to equate ethics with moral principle- and judgment-

making. Costello's concept of textual "humility" significantly revises those dominant discourses of what morality is. Others, concentrating more fully on the psychology and philosophy of ethics, have also elaborated an alternative discourse of morality, in which ethics is not reducible to a moral code. For example, in her study of the psychological development of the individual's moral sense, In a Different Voice (1982), Carol Gilligan, drawing on the work of Nancy Chodorow, argues that "femininity is defined through attachment" while "masculinity is defined through separation" (Gilligan, 1982, p7). For Chodorow, this difference stems from boys' and girls' differing relationships to the mother during early childhood: "Girls emerge from this period with a basis for 'empathy' built into their primary definition of self in a way that boys do not. Girls emerge with a stronger basis for experiencing another's needs or feelings as one's own..." (Chodorow, in Humm, 1992, p282). Gilligan, reworking Chodorow, stresses that the gendered strategies of identity-formation which Chodorow describes are tendencies and not biologically determined attributes, and that both "themes", as Gilligan calls them, can be identified in the social interactions of both men and women. Nevertheless, Gilligan accepts the findings of empirical studies which have shown that women more than men tend to base their sense of self and of moral worth on questions of relatedness to others.¹ However, although Gilligan does not quarrel with the empirical content of studies which describe these differences between the sexes, she does quarrel with the conclusions drawn in

¹ She provides a considerable number of examples of such studies (see Gilligan, 1982, pp9-23).

many of those studies.² Gilligan persuasively argues that such conclusions tend to take behaviour patterns typical of male children as the norm, and equate "masculine" qualities with maturity:

The quality of embeddedness in social interaction that characterizes women's lives in contrast to men's, however, becomes not only a descriptive difference but also a developmental liability when the milestones of childhood and adolescent development in the psychological literature are markers of increasing separation. Women's failure to separate then becomes by definition a failure to develop. (Gilligan, 1982, pp8-9)

Gilligan attempts partially to repeat the research procedures of one study and does indeed find different modes of moral judgment in boys and girls.³ For Gilligan, these different modes are complementary, and neither should be seen as the precursor of the other. In the original study, by contrast, the reaction more typical of boys was judged to be at a more advanced level of development, while the girls' typical responses were judged to be immature.⁴ Gilligan repeats this study not to confirm the existence of gender differences, which she believes

² Rosemarie Tong discusses criticisms of the way in which Gilligan draws upon the studies she cites: firstly, it is argued that Gilligan misreads the conclusions of the studies; secondly, she ignores observations and studies which show that men's behaviour may fall on the caring side of the spectrum while women's may equally well exhibit a complete lack of care for their fellow human beings. Tong provides counter-arguments for both criticisms (see Tong, 1993, pp90 & 99).

³ The experiment was one devised by Lawrence Kohlberg in which adolescents were asked whether a man should steal a drug which he cannot afford to buy in order to save his wife's life. The question is intended to measure moral development "by presenting a conflict between moral norms and exploring the logic of its resolution" (Gilligan, 1982, p25).

⁴ This, Gilligan concludes, is partly because developmental theory, by definition, is biased towards "ordering differences in a hierarchical mode" (Gilligan, 1982, p33).

are firmly rooted in social context, but in order to correct the imbalance which values the male's response at the expense of the female's. In Gilligan's words, "adding a new line of interpretation, based on the imagery of the girl's thought, makes it possible not only to see development where previously development was not discerned but also to consider differences in the understanding of relationships without scaling these differences from better to worse" (Gilligan, 1982, p25).

The pattern of moral thought which Gilligan discerns in her female subjects is typically an ethic of care, commitment and attachment:

Women's construction of the moral problem as a problem of care and responsibility in relationships rather than as one of rights and rules ties the development of their moral thinking to changes in their understanding of responsibility and relationships, just as the conception of morality as justice ties development to the logic of equality and reciprocity. Thus the logic underlying an ethic of care is a psychological logic of relationships, which contrasts with the formal logic of fairness that informs the justice approach. (Gilligan, 1982, p73)

Thus, an ethic of care and commitment centres around ideas of responsibility for others. Gilligan shows clearly that such an ethic is repeatedly judged to be psychologically immature, since it does not revolve around the kind of quasi-legal code which is conventionally thought to be the hallmark of a mature ethical stance. An ethic of commitment will not consist of a series of rules and prescriptions of behaviour; by implication it will find it difficult to make statements of supposedly definitive moral judgment. As I have argued in my discussion of the critical comments on Lehmann's work quoted above, moral vision is conventionally thought to consist of clear judgments about right and wrong. In Lehmann's fiction, as in the psychological case studies which Gilligan

describes, an absence of such judgments is thought to indicate an absence of moral maturity. In fact, as Gilligan shows, an ethic of commitment is developed by the individual in a series of stages which correspond roughly to the kind of developmental process gone through by those developing a more conventional ethics, and the ethic of commitment itself has immature and mature forms. Following other studies, Gilligan terms the most mature stage of moral development "postconventional" while the stage immediately preceding this is termed "conventional". Other psychologists have viewed only a "masculine" legalistic ethics of justice as postconventional, while female subjects have typically been judged to be stalled at the conventional level of judgment. Gilligan argues that there is more than one type of postconventional morality and that the ethic of commitment can itself develop a degree of sophistication not found in conventional, adolescent morality:

The reluctance to judge remains a reluctance to hurt, but one that stems not from a sense of personal vulnerability but rather from a recognition of the limitation of judgment itself. The deference of the conventional feminine perspective thus continues at the postconventional level, not as moral relativism but rather as part of a reconstructed moral understanding. Moral judgment is renounced in an awareness of the psychological and social determination of human behaviour, at the same time that moral concern is reaffirmed in recognition of the reality of human pain and suffering. (Gilligan, 1982, pp102-3)

Here, Gilligan identifies a mature "postconventional" feminine ethic of commitment with a reluctance to pass judgments on others. Gilligan's studies show that this reluctance to judge stems not from self-interest, or from an inability to weigh up moral difficulties, but from a sensitive and sophisticated understanding of the nature of those difficulties. The refusal to pass moral

judgment is thus a central feature of a feminine ethic of commitment.

Before turning again to Lehmann's work, it is important to note that some feminists have objected to theories like Gilligan's which found a female identity and ethical stance in concepts of care and commitment. Summarising such objections, Rosemarie Tong points out:

Even if women are better carers than men (for whatever reasons), it may still be epistemically, ethically, or politically unwise to associate women with the value of care. To link women with caring is to promote the view that women care by nature. It is also to promote the view that because women can and have cared, they should always care no matter the cost to themselves. (Tong, 1993, p100)

Most of these criticisms seem to stem from a view of female caring as reducible to activities of "feeding men's egos and tending men's wounds" (Tong, 1993, p100). Viewed as such, under patriarchy, female caring can be interpreted as self-sacrifice or, at best, as a slavish mechanism for coping with a lack of economic and social power (Tong, 1993, pp100-104). Tong has no real answer to this and, given that her project is simply to survey the field, she has no need to provide an answer. Perhaps for this reason, she touches upon a critical point without recognising it as such:

Some women develop such virtues as care, responsiveness, attentive love, and resilient good humor in order to create and maintain strong female friendships from which they derive support. However, other women develop these same virtues simply to please the men on whom they are utterly dependent or to cater to the children on whom their identities depend. (Tong, 1993, p154)

Concentrating on the second group of women, Tong and the ethicists she cites ignore the importance of the first group. Approaching the concept of a feminine ethics of care and commitment within the context of Lehmann's work, however,

I want to stress the importance of an ethics of care in the creation and maintenance of female friendships which are not oppressive or exploitative in the way in which male-female or mother-child relationships can be. On the contrary, as Tong herself suggests, such relationships offer support to the carer as well as to the cared-for.

In the remainder of this section, I will show that in Dusty Answer and The Echoing Grove, Lehmann explores a morality of care and commitment which operates through relationships between women, through the qualities of empathy and attachment which, as Chodorow implies, are qualities more characteristic of relationships between women than of those between men.⁵ We will see that the moral vision of Lehmann's work can be found chiefly in the representation of relationships between female characters. I will argue that this moral vision is not

⁵ For Chodorow, the relational nature of female identity leads to the desire to form intense bonds. This is mainly achieved through motherhood (see "Gender, Relation, and Difference in Psychoanalytic Perspective" [Chodorow, 1985; 1st published 1980]). Nevertheless, Chodorow does recognise the importance of women's friendships with each other: "Most women are genitally heterosexual. At the same time, their lives always involve other sorts of equally deep and primary relationships, especially with their children, and, importantly, with other women" (Chodorow, in Jackson, 1993, p59). For a summary of Chodorow's work which discuss its strengths and limitations, see Eisenstein, 1984, pp79-95. Adrienne Rich also discusses Chodorow's work, objecting principally to her assumption that "Most women are genitally heterosexual" (Rich, 1987, esp pp32-34). In my reading of the way that Lehmann's work depicts a feminine identity which is relational and based upon friendships with other women, I owe a debt to Elizabeth Abel, who has used Chodorow's theories as the basis of a reading of the way that female friendships are represented in a selection of twentieth-century novels by women. Abel's influential article argues that, in the novels she discusses (by Doris Lessing, Christa Wolf, Ruth Praver Jhabvala and Toni Morrison), imaginative identification with another female is necessary for moral growth and central to language and identity formation (Abel, 1981, p423).

only feminine, but also feminist. Discussing the lesbian ethicist Sarah Lucia Hoagland, Tong makes a pertinent point: "in choosing for herself, a lesbian chooses for other lesbians, who in turn choose for her. Lesbians do not weave value in isolation from each other; they weave value together. Ethics is not an individualistic quest; moral value does not emerge from somewhere deep within one's self or from far outside of one's self" (Tong, 1993, p215). In thus paraphrasing Hoagland, Tong begins to suggest ways in which personal relationships of care and responsibility can be linked to political goals. Indeed, for a radical feminist like Janice Raymond, when it comes to relationships between women, the personal is political in ways which go far beyond early 1970s sloganeering. Defining a concept of "Gyn/Affection", Raymond explains:

The more commonly understood meaning of affection is a feeling, emotion, fondness, attachment, and love for another. In this sense, Gyn/affection connotes the passion that women feel for women, that is, the experience of profound attraction for the original vital Self and the movement towards other vital women. There is another meaning to affection, however, which conveys more than the personal movement of one woman toward another. Affection in this sense means the state of influencing, acting upon, moving, and impressing, and of being influenced, acted upon, moved, and impressed by other women [...]

Women who affect women stimulate response and action; bring about a change in living; stir and arouse emotions, ideas, and activities that defy dichotomies between the personal and political aspects of affection. (Raymond, 1986, pp7-8)

Accepting this account of the way that female friendships may bridge the gap between the personal and the political helps explain why Lehmann's work should be so popular, with non-feminists and feminists alike. Thus, I will argue that her depiction of relationships between women is one of Lehmann's strengths as a woman writer, perhaps the main factor which makes her a successful woman's

writer.

However, it is important to reflect on the historical context in which Lehmann produced her ethical vision grounded in woman-to-woman relationships. As a feminist living in the late twentieth century, I find this vision attractive and useful, but it is not an explicitly feminist vision. It is, instead, a vision born of the circumstances in which women of Lehmann's class found themselves in the early part of this century. Deborah Core has argued that Lehmann's ethic of commitment between females stems from that historically specific female experience of being a woman in post-first world war British society. Thus, for Core, The Weather in the Streets represents female characters who attempt to fill the gap left by the dissolution of Edwardian moral and social values.⁶ The strength of the relationships between the female characters allows them to forge a new moral order: "The tie between the two women, then, serves to re-shape and renew moral order in a society where such order is very nearly extinguished" (Core, 1981, p123). Core's suggestion seems to be that female relationships are a useful tool which can be used to forge a new moral order. I will go further and argue that Lehmann's moral vision is based on the assumption that relationships between women are not only the means of creating a new moral order, but also embody that new order. The new moral order is to

⁶ Some critics have suggested that the female characters might also be trying to fill the gap left by the literal absence and loss of morally strong men (see, for example, Tindall, 1985, p31). Lehmann's male characters often seem to exist in the shadow of an intellectually and morally superior older brother who was killed in the First World War and, partly as a consequence of this, they are not the kind of men who can be relied upon in anything, let alone in moral judgement.

be found not only through, but also in, relationships between women. My analysis of Lehmann's moral vision will therefore focus on relationships between female characters. Furthermore, such a focus also serves the wider purpose of providing a model for the way that the relationship between the woman writer and her female readers might operate. Consequently, I will examine woman-to-woman relationships both within the texts and between the texts and their readers. While not questioning Core's identification of the historical determinants of Lehmann's ideas about female relationships, in describing and analysing those relationship between characters and between the texts and their readers, I want to suggest that such relationships constitute an ethic which is of value beyond the historical conditions in which it was produced.

To perform a reading of female relationships within texts may seem like a straightforward task. It is far from being so. In 1929, Virginia Woolf made her famous comments about the lack of representations of female friendships in works of fiction (Woolf, 1977; 1st published 1929, pp78-81). Discussing a work of fiction which she claims to be reading, Woolf notes that "Chloe liked Olivia perhaps for the first time in literature" (Woolf, 1977, p78).⁷ Several critics have shown that, even at the time she was writing, Woolf's perception of the lack of female friendships in novels was not an accurate one.⁸ However, for Woolf, any representations which had been attempted were at best partial: "So much has

⁷ In fact, it seems that the book did not actually exist, and that Woolf is dramatising to make her point.

⁸ See, for example, Todd, 1980; Cosslett, 1988 and Auerbach, 1978.

been left out, unattempted" (Woolf, 1977, p79). These representations were partial for several reasons. Firstly, if the fiction was written by a man, as Woolf, not entirely accurately, considered the bulk of fiction to have been written, he lacked the necessary knowledge of how women behaved when alone together, while if the fiction was written by a woman, she was hampered by the fear that she would be censured for her frankness (Woolf, 1977, pp78-79). Secondly, and more importantly, Woolf suggests that in order to represent such relationships the writer "has to devise some entirely new combination of her resources, so highly developed for other purposes, so as to absorb the new into the old without disturbing the infinitely intricate and elaborate balance of the whole" (Woolf, 1977, p81). The implication is that female relationships cannot be contained within conventional narrative genres without those genres being in some way modified.

In a study of fictional representations of female friendship, Tess Cosslett provides an expansion of Woolf's claim that female friendship cannot be represented within existing narrative conventions. Cosslett argues that the way that female friendships are commonly perceived makes them incompatible with conventional narrative structures, which require significant action and plot development to give the impression of constant forward movement. Female friendships, Cosslett argues, are not considered to constitute significant action and are therefore not thought to contribute to plot development:

Here, I think, the important point is what is considered as suitable material for a narrative as opposed to a letter: what counts as an event in a story. The world of women's friendships seems to be perceived as something static, outside the action that makes a story. In narrative, men are thought to be

needed to create tensions and initiate significant action. (Cosslett, 1988, p11)

Cosslett's claim is valid in some cases, but she does fail to take account of the fact that many novels are valued not for their plot development but for their character development. Therefore, it would perhaps be more accurate to argue that female friendships are not only seen as failing to contribute to plot development, but as also failing to contribute to character development. However, even that is to over-simplify. In my reading of Lehmann's Dusty Answer, I will show that although the action of the heterosexual romance plot is arrested by the description of a female friendship, and although the development of the main character is represented as being stalled in adolescence, at least partially, so long as this friendship is the central relationship in her life, yet the friendship does fulfill an important function in both character and plot development.

A further problem with Cosslett's argument is that she appears to assume that there is a single set of narrative conventions which are incompatible with the representation of female friendship. Cosslett implies that all fictional genres reflect a dominant ideology in which "marriage is the only acceptable and fulfilling destiny for a woman" (Cosslett, 1988, p114). Whether Cosslett's arguments do apply to all narrative genres, at all stages of their historical development, requires investigation elsewhere, but even within those genres which do privilege the marriage-plot, Cosslett herself shows that female friendships can play an important role. The end-point of the plot may be a marriage, but the process which takes the characters to that end-point often

involves more interaction with a friend of their own sex than with the intended partner. Both Cosslett and Janet Todd (1980) demonstrate that this is the case, and that friendships between female characters have played important structural roles in fiction, even in fiction centring around the conventional marriage-plot. Referring to the role of the female confidante in eighteenth century epistolary novels, Todd contends that "Although seemingly on the periphery of the plot, she [the female friend] may usurp the center when the perspective on action is changed" (Todd, 1980, p1). Todd's point is that female friendships have not been absent from fiction, merely invisible to critics. For Todd, to see the female friendships in a work of fiction as important it is necessary to look at the work with a different vision. I would add that such a change of critical perspective is a further tool which allows the feminist reader to re-read works which have seemed to be supportive of patriarchal norms, and to re-value works by undervalued women writers, since potentially valuable aspects of the text which were previously invisible will now be foregrounded and discussed.

I have noted that one perhaps inescapable risk of such a project of revisionary re-reading is that such readings often remain permanently peripheral to the institution of criticism (see my introduction to this thesis). While this is no reason to surrender the project, it is important to remember that the danger is particularly manifest when it is female friendship which is at the core of the revisionary reading, since such friendship is itself constantly rendered invisible by conventional attitudes. Raymond, in a study of the history of female friendships and communities, argues that women together tend to be invisible to society at

large. Relationships between females are not perceived as significant, therefore such relationships, and the women in them, are hardly perceived at all (Raymond, 1986, p3). Their existence is simply ignored. Thus, as Nina Auerbach argues, union among women is "perceived by every generation that experiences it as unprecedented" (Auerbach, 1978, p161). Each generation of women has to re-discover the possibilities inherent in bonding with other women, since such bonds are rendered invisible by the dominant attitudes.⁹

A failure to perceive relationships between women as significant, indeed as any kind of relationship at all, is characteristic of the dominant critical attitudes to the conclusion of Lehmann's The Echoing Grove. This novel begins and ends with two sisters, in their late forties or early fifties, both widowed, forming a pairing in which each becomes the other's help and support. Significantly, critics have tended to dismiss this ending, and therefore the whole novel, as bleak and pessimistic. For example, Tony Coopman says of the novel:

when the novel ends, Madeleine and Dinah cannot lay claim to much happiness. Madeleine will not marry Jocelyn [her young lover]; since Rickie's [her husband's] death, her life has been a compromise between despair, which she rejects because of her inner vitality, and the ideal of a harmonious relationship, which she aims at but tragically fails to achieve. She harks back to the simplest modes of life without finding in them any genuine refreshment. On the other hand, Dinah's best companion is now a dog. (Coopman, 1974, p121)

Coopman simply fails to perceive that Madeleine achieves "a harmonious relationship" with Dinah, and that "Dinah's best companion" is not the dog, but

⁹ That women's relationships are not perceived as significant is true whether one is discussing the way they are treated by male bartenders and waiting staff (Raymond, 1986, p3) or the way relationships between female characters are perceived by literary critics.

Madeleine. His failure is not unusual. Several critics make such comments on the ending of The Echoing Grove, seeing Madeleine and Dinah as alone at the end, their relationship as having so little significance that it is barely thought of as a relationship at all.¹⁰ I suggest that such a failure is bound up with failure to perceive the ethic of commitment which is represented and enacted by Lehmann's works, since that ethic is based precisely in relationships between women. The following two chapters of this thesis will attempt to make visible that previously invisible ethic and perform a revisionary re-reading of a selection of Lehmann's work which will concentrate on the way that relationships between women are represented and enacted by the texts. Nina Auerbach argues that in fictional representations of female bonding, women writers have been able to explore alternative modes of feminine behaviour, outstripping history and creating "an evolving literary myth that sweeps across official cultural images of female submission, subservience, and fulfilment in a bounded world" (Auerbach, 1978, p6). This is a large claim. The concluding chapters of this thesis will investigate the extent to which Lehmann's work contributes to such a myth.

¹⁰ See, for example, LeSturgeon, who considers that the sisters' future is bleak because it is a future without men (LeSturgeon, 1965, p112), or Tindall who considers that the ending is bleak because the sisters decide that they are done with love, as if the love between the two of them did not count (Tindall, 1985, p162). However, there are exceptions to this, notably Core, who does see the ending of the novel as "hopeful" (Core, 1981, p125) and Cox, who argues that the reconciliation between Madeleine and Dinah offers them the chance of "consolation" (Cox, 1977, p245). And Siegel seems to be wholly positive about the ending, claiming that the sisters' relationship develops into "a deep bond that will sustain the sisters through the rest of their lives" (Siegel, 1985, p262).

CHAPTER 5: FEMALE FRIENDSHIP AS A "DUSTY ANSWER"

Lehmann's first novel, Dusty Answer (1936; 1st published 1927) was a great success when it was published. However, like many first novels, it was assumed to be a straight transcription of the author's own experience, and critics seem to have assumed that the author would not be able to repeat the success, since she would have run out of interesting experience to describe.¹ While I would disagree with both the premises and the conclusion of such arguments, in some ways Dusty Answer's early critics were right to view the novel as semi-autobiographical, since there are many elements in the work which are drawn from Lehmann's own experience, and many points at which the subject matter of the novel bears a strong resemblance to incidents or feelings described in Lehmann's autobiography, The Swan in the Evening. For example, and most pertinent to my argument, it is in Dusty Answer that Lehmann first confronts the issue of the unrealised potential in mother-daughter relationships. However, as I will show, the fictional form both gives Lehmann the scope to explore relationships which might provide an alternative to that maternal one, and places limits upon the scope of that exploration. In the present chapter, then, I will analyse the way Dusty Answer presents the mother-daughter relationship, but I will also look at the alternative female-female bonds envisaged and at the factors which prevent the text from achieving full imaginative realisation of the potential

¹ See Cox, 1977, pp53-55 for a summary of the initial reception of Dusty Answer. The reception of her first novel is also described by Lehmann herself in The Swan in the Evening, pp66-67.

of those alternative bonds.

Dusty Answer describes the late adolescent years of Judith Earle, a young girl who has spent most of her childhood in upper middle-class seclusion. The novel centres around Judith's relationships, firstly with the Fyfe family which occasionally stays next door to her home, and secondly with a female friend, Jennifer, whom she meets when she leaves home for the first time to study at Cambridge. Judith's friendship with Jennifer is as important an aspect of her development as the heterosexual relationships she has with the various members of the Fyfe family. The way the female friendship is presented, and the fact that it takes place in the rarefied setting of a girls' college, means that to a large extent the female friendship is kept within strictly defined limits. Nevertheless, I will show that despite being thus confined, the friendship does play an important role in the narrative and the development of the central character.

1. THE MOTHER-DAUGHTER RELATIONSHIP

The potential for female friendship and support is there in several of the relationships between female characters in Dusty Answer, but in most, if not all of them, that potential fails to be realised. This is especially so of Judith's relationship with her mother, which is characterised by detachment and reserve. However, Judith keeps hoping for something more, and when her mother invites her to spend one last summer at home, after her father's death and her own graduation from Cambridge, she finds cause for optimism in the fact that "even

though they never spoke intimately, they were never at a loss for topics" (p197). Judith desperately looks for evidence that her mother is happy at home with her, and the renewed daily contact reawakens her dormant worship of and longing for love from her mother: "Surely it was going to be possible at last to establish a satisfactory relationship; to feel deep affection as well as interest, admiration, and that curious pang and thrill of the senses which her scent, her clothes, the texture of her skin and hair gave you and had given you from babyhood" (p197). This passage vividly conveys a genuine sensual delight in the feminine body and clothes of the mother. However, there is a hint of irony in the word "satisfactory", which suggests that, even at its best, the relationship will be too lukewarm to encompass such sensuality, or even the hoped-for "deep affection". Moreover, the validity of Judith's sensual delight in her mother's presence is more fundamentally challenged by the structure of the chapter from which the above description comes.

The novel is narrated from what several critics have called a "limited point of view", that is, in a third-person narration which, while it does not always relate Judith's thoughts directly, does not tell us anything that she could not know about.² However, by making use of ironic juxtapositions, the text does often open up a space between Judith's perceptions of events and the narrative stance. This chapter, in which Judith anticipates a revival of her relationship with her mother, is the first to describe in any detail the relationship between mother and

² For a definition of the term "limited point of view" and a discussion of how it operates in Dusty Answer, see Dorosz, 1975, pp28-29.

daughter, although it occurs late in the novel when it is almost reaching its conclusion. The chapter reports Judith's memories of the past and hopes for the future with her mother. However, the report of these thoughts and feelings is framed within a present day narrative in which her mother is tying a bow onto Judith's hat as Judith is going out to a picnic. The small action of tying the bow, which opens the chapter, provides the narrative motivation for the reveries which follow, since the tying of the bow is itself enough to spark off Judith's romanticised daydreams about her relationship with her mother (see p193). The framing device used in this chapter is an extended example of the ironic juxtapositions which I have mentioned. In one respect this framing device simply provides the immediate motivation for Judith's fantasies about her mother. In this way, it adds psychological accuracy to the chapter, since it is entirely convincing that the tying of a bow on a hat should send an affection-starved child into a swoon of delight. However, in another respect, the framing device merely serves to emphasise for the reader that Judith's fantasies are just that and so indicates that Judith is not always to be trusted as a narrator. The latter effect occurs because the framing device permits the third-person narrator to present an ironic juxtaposition of the "real" Mrs Earle with Judith's fantasy Mamma, signalling to the reader that Judith's perceptions are not accurate. Thus, when Judith's romanticised dream reaches its peak in the passage quoted above, it is immediately followed by a return to the present day business of the tying of the bow, only now the action is complete, the sensual contact with Mamma is over, and the worldly-wise, rather bored Mrs Earle speaks to Judith: "Mamma finished

tying the bow, remarked: 'Well - enjoy yourself,' in a half-amused, half-mocking voice; and dismissed her to the picnic" (p197). The baldness of this statement, coming after Judith's idealised reveries about her mother, is bathetic. The fact that Mrs Earle says so little, and that so superficial, the fact that her voice is "half-amused, half-mocking", and the use of the word "dismissed" to describe how she ends the incident, all signal to the reader that Judith's relationship with her mother is far from being the sensual, deeply affectionate one Judith imagines.³

Such ironic juxtapositions also undercut Judith's judgments of events elsewhere in the chapter. For example, we are told that Mrs Earle has returned to the house in England, even though she would prefer to live elsewhere in Europe, "out of pure kindness and consideration for Judith" (p196). This third-person statement is not an external narrator's omniscient comment on the action, but an indirect report of Judith's thoughts. However, as in the example above, it is subtly signalled to the reader that she need not, or should not, accept Judith's point of view as a reliable report of events. The praise of Mrs Earle seems over-stated, suggesting that the passage is to be read ironically and that the sentiments expressed are delusions. That the passage is to be read ironically is confirmed in the next paragraph, when the words of Mrs Earle's invitation to Judith are reported directly to the reader:

³ This is confirmed elsewhere in the chapter. For example, we are told that Mrs Earle looks at Judith "dispassionately", that her behaviour towards her daughter is "charming" and that "every night Judith sat on Mamma's bed and they chatted together with friendly politeness, almost with ease" (p193). The words "charming" and "dispassionately" suggest that Mrs Earle does not feel any powerful maternal love for Judith, and Judith appears to feel only awkwardness in her mother's presence.

I see no reason why we shouldn't spend a very pleasant summer together. You are very companionable - quite well-read now and quite intelligent and extremely presentable, I will say. I do not intend you to stay with me permanently. I should find it extremely tiresome to be always dragging you about with me; and I daresay you'd dislike it too. We are quite unsuited to being together for long; we should only irritate each other. (p197)

The tone of this speech is quite clearly not that of a devoted mother, but rather that of someone who feels she has a duty to perform - her maternal role - and is making the best of a poor situation. This much is apparent even to the deluded Judith, who nevertheless thinks it "a step of considerable importance" that her mother "should want her at all" (p197). Even in her delusion, Judith is aware that her mother does not value her company very highly. She is also aware of the reason for this. Judith's mother, as Judith knows, prides herself on being a glamorous and fascinating creature, most at home in the company of men:

She [Mrs Earle] had no women friends that you could remember. She remarked, now and then, how much she disliked women; and Judith had felt herself included in the condemnation. She had never been pleased to have a daughter; only a handsome son would have been any good to her. Her daughter had discerned that far back in a childhood made vulnerable by adoration of her. (p194)

A glamorous, popular woman, Mrs Earle is separated from other women in her conventionally feminine success. Judith knows that "men admired and delighted in her [mother]" (p194), but throughout her own childhood her mother becomes "more and more obviously not interested in her daughter" (p195). The relationship with her mother, which might have been Judith's first enduring and supportive bond with another woman, appears to have failed her and to be at least partly responsible for the fact that Judith is such an introspective and lonely

child. Like the fragments of childhood memories which are narrated in the first section of The Swan in the Evening (see Chapter 4, above), these brief descriptions of Judith's early relationship with Mrs Earle suggest that Judith's childhood has been blighted by unreciprocated love for her mother.

Judith's way of coping with the feeling of being abandoned by her parents is to imagine them as an ideal Mamma and Papa, whom she separates from her actual parents (Fred and Mildred):

The three were blent in a relationship of a romantic and consoling sort, - an ideal relationship, but then Fred and Mildred would take the place of Mamma and Papa, and shatter the illusion. For they, alas, seemed made of stronger and more enduring fibre: they were real: and they were often not together: and when they were, there was often *coldness and now and then quarrelling*. Life with Fred and Mildred was neither comforting nor secure. (p195)

Obviously, both her parents have been rather distant, and often absent, but it is her mother in particular that Judith blames for the lack of love in her childhood home, for she feels that it was her mother's duty to look after both her father and herself, and that she failed in both. Thus, while she adores her mother she also feels "a faint obscure resentment against Mildred for the way she treated Fred" (p196). I will show that Judith resents her mother for the same reason that she adores her - because of the feminine qualities which make Mrs Earle a success in the world. Her early adoration of her mother seems to stem from worship of the cold glamour which makes her socially successful: "there was scarcely anything about Mamma to remember: nothing but a vague awestruck worshipful identification of her with angels and the Snow Queen" (p194). Judith remembers one night in particular when her mother had come, dressed for a

dinner party, looking "angelic" and accompanied by a strange man. When the stranger made comments about Judith, Mrs Earle referred to her daughter as "the child" and "sounded bored" (p194). Unnoticed by either of them, Judith had stolen one of the pink geraniums which adorned her mother's dress and found that "It was not real after all: it was made of pink velvet" (p194). This seems to be the first step in Judith's disillusionment with her mother, a partial realisation that the glamorous, feminine image which Judith worships in her mother is an artifice.⁴

Through its presentation of the character of Mrs Earle, then, the text comments on the modes of femininity open to Judith and the way that ideas of appropriate feminine performance effectively block female bonding. Judith herself is allowed a partial understanding of this situation. She is also granted some insight into the contradictory nature of different feminine roles. Mrs Earle may approach one ideal of femininity, but she fails dramatically to measure up to another of the ideals of femininity - that of the perfect mother. Thus, Judith's ideal Mamma must be separate in her mind from the socially successful Mildred. What Judith partially realises is that the very qualities which make Mildred a social success preclude the warmth and sympathy which would make her an ideal wife and mother. Judith resents the fact that her worldliness renders Mildred unable to realise that her husband and daughter need her care. Thus she resents

⁴ The presentation of the character of Mrs Earle also explores aspects of the relationship between discourses of class and femininity, since the particular feminine role which she performs is the characteristically upper-middle-class part of the glamorous, charming, and ultimately idle and frivolous woman whose role in life is to passively exhibit her (husband's) wealth.

her "for her competence - her dry, unmerciful, cynical success in dealing with the world. Fred was not at home in the world: even less at home, thought Judith, than she herself: but Mildred was steeped in its wise unkindnesses. She did not seem to realize that Fred needed looking after" (p196).⁵ Implicit in Judith's resentment is the suggestion that the qualities which make Mildred a social success make her a bad mother - that the two types of feminine role, the glamorous socialite and the loving mother, are incompatible with each other and cannot be performed together. However, Judith is not granted the ability to fully articulate this insight into the nature of her mother's femininity, and in her more deluded moments she clings to the hope that Mildred might turn out to be her ideal Mamma after all.⁶

In fact, the true nature of the relationship between Mrs Earle and Judith is signalled to the reader not by the description of Judith's feelings for her mother

⁵ This might seem to suggest that Judith identifies with her father, but elsewhere we are told that "Fred was quite an elderly man, and terrifyingly silent and preoccupied" (p195). Immediately after his death, Judith tries to collect all her memories of him. These suggest that her relationship with her father, like that with her mother, has involved distant worship on her part and vague neglect on his: "He had seemed to forget her for weeks at a time, but when he had remembered, what a more than compensating richness had come into life!" (p104). However, unlike the mother, the father is not castigated for his neglect. Most tellingly, at no point in the novel does it directly describe a meeting between Judith and her father. A few memories of him are all that are reported. He is a shadowy figure for the reader, as for Judith.

⁶ For example, after her father's death Judith feels that Mildred temporarily disappears and that Mamma appears again, "gentle, tired-looking and pale in her black clothes, and dependent for a little while on Judith" (p196). However, the period of grief is very brief, and after six months Mrs Earle no longer wants Judith during the holidays and is again "always surrounded by flattering talkative men and bridge-playing scented women" (p196).

but by what happens after the short chapter which focuses on these feelings. In the following chapter, the narrative moves away into Judith's various experiments with heterosexual relationships, and it seems that it is for such relationships that her mother prepares her as she buys her new clothes and discusses worldly affairs with her (p193).⁷ Tying the bow on Judith's hat, Mrs Earle dismisses her daughter to the company of the three male cousins of the Fyfe family who live next door. This action could be construed as symbolic of her mother's passing on to Judith the secrets of her type of siren-like femininity, since Judith later becomes romantically involved with each of these men in turn. Thus, Judith's relationship with her mother offers her no emotional support, but serves as a means by which she can learn about femininity and how to perform an appropriate role in the upper-middle class social world presented in this novel.⁸ Mrs Earle warns Judith that to take her place in society, she needs to be "a little more stupid" (p259). It is also suggested that it is "best not to refer" to Judith's "odd education" (p259). It is not feminine to be well-educated and clever and, Mrs Earle hints, it is not prudent for a woman who wants social success to think too much about her life. Judith's educational success conflicts with the kind of feminine role her mother is inviting her to perform. Mrs Earle helps Judith to

⁷ Mrs Earle has no difficulty in talking to Judith, but the report that "even though they never spoke intimately, they were never at a loss for topics" (p224; quoted above) suggests that she talks to her in the same superficial way she would talk "in company".

⁸ Gill Frith argues that in its contrasting presentations of the mother-daughter relationship and the central female friendship, *Dusty Answer* depicts a heroine in the process of negotiating changing ideologies of femininity (Frith, 1989, p312).

create an artifice of glamorous femininity, like a theatrical designer equipping her with the costume needed for the part - strings of pearls and a collection of different dresses for morning, afternoon and evening: "Mamma had ordered them in Paris with bored munificence and perfect taste, and an unenthusiastic ear for the modiste's approval of her daughter" (p259). For a short time, Judith tries to fit in with her mother's vapidly glamorous world: "Judith laughed at Mamma's epigrammatic dicta and was a social success. She motored, chatted, danced and played tennis [...] silly all through -stupid even; stupider every day" (p259).

It is entirely apt that it is in this setting, and in the short period when Judith tries to emulate her mother's glamorous version of femininity, that the plot centres around Judith's involvement with Julian Fyfe, a cynical and worldly man who fits easily into her mother's world.⁹ Julian offers Judith a passionate, but ephemeral relationship (p270). Since he believes Judith to be the image of sensual, worldly-wise femininity, he believes that this kind of relationship will suit her. In fact, in common with others in the novel, Julian tries to impose his own idea of appropriate feminine roles upon Judith, telling her "I know you better than you know yourself" (p271). Through its presentation of the relationship between Judith and Julian, the novel exhibits aspects of the tangled relationship between ideologies of femininity and heterosexuality. The (hetero)sexually active life Julian envisages for Judith, and the sort of woman he imagines her to be, are logical extensions of Mrs Earle's brand of femininity which uses glamorous

⁹ As soon as he meets Mrs Earle, he "sat down beside Mamma and started at once to entertain her with the easy, civilized, gossiping conversation she enjoyed" (p260).

artifice in order to court superficial relationships with men and to spend time in frivolous pursuits. At the base of this image of femininity is the idea of woman as siren, as sexually exploitative and greedy, and although Mrs Earle's version of the image is a more refined one, in the post-first-world-war world in which Judith will assume the image, it is to a life of sensual pleasures with Julian that it leads.¹⁰ Whether or not Mrs Earle envisages active sexuality to be a part of the ideal of femininity she wants Judith to acquire, Julian is only taking Mrs Earle's lessons to their logical end. Neither Mrs Earle nor Julian can see that this version of femininity is not the only script available for Judith to learn, and neither can see that Judith does not want to perform this feminine role, so that although she agrees to Julian's proposals, "she felt crushed with melancholy to hear him" (p272).

If Mrs Earle teaches Judith a brand of femininity that can only lead to a life of ephemeral sensual and social pleasures, she is nevertheless not presented as a character who is totally without feeling. When Martin Fyfe, with whom Judith has also been involved, is killed, Mrs Earle is "kind" to Judith in her grief, and cares for her as best she can:

She had asked not a single confidence, spoken no word of pity, but with merciful everydayness looked after her, revived her body with the practical comfort of brandy and hot-water bottles; and then, the next day, abandoned her cure and taken her away. They had motored all over France and into Italy and Switzerland; and Mamma, between long intervals of silence, had talked light sharp surface talk of the places and people they encountered, of food and clothes: talk that could be listened to with adequate attention

¹⁰ At several points in the novel it is suggested that Julian's dissipation and cynicism, and the frivolity of the society which he inhabits, are the direct results of the war. See especially p64, and pp205-6.

and answered with ease. Through the close wrapping of lead upon her mind Judith had understood the deliberate and painstaking scheme of help, and been grateful for it. (pp279-80)

Here, Mrs Earle's apparent superficiality, and the banality of her conversation, are exactly what Judith needs, and the text suggests that in this instance it is not lack of feeling or understanding which makes Mrs Earle shy away from intimate confidences and expression of deep sympathy. Like the brandy and hot-water bottles, Mrs Earle's superficial chat is designed to help Judith to come to terms with her grief. The "merciful everydayness" and "practical comfort" which she provides for Judith help her to recover. The scheme seems to work, and when Mrs Earle suggests that she and Judith spend autumn together in Paris, Judith stirs herself from her lethargy and decides that she is ready to return to England and try to decide what her life might hold. When she asks her mother if she may do so, her mother agrees: "Acquiescing, Mamma had not been able to conceal her relief. What a bore these weeks must have been for her!" (p280) These appear to be Judith's words, suggesting that she cannot believe her mother's care could spring from genuine affection for her. However, the passage quoted above subtly suggests that Judith's perception is inadequate. The practical comfort Mrs Earle provides, the fact that she immediately gives up her "cure" and her pleasant summer society, the use of the word "painstaking" to describe the way she goes about trying to help Judith recover from her pain, all imply that Mrs Earle's care for Judith has been more than a mere discharge of duty. That care may not be expressed in words, and may not be characterised by the kind of intensity of feeling which Judith seeks, but it is a care which seems genuine, nevertheless.

However, despite being genuine, it is not a lasting care. Judith is right in thinking that her mother is willing to perform the supportive role for a limited period only. While the text hints that Mrs Earle gladly offers Judith her support, it also signals that she does not recognise that such practical comfort and unspectacular care might form the basis of a bond which would enrich their lives on a daily basis. In my discussion of The Echoing Grove in the next chapter of this thesis, I will show that apparently unimportant acts of practical care are at the heart of that novel's vision of a supportive bond between women. In Dusty Answer, by contrast, Mrs Earle is willing to play the caring role for a short time only, and prefers the other roles available to her as a woman.

2. ALTERNATIVE FEMALE-TO-FEMALE BONDS IN DUSTY ANSWER

Thus, Mrs Earle genuinely cares for Judith, but is not willing to adopt the maternal role for a prolonged period, and in Dusty Answer the possibility of a lasting, supportive bond between mother and daughter is only a possibility, and never a strong probability.¹¹ Judith, having failed to find any warmth in her mother during her childhood years, forms intense, fantasy-laden attachments to a variety of other characters, as if seeking solace for the failure of maternal care. Paramount among these other characters are the members of the Fyfe family.

¹¹ One critic has suggested that Mrs Earle's words when Judith returns from college, "Is that my girl?" (p192) are the only words in the novel which convey genuine, unselfish warmth from one individual to another (Siegel, 1985, p110). But while this short sentence does resonate with a sense of potential pride and love it is a potential which remains unrealised in the novel.

I have already indicated that Judith becomes romantically involved with all surviving male members of the family, but I want to concentrate for the moment on Judith's relationship with the only female member of the family, a girl four years older than herself called Mariella. Like Judith, Mariella has had no maternal love for support, since both her parents had died when she was a child. Judith realises that Mariella's grandmother had been "the only woman who had ever in all her life protected, cared for and advised her", but the grandmother dies, leaving Mariella in "child-like dismay and bewilderment" (p212). The two girls thus have much in common, suggesting that the character of Mariella has been included in the novel to serve as a foil to Judith: both are beautiful, isolated children, starved of maternal love. However, each reacts to her situation in a very different way - Judith by vivid imaginings and by throwing herself into intense relationships with people outside her family circle, Mariella by cutting her mind off from all imagination, all intensity of feeling, and from anyone not of her family circle, including Judith. Thus, while there is no real friendship between Mariella and Judith, the relationship between the two of them does provide a commentary on the unrealised potential of female bonding.

For Judith, Mariella is the most mysterious and unknown member of the Fyfe family yet, simultaneously, she is also its most intimately known member. She is also the one who seems to care least about Judith's presence, yet the one who most often initiates invitations.¹² Judith's memories of Mariella are of a very

¹² For example, when the Fyfe family return to the house next door to Judith's after the war, it is Mariella whom Judith first bumps into. Mariella's invitation to Judith to visit them initiates Judith's adult involvement with the

cool, self-sufficient child who seems to have few emotions, especially towards Judith herself: "She was remote and unruffled, coolly friendly. She never told you things" (p10). The over-intense Judith does not know what to make of Mariella's reaction to herself: "Sometimes Judith thought Mariella despised her. But she was kind too: she made funny jokes to cheer you up after tears" (p10). Mariella is kind and friendly on any occasion when it is relatively easy for her to be so, but Judith desperately seeks more. For example, when Mariella enthuses that Judith should come to her school, *Judith's reaction is typical of her*: "It was nice of Mariella to be so friendly and pressing. Perhaps she had always been fond of you, had missed you... Judith's heart warmed" (p31). However, the tone of Mariella's invitation, especially her repetition of the word "ripping" to describe the fun they would have, suggest that it stems from childish enthusiasm for the school rather than from a real desire to have Judith's companionship (p31). This is confirmed a few pages later, when Julian invites Judith to go to a play with them. When he tells Mariella, her reply is typical of her: "'Oh good,' said Mariella, not interested" (p36). Judith's notion that Mariella is "fond" of her is thus shown to be a fanciful one.

Despite such over-enthusiastic misjudgments, in some ways Judith does know Mariella very well. Introspective as Judith is, and lacking any woman in her life, apart from her mother, to provide her with a role model, she makes a detailed study of the behaviour of the only female she knows reasonably well. During the period of her adult involvement with the Fyfe family, Judith is a

family (p52).

"remorseless watcher" (p33) of Mariella's face, searching for "the whole clue to Mariella" (p89).¹³ In one brief interlude, the two of them are alone together after bathing nude in a river, and during their conversation Judith begins to feel that Mariella is opening up to her at last. She waits breathlessly for Mariella to reveal herself to her: "To herself she said: 'In another minute I shall get to know Mariella': and she almost held her breath to listen, waiting for the moment of revelation, and fearful lest a word or movement of hers should alarm the speaker, close her lips suddenly, and for ever" (p210). Judith views Mariella as if she were a timid wild animal who must be patiently coaxed into accepting human society.¹⁴ For a short time her strategy works, and Mariella reveals some of her most intimate feelings to Judith. Judith is infinitely pleased to be granted this contact - as, it seems, is Mariella:

She had never talked at such length or with so obvious a satisfaction in talking. For once, Mariella had things she needed to say.

Judith put a hand tightly on hers as it lay on the grass. It quivered a moment, startled, then lay still, and Mariella turned her amazing eyes full on Judith. Sun and sky were mirrored in them so that they swam with more than their usual blind radiance, but the expression of her lips was tremulously pleased and grateful. (p212)

The scene, like others which I will discuss later, is infused with the language of the romantic novel. The nude bathe they have just shared, the natural setting,

¹³ Indeed, Judith does find "the whole clue to Mariella" in the latter's facial expressions, for it is in these that Judith discerns Mariella's interest in Julian (p33), the basis of her later claim that Mariella loves Julian (p270) which Mariella herself confirms in a letter (pp292-96).

¹⁴ Mariella's affinities with animals, wild and tame, are stressed on several occasions (see, for example, p10).

and the unaccustomed physical contact between the two suggest a bond which is sensuous, if not sensual.¹⁵ Normally, Mariella would have shied away from any physical contact, but on this occasion it seems to draw the two women closer, and she begins at last to tell Judith what she wants to hear. Ostensibly, Judith wants to know about Mariella's marriage to Charlie, another of the Fyfe cousins who was killed in the war. However, Mariella is described as "preparing to say the things which it had seemed never could be said" (p212). What Judith wants Mariella to do is to explain her reasons for marriage, to begin Judith's initiation into adult sexual knowledge, and although there is no suggestion that either woman seeks greater physical intimacy with the other, the scene is imbued with a sense of the eroticism of the contact between them. However, just as it seems the confidences between the two are to be completed, they are interrupted by the arrival of Martin Fyfe, and Mariella reverts to her habitual: "empty little voice, with perhaps a trace of relief in it... It was all over" (p213). The arrival of the male has broken into the tentative communion between the two women, destroyed the incipient sensuality of their contact, and prevented them from getting to know each other fully.

Martin's interruption of the communion between Judith and Mariella is emblematic of the forces which constantly come between them.¹⁶ Mariella later

¹⁵ Judy Simons argues that in *Dusty Answer* swimming is always symbolic of sensuality and is more or less explicitly linked with gaining erotic knowledge of one's companion. Judith shares such an experience with Roddy, Jennifer, Mariella and Julian (see Simons, 1992, pp46 & 52).

¹⁶ Interestingly, Simons argues that it is the presence of the three male cousins which strips Mariella of her individuality (Simons, 1992, p52).

admits, in a letter to her cousin, Julian Fyfe, which he shows to Judith, that the reason why she has seemed so uninterested in relationships is "because ever since I was very young you have absorbed me intirely [sic]" (p295). However, Mariella knows that Julian is not in love with her. Judith, also, is for most of her adolescence completely absorbed in Roddy, the only male member of the Fyfe family who does not love her (see, for example, p226-30). In Mariella and Judith, then, Dusty Answer presents two young women, each lacking maternal care, each reacting to that by turning to romantic attachments with unresponsive men as a substitute for that care. These attachments block off any chance of a lasting friendship between the two women. Both are ultimately disappointed in "romance", but they are too blinded by the attraction of the romantic notion of the one, true male partner to see that the simple friendship they could have provided for each other might at least have been some solace, and would certainly have left them less isolated than their relationships with men do.¹⁷ However, unlike Mariella, Judith tries to break out of her isolation. Despite her fear and shyness towards the Fyfe family, she does sometimes risk rejection and humiliation by approaching them and seeking out their companionship (see, for example, p215). But most importantly, for a time Judith does escape from the trap of seeing heterosexual romance as the only sustaining relationship. When Judith goes to Cambridge to study, she forms an intense friendship with another

¹⁷ It must also be noted that the myth of the one true partner also prevents them from finding fulfilment in heterosexual relationships themselves, since each of the women is offered love by a man whom she cannot love in return, Mariella by Charlie, whom she marries to make Julian jealous (p294), and Judith by both Julian (see above), and Martin (see, for example, pp257-58).

female student, a girl called Jennifer. It is this which is the central female friendship in the novel.

Judith initially sees Jennifer when she is having her first meal in college, having already embarrassed herself by sitting at the wrong table. In her misery, Judith looks across the room and sees "a light there, flashing about" (p110). The light emanates from the fair hair of a girl, Jennifer, sitting at the first year table where Judith should be. From the first moment, Judith regards Jennifer in a spirit of rapture and romanticism:

It was somebody's fair head, so fiercely alive that it seemed delicately to light the air around it: a vivacious emphatic head, turning and nodding: below it a white neck and shoulder, generously modelled, leaned across the table. Then the face came round suddenly, all curves, the wide mouth laughing, warm-coloured ... It made you think of warm fruit, - peaches and nectarines mellowed in the sun. (p110)

The slightly overblown language of the description suggests that Judith is already developing a passionate ardour towards Jennifer; indeed, Judith thinks that "Her name, her very name, would be sure to have the sun on it" (p110).¹⁸ When the two actually meet, Judith cries out in "uncontrollable rapture" and the two gaze at each other "blushing and radiant" (p116). The intensity of the attraction between them is more the intensity of two lovers than friends, and it is perhaps significant that one of Jennifer's first questions to Judith is whether or not she

¹⁸ Gill Frith analyses the way that in descriptions such as these of Jennifer, *Dusty Answer* uses pastoral imagery to invoke a closed world of warm and natural sensuality (Frith, 1989, p315). Frith shows that by contrasting Jennifer with characters like Geraldine Manners and Mabel Fuller, descriptions which draw upon stereotypical codes of lesbian exoticism, Lehmann delineates an otherness against which the healthy female friendship can be defined (Frith, 1989, p302).

is engaged (p118). When the two girls look at each other, "their eyes sparkled and flashed: sympathy flowed like an electric current between them" (p120). By comparing their reactions to each other to an electric current, the text introduces a cliché of romantic or sexual attraction and applies it to the attraction between the two friends. Applying the comparison to sympathy rather than sexual attraction, has the effect of reviving the cliché and giving it fresh potency but it also has the opposite effect of bringing the cliché's commonplace associations into the description of the relationship, suggesting firstly that it is passion, and not sympathy, that they feel for each other, and secondly, that this passion is romanticised and unrealistic, an adolescent infatuation rather than a genuine lasting attachment.

As the novel progresses, descriptions of the friendship do indeed tend to characterise it as more of a romance than a friendship. Jennifer is described in a series of tableaux which all owe something to the language of romantic novels. Such tableaux, often consisting of extraordinarily romanticised images, form the major part of the description of the friendship. For example, the following begins a long series of such images:

Jennifer coming into a room and pausing on the threshold, head up, eyes wide open, darting round, dissatisfied until they found you. That was an ever fresh spring of secret happiness. Jennifer lifting you in her arms and carrying you upstairs, because she said you looked tired and were such a baby and too lovely anyway to walk upstairs like other people. (p131)

Each of these almost static images is expressed in language which is quite explicitly that of the romance novel: Jennifer is the strong, masculine partner and Judith the weak, feminine one. On more than one occasion Jennifer lifts Judith

and puts her to bed like a baby (see, for example, p152), and on several occasions, Jennifer's masculinity is subtly emphasised.¹⁹ Most importantly, Jennifer is associated with masculinity through her athleticism. She herself is aware of the association, for she tells Judith about the exercises she does, asking, "Are you keen on muscle? It's more womanly not to be. I've over-developed mine" (p120). When Jennifer asks if Judith can run, Judith replies "excitedly" that she can run and climb (p120).²⁰ The word "excitedly" suggest that Judith is pleased to have found that she has something in common with her new friend. Jennifer's reply, however, displays no such pleasure, and puts an end to any further talk of Judith's physical prowess: "Oh!... I can't imagine you doing anything except wander about looking innocent and bewildered" (p120). Jennifer's "Oh!" suggests not just surprise, but also disappointment. She does not want Judith to be her rival in athleticism; she wants Judith to be "innocent and bewildered" and rather helpless - in short, feminine. Thus, it appears that Jennifer is attracted not to Judith herself, but to the image of passive and helpless femininity which she would like Judith to fit. Indeed, it appears at times that Jennifer succeeds in making this Judith's own self-image. For example,

¹⁹ For example, she draws attention to her own height, and to her affinities with her male cousins (pp118-19); she drinks, smokes and swears in a way that Judith finds a little shocking in a girl (pp119-20); and she wears a "manly" dressing gown (p181) quite unlike the coloured silk kimono that Judith wears (p162). (Judith gives Jennifer a present of a kimono just like hers, but Jennifer does not wear it. Instead, she gives it away to her new lover, Geraldine [see p162].)

²⁰ In several instances, Judith is shown to be physically stronger, faster and more daring than any of the Fyfe family, even the muscular and athletic Martin (see, for example, pp 21 & 88).

when Judith first hears about Jennifer's wrestling matches with Geraldine Manners, she overlooks her own athletic prowess in imagining Geraldine "striding on the lawn with Jennifer, vying with her in feats of strength, a match for her in all magnificent unfeminine physical ways, as you had never been" (p158).

Jennifer's characterisations of her own and Judith's different degrees of sexual sophistication also suggest that she sees herself as the masculine partner and Judith as the feminine one. Until the end of their relationship, Jennifer maintains that Judith is too innocent to be able to understand her own passion-driven nature. The words "innocent" and "baby" recur in Jennifer's descriptions of Judith (pp179-80 & 288), while she describes herself as being "in a fever" about Judith and as a "corrupt disreputable" (p288). In such descriptions, then, Jennifer characterises herself as the worldly, lustful, masculine partner and Judith as the sheltered, asexual, feminine one. The ideal of femininity to which Jennifer would like Judith to conform is thus neither Mrs Earle's glamorous siren, nor the warmly maternal ideal of Judith's imaginary Mamma, but is a third vision of appropriate feminine behaviour, taking the pure, virginal young girl as its ideal. It is, I suggest, partly to preserve her own idealised image of Judith that, in both their last meeting and her last letter to Judith, Jennifer refuses to explain her motives for leaving Judith for Geraldine Manners, since to explain would be to give Judith the knowledge of sexuality which would propel her from the innocent state in which Jennifer would like her to stay. Judith worships Jennifer with a blind hero-worship, but Jennifer goes further, imagining Judith as her ideal but also trying to mould her to fit the image. And Judith is to preserve this image

for ever, so that Jennifer may think of her sentimentally as the one pure love of her youth. Thus it is just at the point when she seems to realise that their relationship is almost over that Jennifer claims that she will love Judith for ever (p153). She further claims that she has always loved Judith, even when "swept off her feet" by Geraldine Manners's sensuality:

"She dazzled me. I simply let everybody and everything else go. And all the time I loved you more than ever. You may not believe it, but it's true. But I couldn't explain to you how I felt - I didn't care. You'd have hated it really, wouldn't you? You are pure and ethereal and I am not. Nor was Geraldine. You used to look after me and kiss me as if you were my mother..." (p289)

Despite loving Judith, and despite her fairly successful moulding of Judith into her own ideal of femininity, Jennifer chooses Geraldine Manners as her partner, at least temporarily. Thus, through its descriptions of Jennifer's attitudes to Judith, the text presents one more image of femininity to which Judith might aspire, but by showing that the image proves unsatisfactory even to the person who moulds Judith in this way, the text simultaneously provides a commentary on the doubtful validity of that image. And once again, the ideology of femininity prevents any real possibility of a lasting female bond. Jennifer's love for Judith is based on a largely false image of Judith's character, suggesting also that the image of femininity she promotes in Judith is itself false, lacking in validity.

However, Jennifer is not totally deluded in her view of Judith. She does recognise something very important about Judith's reaction to her, since Judith does kiss Jennifer like a mother. From their first meeting, part of Jennifer's attraction is that she allows Judith to provide her with maternal care. Judith's

relation to Jennifer can thus be read as significantly modifying Chodorow's claim that it is principally in actually becoming mothers and nurturing children that women seek to replicate their relationships with their own mothers. In her friendship with Jennifer, Judith, who has lacked maternal care, tries to replicate the ideal mother-daughter bond by assuming the maternal position and looking after a "daughter" as her own mother has never looked after her. In her relationship with Jennifer, Judith seems to realise the value of practical care and comfort - in contrast with her partial failure to do so in her relationship with her mother. The differentiating factor being, of course, that in the case of Judith and Jennifer the banalities of everyday care stem from a root of passionate feeling. Also, Judith also seems more able to accept the importance of practical care when it is she who is providing it.²¹ Thus, on the first night, Jennifer gets into bed and, like a dutiful mother, Judith tidies Jennifer's room while her child falls asleep, Judith "enjoying the novel sensation of rendering service" (p121). And at their last meeting, when Jennifer tells Judith that she is leaving Cambridge, it is the pleasure of rendering service that Judith thinks she will miss most: "it had been such a pleasure to comfort, advise, explain" (p174).²² Such descriptions of Judith's pleasure in her friendship with Jennifer make it explicit that the bond with a female friend functions as a substitute for and reversal of

²¹ Thus, Mrs Earle comes closest to being Judith's ideal Mamma after the death of her husband, when Mrs Earle is "dependent for a little while on Judith" (p196).

²² This is true not only of her relationship with Jennifer, but also of her relationship with Mabel Fuller, whom she sometimes loathes but often feels sorry for (see, for example, p135).

the mother-daughter bonding which Judith has lacked. Moreover, at one point, Judith is allowed to recognise the maternal element in her love for Jennifer for what it is. Momentarily contrasting her feelings for Jennifer with the physical, heterosexual union she hopes she will share with Roddy Fyfe, Judith identifies why she loves Jennifer: "Meanwhile there was Jennifer to be loved with a bitter maternal love" (p133). Judith loves Jennifer maternally because she knows that Jennifer is "afraid of the dark", and that she herself is "stronger than Jennifer in spite of the burning life in her" (p132). However, despite feeling protective towards Jennifer, Judith's love for her is also "bitter" because she recognises her own emotional "dependence" on Jennifer, and moreover recognises that such dependence will ultimately drive Jennifer away from her (p133). In this, she has greater insight into their relationship than Jennifer has, for Jennifer makes Judith dependent upon her, only to flee from her when she becomes so. Like Judith and Mariella, Jennifer appears to have lacked maternal care.²³ Her response is to try to create for herself an individual who embodies the twin feminine ideal images of mother and virgin, but, perhaps because the ideal into which she tries to mould Judith is full of contradictions, when she has created the image it proves unsatisfactory. The ideal of femininity blocks, rather than aids, the process of bonding between females.

²³ See p174, where Jennifer says that her mother is "not a bit nice".

3. CONSTRAINTS ON FEMALE BONDING

We have seen that Dusty Answer, through its representation of Judith's relationships with her mother, with Mariella Fyfe, and with Jennifer, explores the possible effects on a female child of a lack of a sustaining bond with the mother, and envisages alternative female-female bonds which might substitute for maternal love. All three of the relationships are presented as offering potential for support, but in none of them is that potential fully realised. It is possible to infer from this that the narrative is complicit with the ideological stance that relationships between women cannot be the main sustaining bond of a woman's life. I have already briefly outlined Cosslett's argument that positioning a female friendship at the centre of the text tends to have the effect of arresting the action of the novel, since only men are thought to perform the kind of significant action which can move the plot forward (see the introduction to this section). A cursory examination of the structure of Dusty Answer might seem to suggest that the pattern Cosslett identifies can be discerned in Lehmann's novel. The work is divided into five parts. Parts One and Two describe Judith's relationship with the Fyfes, as a child then as an adolescent; Part Four describes her relationship with that family when she is an adult, and Part Five acts as a kind of coda, tying, or untying, the loose ends which have been left by the tangled web of relationships which Judith enters into in Part Four. Between these lie Part Three, which describes the relationship between Judith and Jennifer. In terms of length, Parts One and Two are almost exactly balanced by Parts Four and

Five, with Part Three the pivot in the centre. This balanced structure might suggest that Part Three does arrest the development of the plot, which until this point has centred around Judith's relationships with the Fyfe family and the enigma of which one of them will be her marriage partner. Furthermore, as I have already shown, the descriptions of the relationship between Judith and Jennifer tend to take the form of a series of tableaux, static pictures in which Judith watches Jennifer and reflects on the qualities of her friend. There is no development in their relationship, since it is passionately intense from the start. There is not even a process of learning about the other, since each participant almost immediately forms an idealised view of her friend and continues to respond to that ideal rather than to a complex character. The main crisis which ends the relationship, Jennifer's lesbian involvement with Geraldine Manners, is reported to the reader, as it is revealed to Judith, in retrospect, euphemistically, and at second-hand through the filter of another character (see pp157-58). The way that the relationship between Judith and Jennifer is presented to the reader thus emphasises its static qualities, and gives the impression that this friendship is an interlude in the plot, rather than an integral part of it.

That the relationship between Judith and Jennifer could be regarded as a digression from the main narrative action of Judith's developing relationships with the three male Fyfe cousins also appears to be borne out by the fact that it takes place while Judith is at college. She does not meet Jennifer before she goes there, nor do they meet again after they have left college. At one point, the text tells us that Judith had never spent time at Jennifer's home, nor vice versa,

although they had spent one month's holiday together in Cornwall (p196). However, this holiday is only reported to the reader after the relationship between Judith and Jennifer is over, and then only in a brief statement. The text never provides a description of Judith and Jennifer outside of college life. In terms of the narrative presented to us, Judith and Jennifer only exist together while they are at college. Their relationship is firmly bounded by walls, rules and a finite period of time.

However, despite the fact that the friendship is literally contained both by its position in the text and by its college setting, the description of it does more than just delay the completion of Judith's heterosexual development. Part Three may be at the centre of the text, but it functions as more than a simple turning-point, since it itself forms almost one third of the text. Moreover, college is both the setting of Judith and Jennifer's friendship, and an extended metaphor for that friendship. Theirs is a learning relationship. Each uses the other to explore some of the potential in passionate relationships, safe in the knowledge that their passion is contained. Thus, in some ways, the college setting can be read as liberating the potential of the female friendship as well as containing it, since it literally provides a space in which the friendship can be developed. Although in one way the spatial and temporal containment of college life both reflects, and causes, the containment of the emotional repercussions of the relationship, it is also, paradoxically, that very containment which allows the friendship to flourish. One inference which could be drawn from the containment of the friendship is that, like their years at college, the friendship is to be regarded as a stage which

the women must go through in order to reach maturity, but which will have little relevance in their lives thereafter, as Judith's mother suggests to her (see p259, quoted above). However, this need not be regarded as a reactionary vision on the writer's part. As Gill Frith argues, "the understanding of the passionate friendship as a stage in the movement towards sexual identity provides a safe space from within which the writer can experiment with a language of female sexuality which does not depend upon a polarisation of masculine and feminine" (Frith, 1989, p318). In other words, the college setting is liberating not only for the characters but also for the writer, in that it allows her to explore aspects of femininity and female friendship without appearing to reject conventional values.

Thus, the college setting both constrains and liberates the depiction of female friendship. Moreover, in Dusty Answer, the containment of the friendship is not complete. The novel ends with a chapter which takes Judith back to Cambridge and makes Jennifer the initiator of the final stage in Judith's maturation. Judith finds the college and town completely changed. It is now alien to her: she recognises few people, and few recognise her. Those who do recognise her only bring home to Judith the fact that college life continues unseamlessly without her, that she has left no unfillable gap, that her going away and her returning have been equally insignificant. Judith recognises this, and attributes it to the fact that as a woman she had never really been part of the "club": "Farewell to Cambridge, to whom she was less than nothing. She had been deluded into imagining that it bore her some affection. Under its politeness, it had disliked and distrusted her and all other females; and now it

ignored her" (p302). Judith's new adult realism about Cambridge, which she had once regarded with solemn awe (see, for example, p55), extends to her relationship with Roddy Fyfe, as I will show. However, in her relationship with Jennifer she seems still to cling to her dreams. The visit to Cambridge had been arranged in letters between them. In her reply to Jennifer's letter, the first since Jennifer left college, Judith implies that their time together had been the only happy period of her life, and while this might be true, the idyllic image with which she characterises that period suggests that Judith's view of the period is still clouded by romantic illusions: "being happy seems to belong to a far-back time when you wore a green straw hat with a wreath of pink clover" (p290). That Judith is still deluded about Jennifer is signalled in the text, as it is throughout, not through direct commentary from the narrator but by ironic juxtaposition. For example, on looking into the room which had been hers in the college, Judith finds it entirely changed, and thinks herself "dispossessed entirely". But these words are immediately succeeded in the text by a report of what she sees further down the corridor: "There on the corner was Jennifer's door fast-closed, and bearing an unknown name" (p298). By this juxtaposition the narrative suggests that Judith is dispossessed not just from college but from her friendship with Jennifer.

Having rid herself of her delusions about Cambridge, Judith nevertheless continues with her unrealistic expectations of Jennifer.²⁴ While she waits for

²⁴ Judith leaves the college in full knowledge of her own estrangement from the institutions of academia: "The place was terrible - a Dark Tower. She must escape. How had she been deluded for three years into imagining it friendly and

Jennifer, longing for the moment when "she could clasp her hand and feel a voluptuous stir at the heart of her perturbations" (p299), Judith decides not to watch the door but to look out of the window, hoping to "see Jennifer's reflection approaching before she saw her self" (p300). However, what she actually sees is Roddy Fyfe's reflection. This immediately rids Judith of her illusions about Roddy just as she was earlier rid of her illusions about college. She appreciates the symbolism of the moment, recognising that her image of Roddy has been no more than "A shadow laid on a screen and then wiped off again". Judith faces the fact that Roddy had only ever become involved with her "reluctantly" and accepts that "she would never see him again" (p301). She realises that, as in her relationship to her mother, the Roddy she had loved had been an ideal, not the "real" person: "she knew that she had never known Roddy. He had never been for her. He had not once, for a single hour, become a part of real life. He had been a recurring dream, a figure seen always with abnormal clarity and complete distortion" (p301).

This insight into her feeling for Roddy could equally apply to her relationship with Jennifer (hence the superimposition of their images upon the window) but Judith does not recognise that this is the case. Yet despite failing to see that she has also viewed Jennifer through the screen of an ideal image, after watching and thinking about Roddy, Judith does realise that Jennifer is half an hour late and, despite Jennifer's insistence in her letter that Judith should not

secure - a permanent dwelling? In four months it had cast her off for ever" (p298).

wait too long for her (p291), "for the first time it occurred to her that Jennifer might not come" (p301). However, Judith cannot face reality all at once, and keeps waiting and hoping. A quarter of an hour later, Judith worries that she has made a mistake about the date, time or place, and takes Jennifer's letter from her handbag. It is only at this point that she is able to read its signals for what they are, only now that she sees the importance of the sentence "Don't wait for me after five" (p301). Moreover, one sentence, beginning "But if I wasn't there" (p291), has been almost completely obliterated by Jennifer. Re-reading the letter, Judith seems to realise that these "indecipherable" words (p291) might hold the answer to Jennifer's intentions, but she cannot read what is written there: "What was it that she had scratched out? She scrutinised the thick erasure, but there was no clue" (p302). We have seen earlier that Judith was able to discern "the whole clue" to Mariella Fyfe, but she can find no clue at all to Jennifer. The letter, like the reflection, provides a metaphor for Judith's feelings for Jennifer, for not only can Judith not read the hidden words on the page, she has also consistently failed to read the half-hidden signs of Jennifer's true character and real feelings for Judith. To the last, Jennifer fails in her attempts to tell Judith the truth about her own (Jennifer's) lesbianism. Yet Judith does see that Jennifer has hidden something although she cannot decipher what it is.

Judith does realise that Jennifer probably never intended to come back to see her, that she has consigned Judith to her past and does not want to relive that past. However, she fails to understand that Jennifer had loved her exactly

as she herself had loved Roddy, and that Jennifer is no longer likely to want friendship with her.²⁵ She realises that Jennifer did not want to "return to find that all was different, that in this ten months' interval life had separated them beyond hope of reunion" (p302).²⁶ Judith's life, her involvement with all three surviving male Fyfe cousins, has gone on without Jennifer. Jennifer's life, Judith is forced to realise, both from Jennifer's letter (pp287-90) and from hearing about Jennifer from Julian Fyfe (pp266-67), has also continued without Judith. Thus, their friendship has no place in their lives outside of college. Dispossessed from her college education, Judith is also dispossessed from female friendship. Neither has a place for her, and the text can offer no viable place in her life for either.

4. JUDITH'S "DUSTY ANSWER"

Thus, Judith's friendship with Jennifer seems wholly contained by college life, and the creation of a permanent union between the two women does not replace the traditional marriage-ending. This might seem to support Cosslett's claim that

²⁵ Once, Judith does come close to recognising that Jennifer may have been in love with her just as she was in love with Roddy (see p164). However, she does not realise that one consequence of the strength of Jennifer's feeling is that she does not want friendship with Judith, just as Judith does not want friendship with Roddy (see p255) and Julian does not want friendship with Judith (see p281).

²⁶ It is only four months since Judith left college, but Jennifer's relationship with Geraldine Manners had resulted in her being "sent down" in disgrace before completing her course.

"existing conventions cannot fully contain or portray an autonomous female friendship" (Cosslett, 1988, p111). However, Cosslett's argument is a little simplistic. She looks at Charlotte Bronte's Shirley and argues that in that work the centrality of the female friendship disrupts the structure of the narrative and results in a marriage-ending which seems rushed, forced and "clearly there just to satisfy convention" (Cosslett, 1988, p111). Cosslett argues that the demands of the marriage-plot "curtail and contain the friendship" (Cosslett, 1988, p114). This reading of Shirley is not inaccurate, but it is, I believe, more important to stress what in fact Cosslett herself points out - that the loose structure of Shirley "allows a more sustained and central exploration of female friendship for its own sake than is usual" (Cosslett, 1988, p111). It is this point that I would like to emphasise. In both Shirley and Dusty Answer, description of a friendship between two women forms a major part of the narrative. Through this friendship, the characters learn and grow. The friendship does thus perform an important function in the development of both narrative and character.

Moreover, it is also important to note the extent to which in both these novels the friendship disrupts, rather than aids, the marriage-plot. In Bronte's novel, the marriages take place but seem to be more of a coda than a conclusion to the action. In Dusty Answer, on the other hand, the marriage-plot is totally arrested by the female friendship. Judith's relationships with the Fyfe family, which are the concern of the major part of the narrative, appear to centre around the question of which of the Fyfe cousins will be Judith's marriage partner. However, the middle section of the novel, which describes Judith's

relationship with Jennifer, does not just delay the progression of the marriage plot. It also, ultimately, completely destroys that conventional progression. Dusty Answer does not end with a marriage. Instead, it ends with Judith completely alone and claiming that she is now mature enough to live in this way: "She was rid at last of the weakness, the futile obsession of dependence on other people. She had nobody now except herself, and that was best" (p303). This resolution, albeit a negative and rather bleak one, is, as I have already shown, initiated by Jennifer's letter to Judith. The last short chapter places Judith's friendship with Jennifer and her romance with Roddy Fyfe side by side. These two relationships are resolved and dissolved while Judith waits for Jennifer. It is a small point, but an important one, that Judith relinquishes her delusions about Roddy before she is forced to give up her hopes for an ideal relationship with Jennifer. It is the realisation that Jennifer is not going to turn up that sends Judith "out again into the happy-looking streets, where there was nothing more now to fear or to desire" (p302). In Dusty Answer, the central female-female friendship, like the other female-female relationships in the text, fails to fulfill its potential to provide the characters with a lasting and supportive bond.²⁷ However, heterosexual relationships are represented as equally failing to provide any lasting support.²⁸ Dusty Answer does escape from the confines of the

²⁷ This is also so for Jennifer, who tells Judith in her letter that her lesbian affair with Geraldine has broken up because Geraldine was jealous of Jennifer's flirtations, and Jennifer got "so sick of her I could hardly bear to look at her" (p289).

²⁸ Indeed, Judith's romantic relationships with Roddy, Martin and Julian Fyfe, despite being intense (she loses her virginity to the first, gets engaged to

conventional marriage-plot, but it cannot find a satisfactory conclusion to put in place of the marriage. It ends, instead, with a sense of desolation, the main character in a state of "no-thought and no-feeling" (p303). The narrative explicitly signals its own closure: "She was a person whose whole past made one great circle, completed now and ready to be discarded" (p303). But although that closure is motivated by Judith's relationship with Jennifer, the text offers no fully-realised vision of the potential of female-female bonding. Judith spends the whole novel searching for affection, but both female friendship and heterosexual relationships provide her with no more than a "dusty answer".²⁹

We have seen, then, that Lehmann's first novel foreshadows her later preoccupation with the theme of female friendship, but in the early work the potential of the female friendship remains unrealised. In some ways, the friendship is contained both by its college setting, and by its confinement to just one of the novel's five parts. However, it is not insignificant that the part it occupies is the central one. Nor is it insignificant that it is the female friendship which motivates the trip which results in Judith's arrival at a mature, realistic vision of people and places in her life which she has previously viewed in a very idealised fashion. Similarly, it is important to note that it is this friendship which

the second, and promises to become the mistress of the third) each lasts for no more than one or two days. Judy Simons points out that the three romances all take place in one short section of the novel, allowing Judith and the text to test three different but equally conventional romance plots and their endings and to reject them all as illusions (Simons, 1992, pp51-53).

²⁹ Thus, in its critique of the ways that discourses of femininity inhibit the development of friendship between women, the novel also distances itself from any endorsement of conventional gender relationships.

is the last relationship to be resolved. It is the bond with her female friend which is the last one which Judith relinquishes. However, although, indeed, Judith's search for affection gets her no more than a "dusty answer", whether she seeks to find it in heterosexual romance or female friendship, yet the text hints that Judith's bleak and isolated position will not be a permanent one. In its last few lines, the novel sums up Judith's feelings at this point: "She had nobody now except herself, and that was best. This was to be happy - this emptiness, this light uncoloured state, this no-thought and no-feeling" (p303). This might seem to suggest that Judith's search for affection is over, that in its conclusion Dusty Answer rejects the value of relatedness. Yet the reader has learned to distrust Judith's insights, whether directly or indirectly reported, and her complete acceptance of isolation is unconvincing. Indeed, the final words of the text make it clear that Judith's state of "no-thought and no-feeling" is a temporary one: "Soon she must begin to think: What next? but not quite yet" (p303). Dusty Answer does not answer the question, "What next?", for Judith or the reader. However, I will show that Lehmann's subsequent works provide an answer for that "What next?" in more positive accounts of female friendship. In Dusty Answer, such friendship fails to fulfil its potential, but Lehmann continues to explore the theme. In the final chapter of this thesis, I will analyse The Echoing Grove, the novel in which Lehmann is finally able to create an imaginative realisation of the potentials of female bonding, and to situate that bonding as an enriching and sustaining conclusion for both characters and readers.

CHAPTER 6: TOGETHER AT LAST: THE ECHOING GROVE

Janice Raymond's study of the history of female friendships and communities, A Passion for Friends, begins with the statement that "This is a book about women together. Women together are not women alone" (Raymond, 1986, p3). Raymond introduces her study by referring to a few examples of the way women together are ordinarily treated, concluding that women without men are perceived as "women without company or companionship" (Raymond, 1986, p3). As I have already noted, she also argues that, as well as being "alone", women together are also invisible, not perceived as significant, therefore barely perceived at all (Raymond, 1986, p3). We have seen that such failures to perceive women's relationships as significant are characteristic of the dominant critical attitudes to the conclusion of The Echoing Grove (1958; 1st published 1953). The central characters, two sisters who have discovered the strength which can be gained through their bond with each other, are viewed as being tragically alone. For example, one critic, Tony Coopman, argues that the end of Madeleine's affair with the young man, Jocelyn, dooms her to a lonely, frustrated and meaningless life (Coopman, 1974, p121; quoted in the introduction to this section). Coopman thus adheres to the conventional view that for novels whose central characters are female, the proper ending is marriage. I will show that, on the contrary, The Echoing Grove exhibits the "proper" ending of its narrative to be the formation of a lasting bond between two women. In that respect, the end of Madeleine's affair with Jocelyn serves the positive function of bringing Madeleine closer to

her sister, Dinah and allowing the two of them to express their care and understanding of each other. I will further show that the novel explicitly and implicitly confronts the issues of women alone together, and that the ending of the novel represents that state as nearer salvation than damnation.

Madeleine and Dinah appear together in only a few scenes in the novel, but their relationship is central to it.¹ The novel is divided into five sections, the first and fifth of which are told in the "present day" in which Madeleine and Dinah are re-united after an estrangement of fifteen years. These two sections frame the central three sections which describe various events in the past from the point of view of Madeleine, Dinah or one of the other characters. The novel's flashback structure is complex, as are the relationships which are gradually pieced together through that structure. To clarify the context of the points I will raise, I must therefore begin by briefly re-aligning the events narrated into a linear sequence and summarising the complex pattern of relationships which is described.

Dinah Burkett and Madeleine Masters are sisters. During the first few years of Madeleine's marriage to Rickie Masters, Dinah begins an affair with Rickie which continues for some years, unknown to Madeleine, although her never very satisfactory sexual relations with her husband have practically ceased since the

¹ Critics, whether or not they value the bond which the sisters achieve at the end of the novel, tend to see the romantic relationship between Rickie and Dinah as the focus of the narrative. See, for example, Core, 1981, p97, Siegel, 1985, p267, and Tindall, 1985, p161, who reports being unconvinced by Lehmann's own claims that the relationship between the sisters is the central one in the novel.

birth of their second son. Dinah gets pregnant but the baby is stillborn and Dinah becomes dangerously ill. Rickie makes a long and perilous journey to be with Dinah, and his presence appears to give her the will to live, but the effort seems to drain him of the strength to continue his double life. While Dinah is abroad recuperating, a "friend" who had been helping her writes a letter to Madeleine telling her of the affair, through not about the baby. Rickie confesses to Madeleine (although he, too, keeps the baby secret) and begins a round of deceptions and counter-deceptions, in which he repeatedly promises to each sister that he will leave the other, and appears to mean it each time he says it. On one occasion when he "bumps into" Dinah (she may have planned the meeting but he *did not*), he *finds her drinking heavily and almost suicidally depressed*. He tells Madeleine about this, and Madeleine offers to go to see Dinah to try to help her. Dinah rejects Madeleine's help and she and Rickie continue to go through a series of new beginning and endings. Eventually, the affair ends. A few years later, Dinah marries Jo, a working-class socialist who is killed in the Spanish Civil War. When the Second World War begins, Rickie takes a job in the Admiralty and Madeleine moves to a house in the country with their daughter, Clarissa. At this point, she begins an affair with a young man named Jocelyn, a friend of one of her sons. Rickie engages in an intermittent relationship with his best friend's wife, Georgie Worthington. A few days after visiting her during an air-raid and spending the night with Georgie, the duodenal ulcer which has plagued Rickie for years finally kills him. Talking with Dinah shortly afterwards, Mrs Burkett expresses her regret that Dinah failed to send the

letter of reconciliation she had written to Madeleine, and declares her hope that her daughters might be reunited during her lifetime. After the war (one commentator puts it in October 1946) Mrs Burkett dies.² The sisters meet at their mother's death-bed. They have not seen each other since the meeting in Dinah's flat, fifteen years earlier. One month after Mrs Burkett's death, Dinah visits Madeleine's country home. The visit coincides with the end of Madeleine's affair with Jocelyn. Dinah helps Madeleine to cope with her distress and the two are reconciled.

This complex pattern of inter-relationships can only be pieced together at the end of the novel, and even then only with much work on the reader's part, since the story is told not in chronological order, but in an overlapping series of major and minor flashbacks (and flashbacks within flashbacks) each of which recounts a particular character's memory of an incident. Events are described and redescribed from the point-of-view of different characters, each adding a few more details to the overall picture. At the opening of the novel, however, all that is clear is that the central characters are sisters who appear not to have met for some time. From the outset, relations between the sisters are characterised by a strange mixture of intimacy and formality. They share a common heritage, literally, as evidenced by the blue tubs which their mother had given to Madeleine (p9) and the small allowance that each had been given by their father (p22), but each draws on her heritage in a completely different way, and there

² See Broughton, 1984, p95. Broughton gives a full, if not entirely accurate, chronological re-ordering of the events depicted in the novel.

are discrepancies between their memories of the same events as well as great gaps in their knowledge of each other. Several critics have noticed that it is a common feature of Lehmann's work that the heroine has an older, more conventional (including more conventionally feminine), and more socially successful sister, against whom the unconventional younger sister must rebel in order to find her own identity.³ On the surface, this seems to be the case with The Echoing Grove. Indeed, there is perhaps a suggestion that Madeleine and Dinah are to be contrasted precisely as conventional older sister and unconventional younger one in the first of the novel's characteristic flashback scenes. This complex structure, in which small incidents and objects start off a whole train of recollections and reflections, first develops when a gesture of Madeleine's sparks off Dinah's memories of incidents which occurred almost thirty years before:

Early married days, mornings in Montagu Square, the hours turning towards the evening climax - another successful dinner party. All over the household a disciplined increase of tension, not a fray in the glossy texture; and then at my coming into the room - I the unmarried sister, being given an opportunity to meet some suitable young man - at something I said: should I write the place cards for the table, do the flowers, or some of them? - she would rub her forehead and eyes hard thus for a moment. Quite a new trick, revealing a hostess's tension and preoccupation ... and something more. Rubbing me out of her line of vision. And after that she would decline my offer, saying: 'I do it all,' or words to that effect, in the same voice, as if stifling a yawn. (p11)

³ See, for example Gindin, 1974, p204 and Codaccioni, 1983, pp140-41. The most striking examples of the rebellious younger sister and the conventional older one are Olivia and Kate in Invitation to the Waltz and The Weather in the Streets. However, the relationship between these two, and any other pairs of sisters in Lehmann's work, is always more complex than just a clash of different lifestyles. See Chapter 3, above, for a description of some of the complexities in the relationship between Olivia and Kate.

The language of the passage, a direct report of Dinah's thoughts, is signalled as ironic by the word "glossy", which suggests a bright surface with no substance. The phrase "some suitable young man" is clearly not Dinah's own, but a sarcastic quote from Madeleine. Dinah feels that Madeleine regards her as an inferior because she is unmarried, therefore supposedly incapable of simple household tasks, as well as rather boring. Thus, it appears that she perceives Madeleine's attempts to pair her off not as stemming from concern, but from rivalry, to get her out of the way, so that she, Madeleine, will be allowed to shine. Dinah feels aggrieved at being "rubbed out" of Madeleine's vision but, in fact, Madeleine too is rubbed out of Dinah's vision. Despite being narrated from Dinah's point of view, the passage suggests that Dinah has failed to realise that Madeleine feels her young unmarried sister to be a threat to her position. In the first glimpse which we are offered of the past life which will form the bulk of the narrative, then, we are shown a relationship between the two sisters which seems to be characterised by rivalry. Neither sister sees the other's insecurity, nor realises that it is this insecurity which drives them to such rivalry. It is not simply a case of the younger sister rebelling against the older, but of each reacting in different ways to pressure to perform a conventional feminine role. Madeleine tries to act the part of the perfect society hostess, but obviously feels herself to be operating at the edge of failure, while Dinah disparages the attempt to conform while feeling aggrieved at not being allowed to make her own attempt. Clearly, even in those younger days, the relationship between them was a tangled one.

As the section continues, the present day narrative continues to be

interspersed by each's memory of the other, as well as by their speculations about the intervening years. However, neither sister speaks very much, both apparently held back by fear of re-awakening the issue which had finally driven them fully apart. Their relationship is compared to a bomb-site, the ruin of an old home:

They were meeting to be reconciled after fifteen years. This present mood in which they sat relaxed was nothing more than the relief of two people coming back to a bombed building once familiar, shared as a dwelling, and finding all over the smashed foundations a rose-ash haze of willow-herb. No more, no less. It is a ruin; but suspense at least, at least the need for sterile resolution have evaporated with the fact of the return. Terror of nothingness contracts before the contemplation of it. It is not, after all, vacancy, but space; an area razed, roped-off by time; by time refertilized, sown with a transfiguration, a ruin-haunting, ghost-spun No Man's crop of grace. (p13)

The imagery here tells us that they have been afraid of meeting. However, they are afraid not of each other, but of losing each other, of meeting and finding out that there is no relationship between them. What they find when they do meet is that the old home may be gone, but there is something else in its place. Their relationship, like a bomb-site, is cordoned-off, out of bounds, they are prevented from walking straight into it. However, also like a bomb-site, when left for some time, possibilities of new life do occur. These possibilities are both embryonic and ghostly at present, perhaps suggesting that they are not quite real, difficult to imagine in the climate in which they exist, but the refertilization process promises a crop which will have fruitful results, and those results will transfigure the bomb-site, will transfigure their relationship, and confer grace upon them. Here, then, is the first suggestion that while the relationship between the two sisters has characteristically been one of rivalry and conflict, they will be able to create a new relationship with each other, a relationship which promises

transfiguration and a "No Man's crop of grace".⁴

However, before this rebirth can occur, the two must cross the ropes which surround the bomb-site of their relationship. They are meeting "to be reconciled", but they are not reconciled yet. To be so, they must confront the issue which divided them, but first they must learn to talk to each other, to share their feelings openly. They begin with very small steps. So, when the two begin to make contact it is in a tentative and rather superficial way. Significantly, their first honest discussion with each other is about how each of them looks. It seems that each one did, and to some extent still does, lack confidence because each felt that she failed to fit the ideal of feminine beauty which "fashion mags" (p14) and their mother had presented as the key to female success. Each sister, it seems, had thought the other more attractive than herself. Each compares herself with the feminine ideal, finds herself lacking, but believes that the other reaches the ideal. Thus, ideologies of femininity, by creating an ideal which is impossible to achieve, make each woman feel insecure and keep them apart by making them rivals rather than sisters.⁵ When Madeleine begins to describe how

⁴ Several critics have traced the religious imagery in the novel, notably Coopman, 1974 and Broughton, 1984, esp. pp100-102. They have noted that "grace" and "salvation" seem to be key concepts in the design of the novel, recurring again and again through various motifs. What few have noted, although Broughton does mention it briefly (Broughton, 1984, p88 & 99), is that the first and final sections are quite explicit that this grace or salvation is achieved through the relationship between Madeleine and Dinah.

⁵ See, for example, Olivia and Kate Curtis waiting to be asked to dance in Invitation to the Waltz: "They could not part until some one came to part them; but they felt they hated one another" (IW, p163). For a discussion of this function of ideologies of femininity, see Millett, 1977, pp55-56.

much she envied Dinah, she breaks off "as if checked in a tunnel too long, too dark and devious to pursue" (p14). The image, like that of the bomb-site, tells us something about their relationship: as in a tunnel, there will be much darkness to be travelled through in order to find the light at the other side. For Madeleine and Dinah, each trapped in different ways and to different degrees in ideologies of appropriate feminine roles, finding the light at the end of the tunnel will mean leaving behind self-criticism and envy of the other. The journey is a slow and difficult one. The first small step is taken when Madeleine moves from thinking Dinah "utterly different from herself" (p15) to an unexpected realisation that there is at least one way in which they are similar: "Madeleine thought with extreme surprise: 'We are both widows'" (p16). Both are now in the position which their mother had been in for some time before her death, the position of the ageing widow who, having outlived the role which has shaped her life, finds herself regarded almost as a non-person.⁶ Later in the narrative, in a scene which is reported from their mother, Mrs Burkett's, point of view, Mrs Burkett thinks: "Nobody living cared much now what she in her own identity might want or could remember" (p149). That their widowhood is the first similarity Madeleine recognises between herself and her sister suggests that it is perhaps because they are now in this marginalised position, now that their relationship is not hampered by the presence of men, that they can begin to

⁶ The place of the ageing woman is also an issue in The Ballad and the Source where Sybil Jardine expends much energy fighting against society's attempts to assign her a marginal position once she is past child-bearing age (see Chapter 2, above).

discover that they were never really so different after all.

However, this first stage in their movement towards an understanding of each other is only a temporary one, as the sisters again begin to dwell on the differences between them, this time in the matter of the education they have had and their ability to support themselves economically. Dinah holds down a job in a bookshop, where she is the authority on political and economic history (p20), but Madeleine has never taken paid work and has never pursued her education beyond the inadequate level allowed to them as children (p21). This appears to confirm what is suggested by Dinah's rather superior ironic tone when thinking of Madeleine's dinner-parties (see above), that Madeleine has performed the available feminine roles of the period much more successfully than Dinah has.

The question of how alike the two sisters are is central to an understanding of the way that the novel negotiates discourses of femininity. At one point, unsurprisingly, in describing the impact which Madeleine had made on Rob Edwards, Dinah says that Madeleine embodies Rob's "ideal of womanhood" (p182). This is confirmed later, when Rickie (Madeleine's husband) reports a conversation he'd had with Rob: "my wife now, she was his idea of a really beautiful woman: the way she carried herself and her taste in dress and all: smashing. And her gracious manner..." (p247). Madeleine thus exhibits all the qualities expected of a middle-class feminine woman: she is well-groomed, good-looking, tastefully dressed, and so on. What Rickie and Rob fail to see is the

effort this Irigarayan masquerade requires on Madeleine's part.⁷ Dinah's report of Madeleine's preparations for dinner-parties (see above) suggests that Madeleine struggles to live up to the ideal. Nevertheless, Madeleine condemns Dinah for failing to try to do the same.⁸ For example, in their last meeting in Dinah's flat (the meeting in which Madeleine briefly met Rob and Dinah judged Madeleine to be Rob's ideal of womanhood), Madeleine found Dinah to be lacking in some of the qualities deemed essential in women. Madeleine had been estranged from Dinah for some time but had gone to visit Dinah to try to help her, having been told by Rickie that Dinah is coping badly with the end of the affair. In offering to visit Dinah, Madeleine sees herself as noble and self-sacrificing, almost saint-like. Despite her claim to Dinah that she is not from "the Rescue and Preventive" (p177), Madeleine has thought of herself as going to rescue Dinah (p174) and the scene is shot through with imagery of salvation and grace, the imagery which characterises the first section of the novel. But in this scene, Dinah is at the low point of her life, and salvation does not seem a possibility to her. She discusses a man who had "believed in salvation" as if he were deluded (p180), and Madeleine cannot bring herself to say the words which "would have conferred grace, or the right prelude for it, upon this botched, maimed scene" (p186). One reason why Madeleine's rescue attempt fails is

⁷ Perhaps because Rickie fails to recognise the effort Madeleine puts into her femininity, he is harshly critical of the results. For example, when they are on their way out to a dinner party, he thinks her dress "garish" and her make-up "overdone" (p46).

⁸ She also condemns other women mercilessly. See, for example, her comments on her friend Mary (p65).

because, as I have suggested, she does not know how to respond to Dinah when her behaviour does not conform to acceptable feminine patterns. Hence, Madeleine is alienated by Dinah's characteristic way of responding to crises in her own life, which is to respond to a problem as to the "untying of an intellectual knot". Madeleine is critical of such responses, which evoke for her Dinah's "formulas for living: some plan or other laid down beforehand, expounded with this committee-woman's sniff" (p185). The choice of the opprobrious stereotype of the committee-woman suggests that Madeleine finds it inappropriate that Dinah should try to organise solutions to her own problems as if she were not involved in them. She is critical of Dinah's reactions because they do not exhibit traditional feminine immersion in one's own emotions. The stereotype of the "committee-woman", the suggestion is, is less than a "real" woman. Thus, Madeleine judges Dinah as a failure, a failure to live up to standards of femininity which, at present, are the only standards she has available with which to compare herself and other female characters.⁹

In fact, Madeleine appears to feel that in some ways Dinah is hardly feminine at all. This apparent lack of femininity is most obvious in Dinah's adventurous conduct in heterosexual relationships and for much of the novel Madeleine is afraid to face this side of Dinah. By contrast, at the end of the

⁹ Crucially, at the same time as judging Dinah to be a failure, Madeleine also feels herself to be inferior to Dinah. She fails to help Dinah because she is put on the defensive by the other, because she is "once again proved unacceptable by Dinah's standards" (p180). In other words, her own poor self-image, and desperate need for Dinah's approval, block any possibility that the sisters can be reconciled at this point.

novel, Madeleine is keen to hear about Dinah's sexual experiments, suggesting that even although she feels that Dinah was "More like a man" (p285) in having several sexual partners, she now sees that the traditionally "feminine" ways of behaving may not be the only ones valid for women. Thus, by the time the novel nears its conclusion, Madeleine is able to draw on Dinah's "masculine" experience in order to learn new possibilities for her own sexuality. However, at the earlier meeting where the two sisters fail to help each other, or learn from each other, Madeleine rejects Dinah's sexual confidences. Dinah tells Madeleine that she does not mind revealing to her how she feels about sex, but Madeleine's reaction is one of terror:

But I mind hearing, thought Madeleine, shrinking from the revelation. Such sexual confidences they had never, even in the old days, attempted to exchange... I haven't much experience, she thought, abashed, uneasy, knowing that what Dinah had so violently exposed would germinate in her, pushing up wild shoots in territories fallow now for years; never to be explored, since her sole tenant, to whom she was still bound, disturbing once the virgin surface, taking the thin sweet-and-sour tasting crop, had left her soil unhusbanded. (p187)

Dinah's talk of her own sexuality stirs Madeleine's sexuality, which has always hitherto fitted the model imposed upon her by her mother's generation: no sex unless in marriage, and even then, no real place for female desire.¹⁰ The above description of Madeleine's thoughts about her sexual experience uses conventional imagery of woman-as-soil, man-as-farmer, but the text undercuts the

¹⁰ For example, Madeleine denies enjoying her first kiss and agrees with a friend that "men must have desires completely unknown to women, and thoroughly distasteful" (p70). As Georgie Worthington recognises, sex with Rickie does nothing to convince Madeleine that women might have desires, too (p58).

association of passivity with femaleness and activity with maleness since it is Dinah, not a man, who awakens the growth in Madeleine. The imagery is of Dinah having violent sex, as a man, with her sister. Her conversation with Dinah, Madeleine already recognises, has awakened her sexuality in ways that sex with her husband had never done.¹¹ The violence of Dinah's assault challenges Madeleine's acceptance that women are naturally asexual. What Dinah does is to waken Madeleine for the first time to the possibilities of her own sexuality: the imagery which describes Dinah's fertilisation of Madeleine suggests that female sexuality is natural, wild, and productive in ways which feminine sexuality (constrained in desireless marriage) could never be. The passage implies that Madeleine's marital sex with Rickie had been an attempt to tame a wilderness by someone who had not the strength of will and passion to do so.¹² Together, Madeleine and Dinah discover that the wilderness which had seemed empty and sterile is in fact fertile and productive, as also suggested by the image of the sisters' relationship as a bomb-site sown with a "No Man's crop of grace". That description evokes images of war, the aftermath of which has left the sisters alone.¹³ More importantly, though, the regrowth is a "No Man's crop", as the

¹¹ Georgie Worthington calls Madeleine "a married virgin" (p58).

¹² It might be fairer to say that Rickie does not recognise that such a wilderness exists to be tamed. Yet the man who had given Madeleine her first kiss believed that "She was hot stuff all right - would be when she got into her stride" (p69).

¹³ Dinah's husband is killed in the Spanish Civil War. It is a burst duodenal ulcer which kills Rickie, but descriptions of his last few days suggest that the effects of the war greatly exacerbate his problem (see the "Midnight" section of the novel). Mrs Burkett also explicitly compares Rickie's death to that of a "war

image of Dinah fertilising Madeleine's soil suggests. However, at the meeting in the flat Madeleine is not yet ready to allow Dinah to awaken her sexuality, and the attempt at reconciliation withers.

Later, both narratively and chronologically, it will be the growth of Madeleine's sexuality which brings the two sisters together. When Madeleine is rejected by her young lover, Jocelyn, Dinah helps her because she has already faced such problems several times in her life. Sexuality is the catalyst which brings the sisters together and allows them to discover that they do have much in common after all. However, like any catalyst, the sexuality in itself is not important. The most sustaining relationship in their lives is the one which they find when both have left behind the conventional view that women's lives only achieve meaning through their relationships with men. When Madeleine returns home after her final meeting with her lover, she begins to realise that Dinah will be a point of support and stability in her life:

Thank God for the light behind the curtains in the lower windows, for the narrow comfort of being expected back. Dinah, instead of no-one, waiting in the house: Dinah, of all people... Incredible. On the long drive from London, shivering, crawling, through fog-patches, the thought of Dinah waiting had been the one point of rest. The urgent longing to reach this point ahead of her - she saw it featureless but precise, blocked in like a mark on a battle-map meaning Ambulance, First Aid behind the lines - had focused her shocked mind and body and pulled her, magnetized, back home again. (p270)

In this passage, Madeleine gradually comes to accept the importance of having Dinah's companionship. At first, she thinks it a "narrow" comfort, better than "no-one", but hardly much better. Then the difficulties of her journey make her

hero": "If ever a man laid down his life for his country it was he" (p149).

realise the value of the comfort that Dinah will offer. Recalling the image of the tunnel quoted earlier, the journey through the fog is necessary to show Madeleine the value of the light at the end, the light behind the curtains which says that Dinah is waiting. She cannot envisage what their relationship will consist of, since she has no experience of such a thing, therefore it is "featureless". However, it is also now "precise" in value: their relationship is compared to a First Aid post, a relief from battle, something which will help her mend her wounds and survive. Madeleine is "magnetized" by the promise of being saved by Dinah, a word suggesting not a lukewarm acceptance of the situation, but an irresistible urge to be with Dinah. It is a word more usually associated with intense heterosexual relationships than with relationships between sisters. Madeleine had also felt this strength of emotional response before the earlier meeting with Dinah in Dinah's flat. She had stopped outside Dinah's door, "her breath caught in her throat, her pulses hammering" (p174). Not insignificantly, the physical symptoms of acute fear are also those of being in love. As Madeleine approaches Dinah, it is impossible to decide whether she is so nervous because of fear or love of Dinah and even although fear wins out and the attempt at reconciliation fails, Madeleine's suggestion that she doesn't want their meeting "to be known" (p193) suggests a similarity between the meeting of the sisters and the clandestine meetings of the various pairs of lovers in the novel. Like lovers, Madeleine and Dinah share the secret of their bond with each other.

As I have already shown, the bond between the two sisters is not fully

realised at this earlier meeting. However, the visit is one stage on the way to re-finding the relationship they have lost, as Madeleine briefly realises: "only irrelevancies dividing them from the old schoolroom, from hours that seemed beyond time and change secure" (p179). Moreover, Madeleine does take steps towards understanding what the nature of a renewed bond with Dinah might be. She becomes aware, for the first time, of the inadequacy of her middle-class social chit-chat. She also realises that bonding with Dinah will require both to move beyond conventional codes of morality. For example, Madeleine knows that she fails to give comfort to Dinah because although what she says is honest, greater effort is required to produce a deeper kind of truth: "the truth required of her had been of another order ... Ah yes, if she could have seized her cue and spoken the lines that would have led with artifice to 'we', not 'I' and 'you' ... Insight, in fact, plus magnanimity were what had been required, not honesty" (p186). In this passage, Madeleine begins to realise that the codes of honesty and decency which have been ingrained in her since childhood hinder, rather than help, the formation of close relationships.

These codes have been instilled by their mother, whom both find to be a very dignified, but rather distant figure.¹⁴ Madeleine admits to being unable to tell her mother how she felt about Rickie (p278) and remembers an occasion when she fled her mother's presence when she felt that her mother was about to

¹⁴ Again, this is a common character type in Lehmann. See my discussions of *The Swan in the Evening* and *Dusty Answer*, in Chapters 4 and 5, above. For critical discussion of mothers in Lehmann's work, see, for example, Haule, 1985; Kaplan, 1981, and Tindall, 1985, Chapter 8.

confide in her (p10). Dinah, too, finds difficulty confiding in, and accepting confidences from, her mother. For example, after Rickie's death, Dinah finds her mother sobbing uncontrollably, and feels "a shock to see such torrential passion break from the fountain-head of disciplined authority" (pp145-46). These words, which appear to be a direct report of Dinah's thoughts about her mother, suggest that Mrs Burkett usually displays qualities traditionally thought of as masculine.¹⁵ Mr Burkett, like many of the fathers in Lehmann's work, is a rather shadowy figure, whose main impact on his wife and children appears to come when he is ill. In the absence of a strong father-figure Mrs Burkett assumes that role, apparently to the detriment of conventionally maternal qualities like sympathy and receptiveness. For this reason, Dinah and her mother can only speak about the latter's grief over Rickie's death when she has regained control of her emotions, and then only by assuming a bantering tone which makes the conversation into kind of a game: "It was easier to speak then, assuming the dry tone that was part of the game - the particular type of backhand volley they practised enjoyably together" (p150). However, although the image of the game might suggest that their conversation is superficial, even flippant, in fact the "bantering tone" masks the serious substance of what they are saying. What happens during this "game" is that Mrs Burkett and Dinah begin to discuss their

¹⁵ The dignified and authoritative older woman who represents and upholds the values of a past age is another recurring common character type in Lehmann's novels. Sometimes this character is the mother of the heroine, sometimes a mother-figure. See, for example, Mrs Curtis in Invitation to the Waltz (see Chapter 3, above) and Lady Spencer in The Weather in the Streets, especially pp272-84.

feelings about gender roles, difference, and sexuality. Sharing such confidences seems to re-awaken a maternal bond in Mrs Burkett, who suddenly relaxes, "feeling something flutter deep inside her, like the intimation of one more quickening of the sense of life: as if after all there could be no such thing as loss without replacement" (p151). Obviously, the physical bond between Dinah and her mother is not a sufficient basis on which to forge an emotional bond: Mrs Burkett's grief is caused by the loss of Rickie, not one of her own children, and it is almost surprising to her that she might find a replacement for him in one of her own children.¹⁶ The stirrings of life within Mrs Burkett are symbolic of the beginning of a new relationship with Dinah, who must be born again as her mother's spiritual daughter as well as her physical one.

However, the potential remains largely unrealised, because, like Madeleine and Dinah in the incident in Dinah's flat, the two women cannot get over the differences between them. In fact, as also with Madeleine and Dinah, it is the figure of the man, Rickie, who comes between them, since Dinah makes a remark which sounds mildly critical of him and Mrs Burkett grows angry. Images of gestation are again used, but now child and mother seem to threaten each other: "A violence in which some threat, some accusation of betrayal thrashed like a half-glimpsed subterranean monster began to swell in her ... 'For two pins I would get up and beat to a jelly my own flesh and blood'" (p155). The image of the monstrous pregnancy, the idea of making jelly of one's own flesh and

¹⁶ Mrs Burkett thinks of Rickie as "my spirit's son, as the twins, sons of my body, had never been" (p147).

blood, suggests that the embryonic relationship with Dinah, which had just begun to gestate, has aborted violently. Part of the problem seems to be that Mrs Burkett is angered by Dinah's refusal to pass moral judgement on herself (Dinah). Despite claiming "I did not take it upon myself to judge. I never apportioned blame" (p158), Mrs Burkett makes it clear that Dinah and Rickie have both transgressed her codes of "decency".

But again, a change comes over Mrs Burkett and she suddenly recognises a family likeness between Dinah and herself:

For the first time, and with a pang whose edge bewildered her, it struck her that she could trace a family likeness in Dinah after all: to her little sister Alice... died in her tenth year of meningitis... What trick of feature, facial angle or proportion, accidental pose, expression, could have summoned back that long-forgotten child? (p159)

Here, Mrs Burkett glimpses the underlying nature of her relationship with Dinah: she and Dinah are sisters. For a moment, Mrs Burkett realises that sisterhood is a bond which is not confined to relationships between siblings, and that she could develop such a bond with Dinah.¹⁷ Dinah is likened to her dead sister, the memory of whom she had long buried in her unconscious. Perhaps this little sister, who looked untidy, got dirty, was always breaking rules, represents for Mrs Burkett the child she herself could have been if she had had more courage to break with convention; that this child died very young seems symbolic of the fate of an unconventional female in the Victorian world of Mrs Burkett's childhood. Her own acceptance of these Victorian, middle-class values distances her from

¹⁷ In Invitation to the Waltz, Mrs Curtis has a similar feeling about her daughter Kate being a replacement for her dead sister, May (IW, p57).

her children and prevents her from seeing the likenesses between them, just as Madeleine's acceptance of such values temporarily prevents her from seeing the likeness between Dinah and herself.

However, others do see the similarities between these women: Rickie is constantly finding similarities between the two sisters (see, for example, p98) and Dinah's husband, Jo, instantly sees the resemblance between mother and daughter. He tells Mrs Burkett: "It's a funny thing, she doesn't take after you but I'd know you were related: your skeletons 'ud be the dead spit of one another" (p153).¹⁸ Jo recognises that the likeness between Dinah and her mother is not based on superficial attributes, but lies deeper, under the skin. The likeness exists in their bones, but they must build the flesh of their relationship.

That flesh is never built. Mrs Burkett fails to achieve a close relationship with either of her daughters, and Madeleine and Dinah are not reconciled until their mother is too near death to know that her dearest wish is coming true (p164). Perhaps the reason for this is related to the fact that for both the sisters the most haunting memory of their mother is of a stern, Edwardian judge.¹⁹

¹⁸ Compare this to the passage in A Note in Music which describes Grace Fairfax's similarity to her mother: "The moulded contours, the animal impulses, the flesh and blood of youth might differ from generation to generation; but beneath, endured a portion of the shape and structure, the bone of one's ancestors" (NM, p252).

¹⁹ In the portrayal of Mrs Burkett, The Echoing Grove exhibits aspects of the complex relationship between issues of historical period, class and gender. Mrs Burkett herself views the differences between her own and her children's attitudes to issues of gender and sexuality as the product of the generation each was born into (see, for example, p146). However, one critic argues that the generations in Lehmann's work are not as different as they seem. Jane Miller suggests that Lehmann's insight into changing attitudes to gender roles and

Dinah's memory of the conversation with her mother quoted from above is not triggered by thought of the genuine love and affection which passes between them (p160), but by repetition of her mother's judgement on herself: "How is it I wonder that you have never learnt humility?" (p145) For Madeleine, too, it is the sound of her mother passing judgement which rises unbidden from her memory: "Strong passions from a child but not much heart" (p172). Madeleine has, in fact, never heard her mother actually utter these words, but apparently receives the judgment from her mother's unconscious at the moment when she and Dinah meet at their mother's death bed: "when I saw Dinah face to face at last, when we knew she would not rally: then was the moment when from her fading mind she yielded it up and I received it" (p172). Madeleine's acceptance of this judgement seems inextricably linked with coming face to face with Dinah; it is perhaps in this relationship above all others that Madeleine has let passions, including petty jealousy and rivalry, prevent any true expression of heart on her part.

What this quality of heart might consist of is defined by Madeleine's young lover, Jocelyn:

Pinning down heart, qualifying, separating kindness, disallowing generosity, he concluded at last that it could best be defined by considering its opposite, the void: it was the reverse of the void in the being's centre: nothing to do with a code of morality, by no means always recognizable in good conduct. It was a residue, an essence ...something more like grace. Not unselfishness,

sexuality ultimately fails to produce a revolutionary vision because her heroines are still stuck in the class values of their mothers and fail to see that to change gender relations will necessarily involve changing economic and class relations as well (Miller, 1986, pp208-9; see the introduction to this thesis for a discussion of this aspect of Lehmann's work).

but the capacity for freedom from self - the void-containing self. (p172)

"Heart" does not reside in a fixed code of manners, then, or even in a specific set of feelings and actions. It is something much more elusive than Mrs Burkett's code of good behaviour.²⁰ Jocelyn's definition also metaphorically links the quality of heart to Madeleine and Dinah's relationship: as in the image of the bomb-site of Madeleine and Dinah's relationship, in the midst of the apparent void is a residue which confers grace. In that sense, "heart" is a moral quality. Ironically, Jocelyn defines "heart", but he does not exhibit it.²¹ Indeed, the pedantic way he goes about defining "heart", pinning down, qualifying, separating, disallowing, perhaps means that he can never truly understand or exhibit it. By contrast, even the code-bound Mrs Burkett can recognise "heart", or the lack of it, in her children. For example, she recognises that despite Dinah's conduct, which, as I have said, transgresses her mother's code of decency (p158), she has a core of "moral stamina" (p159) and will leave "a fair name and a good report" (p160). While none of these qualities is explicitly linked to "heart", Mrs Burkett's suggestion that Dinah exhibits a residue of goodness which can be perceived even when her conduct is "at the worst" (p159) would appear to indicate that "heart"

²⁰ Several critics have noted that the presentation of the character of Mrs Burkett suggests that she is herself the possessor of a deeper moral sense than her code-bound statements and behaviour might suggest. Thus, while her moral code is viewed as rigid and out-dated, she is also presented as having a greater instinctual knowledge of what is right than either of her daughters. For variations of this argument, see Haule, 1985, pp197-98; Cox, 1977, p255, and Siegel, 1985, p264.

²¹ Jocelyn recognises that he himself lacks heart (p72), and Rickie also recognises this lack in Jocelyn's character (pp228-30).

is the moral quality which Dinah exhibits. Moreover, Mrs Burkett is right to judge Madeleine as having no heart, for despite apparently adhering to her mother's codes of decent behaviour, Madeleine often exhibits coldness towards her husband and children.²² Yet despite the fact that she both exhibits and recognises "heart", it is the image of Mrs Burkett as a stern, judgmental parent which appears to have most impact on her children. Only her death can clear away this image and free Madeleine and Dinah from their resultant rivalry, adolescent lack of confidence in themselves and jealousy of each other. Both must also move beyond their mother's code of certainties, of fixed ideas of what is appropriate behaviour in a woman (see, for example, her judgment that no "proper man" would stand for Dinah's pedantic views, p155). However, as I will show later, the bond that Madeleine and Dinah will build with each other does have much in common with the bond which is tentatively built between Mrs Burkett and Dinah. As in other mother-daughter relationships in Lehmann's work, the potential is there in the relationship between Mrs Burkett and Dinah, but it is never fully realised.

To realise this potential in their relationship with each other, the sisters must learn to disregard the superficial behaviour which society would conventionally consider to be markers of morality. In their youth, each is constantly judging the other in this superficial way, responding to the other's behaviour as if to a character type rather than to a sister. This is most striking

²² See, for example, p171, where she remembers humiliating her son in public because she was ashamed of him.

at the meeting in Dinah's flat, when Dinah answers Madeleine's passionate plea to be heard with the words "The little spitfire!" and with a "long, pseudo-appreciative whistle" (p177). Later in this scene, too, Madeleine thinks of Dinah as "the Belle of the Ball" (p181). The phrase each uses here suggests that their only means of judging each other is by making use of some of the more limiting stereotypes of femininity, and these stereotypes prevent them from reacting to each other on a more personal basis. So, it is not surprising that each makes the same kind of judgments on the other, as Rickie realises.²³ Each misrecognises the other in social stereotypes of feminine roles; each reads the other's behaviour in the most superficial way. In the sisters' typical reactions to each other, codes of morality and of femininity are inextricably linked. Until they recognise that goodness does not necessarily reside in abiding by codes of appropriate feminine behaviour, they cannot bond with each other and cannot achieve grace. Moreover, as I have already shown, at the beginning of the novel and the beginning of their reconciliation, the sisters are presented as trying to cross the divide between them but as having difficulty in finding a way of judging the other which does not have recourse to negative stereotypes of femininity.

The difficulty begins to evaporate when they are forced into killing a rat when out walking Dinah's dog. This incident, which concludes the "present day" narrative of the first section of the novel, is the beginning of the true reconciliation between Madeleine and Dinah. Immediately following this

²³ For example, having listened to both Dinah and Madeleine passing judgment on the other, "He was moved to remark aloud upon the similarity of the comments these girls made about one another; he refrained" (p115).

incident the novel's sequence of major flashbacks begins, showing why the reconciliation should have been necessary in the first place. This incident seems to unlock the past for Madeleine and Dinah; in terms of its function within the novel, both the position of the scene within the narrative and its metaphorical complexity suggest that this scene may be a key to the story which is told.²⁴

The scene is full of touches of black comedy, suggesting that one of the first steps in reaching an unselfish bond with another human being is to stop taking oneself too seriously. Surrounded by images of death and decay, in a churchyard full of Victorian tombs and railings (p24), the sisters are dismayed to find that the dog has started a killing which it cannot finish. They decide that they cannot leave the rat in its mauled state; they must kill it and end its misery (p25). Yet it seems as if the creature will never die (p26). Dinah wails for the presence of a man to help them out of this difficulty, but as Madeleine catalogues the available males in the village her answers reveal the funny side of the situation, since all are hopelessly inadequate for the task in hand (p26). There is nothing for it but to kill it themselves. Both make a supreme effort of will: Dinah fails; Madeleine succeeds in killing the thing, but cannot bear to shovel it away, so Dinah has to finish the job, shovelling it into the river. Between them, they have accomplished what they judge none of the males in the village to be capable of doing (pp26-29).

In the act of killing the rat, Madeleine is forced to utilise the masculine side

²⁴ For discussions of the possible symbolism of this scene see Coopman, 1974, pp116-17, and Allen, 1986, p197.

of her own nature and in some ways to react in a more masculine fashion than her superficially more masculine sister. Yet, in fact, the awful task has been completed by joint effort, by both calling on reserves of strength and courage normally thought of as "masculine". Killing the rat temporarily binds Madeleine and Dinah into a unit, neither being stronger, braver or more capable than the other, neither being able to complete the task without the other's help. They are complementary here, but it is not the straightforward complementarity of opposites generally associated with heterosexual relationships; it is a complementarity which can only occur when each accepts both the strengths and weaknesses of the other and of herself and in doing so, bridges the gap of difference between them. As if in recognition that this bridging has been achieved, each praises the other effusively (p29), both now exhibiting the traditionally feminine qualities of humility and willingness to praise others at the expense of the self. After discovering the masculine similarities between themselves, the sisters move on to use aspects of the code of appropriate feminine behaviour in order to connect with each other rather than to drive the other away, as each had previously done. Now less trapped in gender stereotypes, more able to adopt behaviour patterns from a variety of roles conventionally labelled "masculine" or "feminine", and united by the practicalities of the situation, the sisters can begin taking their first real steps towards bonding.²⁵

²⁵ There is a note of irony in the description of Dinah's fulsome praise of Madeleine as "extending the scope of decent tribute" (p28). Here, the comic voice which comes through in this scene mocks conventional femininity as it had

After killing the rat and disposing of its body, Madeleine and Dinah engage in some light banter, again showing that not taking oneself too seriously is a prerequisite of finding a lasting bond with the other. However, the comedy is leavened and quite a different note creeps into the text as the graveyard, in which they are still standing, spreads "yet one more fold of everlasting night upon its shadow people" (p29). Ostensibly, the shadow people are the dead in their graves, but they are also Madeleine and Dinah, and perhaps the people of whom they share memories. The rather ghostly atmosphere is deepened as the section ends in a passage in which the narrative moves into free indirect speech in the second person plural. Free indirect speech is common in the novel, but this is the only time in which apparently joint thoughts and feelings are voiced in this way. Looking forward to the narratively later scene in Dinah's flat, it seems that this section identifies the means by which the sisters can turn "I" into "we", and which "confer grace" on the "botched, maimed scene" (p186, quoted above):

We're sorry. We did our best. Stopped it going on dying, shovelled it into limbo. There's nothing more to be done, we'll go away. Darkness, close up this fissure, dust under roots and stones, consume our virulent contagion; silence, annul a mortal consternation. We must all recover.

But still the stones seemed rocked, the unsterile mounds, reimpregnated, exhaled dust's fever; a breath, impure, of earthbound anguish. (pp29-30)

In this passage, the earlier images of fertilisation and new growth are modified somewhat. "Reimpregnated" suggests that conception has taken place, and rebirth is imminent, but the remainder of the passage suggests forcibly that what

earlier mocked masculinity. The effect of this mockery is to suggest that either extreme is inadequate in itself.

has been conceived is contaminated with disease, and will quickly succumb to death and decay. This passage makes quite clear what has only been hinted at in the rest of the scene, that what Madeleine and Dinah must kill is more than just a mauled rat. The question is what is it which must be killed, what is the disease at the heart of the contagion and anguish? The final paragraph of the section, quoted above, suggests that even although they believe they have cast out the disease, the anguish remains. The metaphors of the passage link this anguish to impurity and dirt, suggesting that some guilty secret is being hidden. Before their reconciliation can take place fully, this guilty secret must be released. In effect, this is what happens in the middle three sections of the novel: in the course of their few days together, Madeleine and Dinah relive their past and come to terms with it.

Later in the novel, there are passages which metaphorically link Rickie with the rat who must be killed and thrown into the river. For example, when Dinah thinks of ways of escaping from Rickie's "pursuing shadow" and decides that painting is the only satisfactory way "to cast that virus out, drop the rat for ever to the bottom of the river" (p145), the rat, and the disease it bears, have become symbolic of the man who came between the two sisters. Many of the descriptions of the later years of Rickie's life reinforce this idea that he is a creature who has been wounded and is slowly dying - for example, he is described as "a fugitive, a hunted animal" (p218), and in the last important incident in his life he lies entombed in a "vault" (p219) with his best friend's wife. However, I would argue that not only is the rat symbolic of Rickie, but that

Rickie himself functions symbolically in the novel, or at least functions as a narrative device by which the narrator reveals the sisters' feelings for each other.²⁶ Using his character as a device in this way also mirrors the way the sisters use Rickie as a tool to work out the rivalry between them. Thus, while the fact that he is little more than a cipher might reduce the complexity and authenticity of his character, it adds to the complexity of the portrayal of the relationship between the sisters.²⁷

During the evening following the incident with the rat, Dinah is allowed a realisation that she and Madeleine must be purged of their obsession with the past before they can relax and be fully reconciled. Checking her dog for signs that the rat's bite has caused infection, Dinah thinks: "If he's OK tomorrow - and he will be - it will be a good omen. The rat will be gone for good to the bottom of the river" (p32). Dinah is trying to convince herself that the rat is not an omen of what might become of the attempted reconciliation between herself and

²⁶ At one point, Rickie seems to see himself as occupying the position of the dog. Thus, thinking of his last meeting with Dinah, "the image of a stone on a buried body rose to his mind; he was trying to prise it up and she to stamp it down and drag him from it" (p143). However, he also thinks of himself as an animal hunted by Madeleine and Dinah and imagines that "In another moment he would be stripped, raked by their deadly crossfire. Strident voices would pierce him, claws seize him, drag him to and fro" (p49).

²⁷ Several critics object to Lehmann's work on the grounds that her male characters do not rise above the level of character types. See, for example, LeSturgeon, 1965, p87. This may be true of some of her work, but while it lessens the value of her texts for conventional critics, it simply reinforces the impression that it is the female characters who are at the centre of the narrative, and who are therefore most important. For a feminist critic, that concentration on female characters can itself be a cause for celebration.

Madeleine. Thus, that the rat is to be taken by the reader as symbolic of something else is signalled by the fact that it has already assumed symbolic status for the characters within the story. Dinah hopes that the attempt at reconciliation will take them to a place of "freedom", of "light and peace" (p32). However, her thoughts of Madeleine do not yet lead her to this place, as Madeleine's thoughts of Dinah do when she returns from her trip to London (p270, quoted below). At this earlier point in the novel, even after the incident with the rat has brought them together temporarily, the sisters are still separate and have not yet achieved full reconciliation. This is suggested by Dinah's fear that the attempt at reconciliation might still end in "a place of distorting mirrors and trap doors" (p33). The image suggests a nightmare-like circus, a place where the same unpleasant ground must be gone over again and again, with no possibility of escape. The implication is that the reconciliation between the sisters might still be prevented by the malign secrets lurking in their past. The memories which are reported in the following sections thus represent the characters' processes of working through these secrets in order to come to terms with them. Moreover, the narrative device of structuring the novel around their memories also allows the reader to work through that therapeutic, almost cathartic process with the sisters. Hence the hints and suggestions, the re-telling of incidents from different viewpoints, the withholding of information from the reader until one of the characters comes to realise it, means that the reader is invited to participate in Madeleine's and Dinah's process of mutual rediscovery instead of being told about this process as she would have been if an omniscient

external narrator had filled in all the background details and re-arranged the events into a chronological, linear narrative. In effect, the structure of the novel requires that the reading process exactly mirrors the process which the characters must go through in order to achieve their female bond. The structure of the text thus draws the reader into the process of (re)constructing female bonds and into the resultant circle of female friendship.

The first memory which the reader is invited to share is Dinah's most painful memory, a memory of death and disease - as the graveyard passage suggests the sisters' secret might be. However, the memory is not triggered by thoughts of the dead rat in the graveyard, but by Dinah's contemplation of the apparently happy mementoes of Madeleine's children which fill the room she is in. What triggers her memory, in fact, is jealousy of something which Madeleine has and which she has never had. She imagines herself making friends with Madeleine's daughter, then reminds herself that she is still thinking in melodramatic stereotypes: "It was only in corrupt literary fantasies, in the world of steel-true waifs and blade-straight wantons that daughters made pacts in their wise grave childish way with the Woman in Daddy's Life" (pp34-35).²⁸ This short passage, which apparently reports Dinah's thoughts but which also allows the narrator indirect comment through the use of heavily ironic language, makes an

²⁸ Unknown to Dinah, this daughter resulted from the intimacy gained through the long purging conversation that Madeleine and Rickie are forced into having on the evening of his final meeting with Dinah. In the later years of their marriage, Madeleine and Rickie do not resume their sexual relationship, so this last act of procreation seems to be the result of Dinah's influence. In some ways, then, Dinah's sexual influence has indirectly created Clarissa, the daughter she is envious of.

explicit comparison between Dinah's characterisation of herself and literary stereotypes of femininity drawn from stock descriptions of melodramatic fiction. Indeed, the hyphenated words "steel-true" and "blade-straight", as well as the use of the terms "waifs" and "wantons", are almost a parody of the melodramatic style of certain types of "women's fiction". The capitalization of the "Woman in Daddy's Life" also indicates that the passage is making fun of the type of fiction which deals in such stereotypes.

Later in the novel, as Dinah relates her memories of her last meeting with Rickie, she explicitly compares the scene not to melodramatic fiction but to film melodrama: "Everything looked expectant, supercharged, dramatic; opening shots in a French film" (p44). Remembering the incident as if she were watching it in a film, Dinah stands outside her own experience and recognises the clichés which mark the scene. However, the comparison to a film genre does more than just allow the narrator to symbolise Dinah's detached mental state. As I suggested in my discussion of Invitation to the Waltz (see Chapter 3, above), drawing on film conventions in a printed text also foregrounds the fictionality of the text. In this case, more particularly, it foregrounds the melodramatic genre conventions upon which the text is drawing. It also, I would argue, undercuts those conventions and suggests that while drawing upon them, the text, like Dinah, is aware of their shortcomings. Thus, when the passage represents the camera freezing on Rickie and Dinah, and Dinah speculating on the viewer's reactions to the scene, it seems that the reader is being invited to notice the clichéd nature of the situation:

When they will move, that pair of lovers? What are they muttering, their lips stiff, looking hard at each other, then away? She wears her hair shoulder-length, rolled-under, she wears a mackintosh and carries a shabby suitcase: clearly she is the heroine. He has a virile sensuous distinction, a prosperous suit of clothes. Upper-class philanderer caught in a fatal net with waif?... Why does that taxi crawl along the street, slow down beside them? Watch now, the plot is about to thicken. (p44)

Again, in thinking of herself as the heroine (and spectator) of a melodrama, Dinah uses the word "waif". Looking back on the incident, she recognises the banal and sordid nature of her situation. In explicitly drawing upon film conventions, she also recognises the extent to which she has been performing a pre-given, stereotyped feminine role. We, too, recognise this, but also see that there is some truth in some of the clichés. For although Dinah uses the word "waif" ironically, the reader can see that in some ways she really is a waif. She is in trouble and friendless, in need of help. What happens next, when "the plot thickens", is that Rickie completely fails to meet her needs, emotional or practical.²⁹ At one point he had made romantic speeches and heroic promises: "I give you my life. If you ever need it, come and take it", but during the course of this final meeting Dinah is forced to realise that these were "Wild words,

²⁹ Although much sympathy is built for Rickie, in many ways he is precisely an "upper-class philanderer caught in a fatal net". See, for example, his failure to respond emotionally to Georgie, his best friend's wife, even after he has slept with her (p232 and the rest of the "Midnight" section), and his thoughts on the difficulties "chaps" have with women (p100). His treatment of Madeleine and Dinah, too, sometimes suggests that he is using both of them. On several occasions he takes advantage of lucky circumstances in order to escape from one of them without having to explain himself (see, for example, p106). He is especially cowardly and selfish when he flees abroad after promising to live with Dinah, and cannot even bring himself to write her a letter telling her their affair is over (p118); instead, he marks the end of his affair with Dinah and his supposed reconciliation with his wife by sleeping with another woman, whom he also treats rather badly (p118-19).

meaningless" (p42). Reporting the climax of the meeting as if it were a scene in a melodramatic film marks the final stage in Dinah's realisation that her romantic illusions were just that, illusions. Heterosexual romance has failed Dinah and proved to be no more than a particularly vivid fiction. Reading this passage after the opening "present-day" section of the novel, the reader knows that the melodrama is over, that Dinah is no longer a "waif", and that instead of suffering the tragic fate of a typical melodramatic heroine, she has survived to become an independent woman who lives a full, but relatively undramatic life.

Thus, both the reader and Dinah are equipped with the knowledge to judge the melodramatic romance for the cliché that it is. This suggests that one of the functions of the "present-day" sections which begin and end the novel is to frame the story of the heterosexual romance and expose its shortcomings as both fictional genre and ideology. In a melodramatic film or book, the tragic heterosexual romance is generally the whole story and is presented as if it were the characters' whole life. While the major portion of The Echoing Grove appears to tell just such a story of tragic romance, that story is framed by two sections which comment on that story and attempt to represent some of the possibilities which could not normally be represented within the conventions of the genre. The passage which describes Dinah and Rickie's meeting as an incident in a French film, and the earlier one which alludes to romantic fiction, are therefore signals that what we will get in the rest of the novel will cover much of the same ground as melodramatic romantic fiction but that the narrative stance on the events related will be quite different from that commonly found

in popular texts of this sort. So, these passages suggest that The Echoing Grove will work with elements from the popular romance genre, but will do so in order to question some of its conventions and assumptions.

The way such passages draw attention to their own fictionality serves to remind the reader that the narrative which follows has been constructed in order to create certain effects. For example, by its parodic references to romantic fiction, the first of the passages quoted above breaks the realist illusion and alerts the reader to the fact that what follows is a fictional narrative and not, in fact, a real human being's memories. This might have the effect of distancing the reader from the narrative, but it also reminds the reader that she is not a passive recipient of "a slice of life" on the page (or screen), but that she is instead required to play an active role in the construction of the story of Dinah's life. Such passages indicate to the reader that she will have to work to make sense of the events of Dinah's life. Furthermore, I would argue that at the same time as stressing the fictionality of the "memories" which will follow, passages such as those quoted above also, in some ways, make Dinah's character seem more "alive" by inviting the reader to actively experience with Dinah the process of making a coherent narrative from her memories. Hence, while foregrounding its own fictionality, the first of the two passages quoted also provides psychological motivation for Dinah's memories and provides the bridge which allows the narrative to move into direct reporting of Dinah's reflections on her life:

Let it alone, it's dead and everybody's dead except Madeleine and myself. It's a patch of scorched earth, black, scattered with incinerated bones. Whatever she's digging for will not turn up; there's nothing buried alive. What does she fear? ... He fathered her breathing children in lawful

wedlock; and in the lawless dark another: mine; spilt seed, self-disinherited prodigal; non-proven proof, stopped breath, rejecting our and the whole world's complicity. What of it now? (p35)

The imagery here connects with the "reimpregnation" of the stones and the breath of "earthbound anguish" (p30, quoted above) which seemed to be emanating from the ground at the end of the graveyard scene. It also makes explicit the appropriateness of "reimpregnated", since the unresolved issue which Dinah imagines might keep hostility between her and her sister alive is precisely that of Dinah's child, the stillborn child of Rickie's which she had borne many years earlier, and which Madeleine knows nothing about. The passage thus draws together the images of the bomb-site and the graveyard, for this time the bomb appears to have fallen more recently, and what is emphasised is the death and destruction it causes rather than the possibility of new life springing up in the gap it creates. Dinah, unlike Madeleine, knows that in this instance the destruction is complete. The child is dead and the breath, both the breath of the child and the breath of "earthbound anguish", is "stopped". The terminology of the passage veers between the legalistic ("lawful wedlock", "non-proven proof") and the biblical ("spilt seed", "self-disinherited prodigal"), suggesting that Dinah sees the child's death as a punishment, or at least a judgement, upon her own actions, almost as if the innocent child had refused to live a life necessarily sullied by its parents' guilt ("rejecting our and the whole world's complicity"). This impression is confirmed later when Dinah remembers the child's death in more detail and thinks that "he had less chance by far than the snowborn lambs all gathered in and tended" (p37).

Even after they are reconciled, Dinah never tells Madeleine about the stillbirth of her child, and since the reconciliation is successful one must assume that the issue does not require to be openly resolved, that it is literally dead. Nevertheless, there is a sense in which all the children, live and dead, of the sisters' unions with Rickie are the unnamed ones in Dinah's list of people who will accompany herself and Madeleine on their "enterprise" of reconciliation: "whoever accompanies us - myself, herself, Rickie, our parents - who besides?" (p32). Use of the word "enterprise" to describe the process of reconciliation both reminds us that this process will be very hard work and links this passage to the scene in Dinah's flat, where Madeleine also thinks of an attempted reconciliation as an "enterprise". Feeling hurt because Dinah seems not only to be rebuffing the attempt at reconciliation but also blaming Madeleine for the fact that her latest boyfriend, Rob, has just walked out on her, Madeleine's reaction is a mixture of self-righteous indignation and feelings of complete inadequacy: "Shocked pride, indignation contended in her with a painful sense of rejection, or mortification that seemed allied to guilt. Her enterprise, so arduous, resolved upon with such selfless intent of generosity, had foundered. She was a bungler, a humiliated figure; once again proved unacceptable by Dinah's standards" (p180). In this passage, the word "enterprise" is clearly ironic. This sentence appears to be directly reporting Madeleine's thoughts, but the language chosen indirectly reveals Madeleine to be rather pompous and self-important. This mixture of pride and hurt, of deprecating the other while also feeling inferior oneself, characterises much of the interaction between Madeleine and Dinah.

As I argued at the start of this chapter, this characteristic way of reacting to each other stems from a lack of self-esteem caused by pressure to conform to unattainable ideals of femininity. In this particular incident, having had her self-esteem further reduced by Dinah, Madeleine's jealous thoughts burgeon, and after recalling past occasions when she felt Dinah had betrayed her, Madeleine finds an image for how she feels about her sister: "The truth was under my nose like a thing under a stone. It was forced up at last by what was breeding under it: the Thing, worm-generating, bedded in blood, roots, clay" (p181). These sentences once again draw upon the symbolism of something buried alive. However, Madeleine's image seems to offer less hope than Dinah's image of someone buried under a burnt-out building, which at least allows the faint possibility that the thing can be dug out and new life can begin. The language in which Madeleine's thoughts are indirectly described is more grotesque than Dinah's. At this point, the narrative has moved into the past when Madeleine's pain is very fresh. This is conveyed through imagery which goes one step further into the graveyard associations, and what is buried is not anything or anyone who could still have a chance of life, but something dead which is being consumed by parasites. Yet this dead thing is still mobile through what is breeding under it, and thus retains a monstrous semblance of life. Although Madeleine seems to believe that the "Thing" is Dinah's betrayal of her with Rickie, the memories reported immediately preceding this - Madeleine's memories of previous times when Dinah had made her feel like a fool - reveal that the grotesque living-dead creature being eaten by worms can be understood as Madeleine being eaten by

jealousy of Dinah.³⁰ The image of jealousy as a worm eating up the sufferer's mind is a common one; what this passage does is to take this cliché and bring it to life by adding graphic detail to it to make it shocking.

In fact, jealousy of each other is the real force which has driven the sisters apart and Rickie was only a tool in the process of getting at each other. Later, trying to explain why she had got involved with Rickie, Dinah tells Madeleine: "my jealousy of you had gone on growing. I couldn't compete in your world. And you made it so plain I wasn't really acceptable" (p282). As a middle-aged woman looking back on her life, Dinah realises that her jealousy of Madeleine was the impetus behind her affair with Rickie. The "tragic" romance which seems to form the core of the novel is revealed as a power game between the two sisters; in itself it has less importance than it might seem to have. In the novel's "present-day" Dinah seems to recognise some of this. She believes that she has progressed beyond the jealousy of her youth, but thinks that Madeleine is still living in the past, and that therefore Madeleine is still trapped in that process of blaming the other while feeling guilty oneself: "It was a time that couldn't be sustained. Time of enormities. Madeleine's still got it under her skin. She's partly stuck in it still, and thinks I am, or should be: Why, says her bright stare, should she - not I - feel guilt for crimes not hers but mine?" (p38). Dinah is right to think that Madeleine feels guilty about situations over which she has no control. This guilt stems from the self-doubt which is the result of

³⁰ Rickie's image of the "stone on a buried body" (p143, quoted above) also suggests that it is his relationship with Dinah which is the "buried body".

her feeling that she has failed to live up to the standards of feminine behaviour expected of her. Thus, a later conversation between the two sisters gives the reader a different perspective on the events of Madeleine's early married days - those events already described from Dinah's point of view as being characterised by Madeleine's assertion of her own superiority (see p11, quoted above). Madeleine tells Dinah that, as a young bride, "I felt I couldn't cope: I saw myself falling down on the responsibilities - I always saw myself falling down on everything" (p282). We have already seen that Dinah felt hurt at being excluded from the domestic scene and made to feel that she was of no use to Madeleine; now the text makes explicit what could only be inferred from the earlier passage - that Madeleine rejected Dinah's offers of help, not because she did not want or need Dinah's help, but because she was afraid to admit that she needed it. Trying to explain what went wrong in her marriage to Rickie, Madeleine says to Dinah, "I suppose we both needed more support than we could give each other: or both secretly too unsure of ourselves ... You were never unsure, were you?" (p282). Dinah replies "Of course I was" (p282), but the whole difficulty between the two sisters has been that there has been no "of course"; neither has taken for granted that the other is like herself; neither has seen her own failings as common; each has felt herself to be unusually deficient and the other to be unusually accomplished. Madeleine thought that Dinah despised her friends, but Dinah tells her that she had tried hard to make Madeleine's friends like her, and only behaved as if she despised them because they "couldn't stomach" her, thinking her "Plain, highbrow and intense" (p282). This leads the sisters into

another conversation in which each admits to feeling that the other was much better looking than herself. Dinah tells Madeleine that she felt "competitive" over this, but both can now admit that they also felt "handicapped" (p283).

For Madeleine, this feeling of being handicapped is particularly linked to her contradictory feelings about sex. She both fears sexual failure, and is ashamed of the impulses that make her so concerned about her own sexuality. That Dinah does not share these feelings amazes her: "you weren't afraid - ashamed of it?" (p283). Yet it appears that her most corrosive fear and shame stem from her separation from Dinah. Trying to analyse her own constant feelings of guilt, Madeleine at first does not know why she feels this way (pp170-72), until the word associations going on in her head lead her to think of her mother's judgement on herself: "Strong passions from a child but not much heart" (p172). Accepting this judgment as just, Madeleine is able definitely to identify one cause of her feelings of guilt: she believes that it is her own lack of heart which is to blame for the fact that she and Dinah had not been reconciled in their mother's lifetime. Thus, when Madeleine is wakened from sleep by a nightmare voice shouting "Why not?" (p164), she briefly reviews her own life and the possible reasons why she might feel guilt. The conclusion she finally reaches is that it is guilt over her estrangement from Dinah which has tortured her dreams, guilt over her failure to let her mother see her daughters reconciled: "At last she had tracked it down - the cry torn out of the pit of her with her waking. It was her fault, her failure of heart and no one else's" (p173).

Nevertheless, while it is her failure to be reconciled with Dinah that

Madeleine recognises as the fundamental cause of her guilt, Madeleine does also know that she and Dinah have both betrayed Rickie. Indeed, it appears to be fear that Dinah will confront her with this fact that prevents Madeleine from seeking reconciliation. She believes that she found "Rickie betrayed" (p173) when she found Rob in Dinah's flat. She avoids meeting Dinah again because she fears that Dinah will see her own (Madeleine's) relationship with Jocelyn in the same way: "That was how she would be seen by Dinah if she came holding out the olive branch; came unaccompanied yet with someone doubtless visible to Dinah behind her shoulder, turning her face and Dinah's towards the ambush where once more Rickie would be hidden and Rickie would be betrayed" (pp173-74). Moreover, even when thinking herself and Dinah utterly different, Madeleine had had an inkling that she would one day want to "betray" Rickie as Dinah had done. For this reason, she keeps secret Dinah's relationship with Rob: "one day she too would find that traitor she was looking for, would require a concealed place in which to lay out with him what Rickie had given her to spend. Buying Dinah's future silence with her own" (p194). Madeleine recognises that she and Dinah are alike in their betrayal of Rickie. She also recognises that they have not betrayed each other.

Madeleine also acknowledges similarities between her own lover and Dinah's, but refuses to admit that this similarity is anything more than superficial (p196). Images of Jocelyn and Rob exchange places in Madeleine's mind and, finally, images of the two of them call up a memory of Rickie. Madeleine feels that this memory is "surely irrelevant, uncalled for?" (p196), and while it is no

more than a memory of a way Rickie had looked at her, there is a suggestion that there are similarities between all three of the men. What the three men have in common is their failure to offer the strong support that Madeleine and Dinah are looking for.³¹ In fact, they cannot even provide practical, domestic comforts: all three are described as feeling "trapped" in stable relationships (Rob, p11; Jocelyn, p195; Rickie, less directly, on pp199-200). All, Madeleine partially realises, are "unsubstantial, romantic" figures (p196); none of them can sustain the kind of commitment which must eventually express itself in the unspectacular everyday support which Rickie expects Madeleine to provide for his family, even though he gives little in return (p169). Dinah seeks "company" (p183) in her relationship with Rob, but he fails to give it; Rickie can perform the heroic, almost superhuman effort of pulling Dinah back from death (p92)³² but he

³¹ Madeleine's brief linking of Rickie with Jocelyn and Rob occurs at the end of the third section of the novel. The next section is told from Rickie's point of view, and in representing his rather callous treatment of Georgie Worthington, the section confirms the suspicion which Madeleine will not acknowledge, that Rickie is as afraid of commitment as Rob and Jocelyn. Indeed, Rickie tells Georgie of a meeting he had with Rob, when he felt that they were, in some ways, very similar (see especially pp245-48). He also seems to have insider information on Jocelyn's motives in his relationship with Madeleine (p228-29), and even suggests that in talking about the moral emptiness in Jocelyn's heart he is talking about himself (p230). While it would be unfair to say that Rickie is morally empty in the way that Jocelyn and Rob are, he does fail Madeleine and Dinah as completely as they do.

³² This may also explain why both Rickie and Jocelyn can provide Madeleine with some degree of support when Anthony is killed. However, neither of them is around to provide the physical comfort she needs when "She collapsed and was put to bed for three weeks in a dark room, under sedatives" (p168). The text is not explicit, but it appears to be Mrs Burkett who physically nurses Madeleine through this period.

cannot answer her plea for practical comfort (see p42-44, discussed above).³³

In contrast, as shown by the image of Dinah's care for Madeleine as a first aid post behind battlelines, practical support and comfort is at the heart of the bond which develops between Madeleine and Dinah. Like Mrs Earle in Dusty Answer (see Chapter 5, above) Dinah exhibits her attachment to Madeleine not in heroic gestures or passionate speeches but in small, everyday acts of thoughtfulness like giving brandy (p271), making soup (p274), heating bathwater (p275) - just as earlier Mrs Burkett had shown her affection for Dinah by heating milk (p161), making Dinah's supper (p150), and making sure Dinah got enough rest (p150 & 161). Then, Dinah had been the one in need of support; now, she is in the maternal role, offering support to Madeleine. Dinah, like her mother before her (see p150), knows that she cannot force Madeleine to accept her support and advice. Madeleine must do what Judith Earle could not do, and accept the help in the spirit it is given.³⁴ Despite the rivalries and the years of estrangement which have come between them, Dinah recognises that this is the case. She does not force Madeleine to speak about her problems: she immediately realises that something is wrong, but allows Madeleine to decide when she wants to talk about it (pp270-71). At first, Dinah does not offer

³³ That Rickie knows Dinah needs practical help is evident when he tells Madeleine of the meeting. It is at this point in the relationship that Madeleine attempts to shoulder Rickie's responsibilities for him and agrees to go and see Dinah (pp116-17).

³⁴ In The Weather in the Streets, Olivia Curtis is described as experiencing similar difficulty accepting the value of her mother's practical comforts (WS, p33).

judgement on Madeleine's relationship with Jocelyn, but simply supports Madeleine in her decision on how to act and makes the practical arrangements necessary for Madeleine's journey to London to see Jocelyn (p271). At this point, Madeleine's fear that Dinah would judge her to have betrayed Rickie is proved to be unfounded; Dinah's greater experience of relationships means that she understands what Madeleine is going through and does not judge her harshly in any way. The fear and guilt which kept them apart are shown to be products of Madeleine's over-active imagination. Dinah does not accuse Madeleine of any of the things she thinks herself guilty of; instead, Dinah shares her own experience with Madeleine, and offers understanding, help and support. Already it is clear that the relationship which the sisters will re-build supports Gilligan's claim that feminine morality is non-judgmental and based upon empathy.³⁵

Dinah's supportiveness quickly becomes such a positive influence on Madeleine that, on returning from London, Madeleine thinks "I hope I don't outlive her." (p271) At last, Madeleine realises that "One should take more trouble to invest in women friends". She thinks that what prevented her from doing so was "distaste for mental picture of Women without Men, cosily resigned, exchanging recipes, knitting patterns, confidences" (p272). In some ways her picture is accurate: her new relationship with Dinah is based on domestic detail and the exchange of confidences. Crucially, however, Madeleine, unlike Judith

³⁵ Judy Simons argues that The Echoing Grove presents as a liability the kind of moral "integrity" which involves a judgmental stance. Only Rickie exhibits this kind of integrity and it leads him into guilt and frustration (Simons, 1992, p115) and, I would add, leads him to behave less, not more morally, towards the women in his life.

Earle, realises that it is no less enriching for that: "On the drive down, everything that her walls enclosed had been exposed to her. Room after room and over and over again in two-faced images: one welcoming, familiar, to be hurried to for shelter, comfort; the other cynical, estranged, condemned, giving out a suspect breath" (p275). The bond between the sisters may be difficult to achieve, but in quality it contrasts sharply with any of the heterosexual relationships represented in the novel. It is not Dinah who is "condemned" and "suspect", but Jocelyn. These legalistic terms imply that Madeleine sees Jocelyn as a criminal, that at last she has learned not to blame herself for everything that happens to her. They also imply that she realises that guilt, on either side, is a characteristic mainly of the heterosexual relationships in her life. While there has in the past been some guilt associated with relationships between the two sisters (and with their mother) they have now overcome that. Thus, the description of the final stage of Madeleine's relationship with Dinah is entirely free of any suggestions that one side may be guilty or innocent - they are simply comforting to each other, by-passing the laying of blame altogether.

Madeleine's new bond with Dinah also by-passes the kind of communication typical of heterosexual relationships in this novel, in which characters say a lot but make little real contact with each other (see, for example, Rickie's meeting with Georgie in the "Midnight" section of the novel). In contrast, in the novel's "present-day", Dinah and Madeleine's conversations really bring the two of them together, and when the time is not right for such a conversation to take place, they are content to let silence speak when necessary (p170), or, in slightly

different circumstances, to engage in apparently trivial discussions which nevertheless continue to deepen the bond between them (see pp274-77). They can move easily from talking of the weather, music or horses to talking of the death of Dinah's husband, or the reasons why Madeleine's marriage failed. In conversation, the sisters are able to transcend superficialities. It is not the content of what they say which matters, but the function of speech in making a connection between them. Recognition of this fact places the interaction between them on a deeper level than their relationships with others. Thus, struggling to make her first spoken reference to Dinah's relationship with Rickie, Madeleine "stopped, afraid of her own voice and what she heard it saying. But silence was more frightening: something, something must quickly be declared." (p277) In fact, Madeleine had gained this insight at their earlier meeting in the flat, but at that time she could not put her insight into practice (see p186, quoted above). This time, Madeleine manages to find the words which will cross the divide, which allow her to begin to talk to Dinah about the past so that they can finally lay to rest the half-buried things which come between them. What they say is at first tentative, and is mainly about Rickie rather than about themselves (pp277-80), but it does eventually lead to their facing the reason for the affair between Dinah and Rickie (p282 & 285-86), and then to the sharing of sexual confidences which finally puts their relationship on a solid footing (pp283-86).

Dinah tells Madeleine that she has passed beyond strong passions, but only after first being "broken open and pounded to pieces" (p286; the process is described in more detail on p38). Madeleine feels that Dinah was saved by her

own inner strength, and that she herself will never be saved, but Dinah tells her that she already is saved (pp286-87). This make no sense to Madeleine, who says, "I didn't think I needed to be broken open. I've never been put together" (p287). What the sisters are learning is that each is more like the other than they had thought; each has gone through the same process of negotiating the emotional pitfalls of heterosexual relationships and has come to realise that such relationships do not offer a stable sense of self-worth, but that the sisterly relationship does. It is this relationship which offers a chance of salvation and the opportunity to achieve "No Man's grace" to the sisters. Madeleine and Dinah show that they value each other not by grand speeches or heroic actions but by performing for each other the everyday actions conventionally judged to be trivial, but which make life more comfortable for most people. Madeleine's thoughts about how much Dinah means to her are not expressed aloud; instead, she shows her affection for Dinah by throwing a rug around her to keep her warm (p275). Indeed, that Dinah also shows her affection for Madeleine in small, practical comforts is an especially effective way to bridge the gap between the two of them because it also helps to show Madeleine that the two of them are not really as different as she had imagined. It gives Madeleine something of a start to realise that Dinah might be able to provide this domestic comfort for her: watching Dinah bustling round her kitchen, Madeleine is forced to recognise both the similarities between them, and the comfort which Dinah can offer her:

Dinah was as efficient as herself, possibly even quicker, neater. A vague immense surprise at the undramatic intimacy, the naturalness of this domestic scene persisted in the background. Instead of nothing, she had been granted this breathing space, the quiet interior, sparsely furnished,

without ornament or colour or perspective: but decent, ventilated: a place where some semblance of normal existence, or realistic action, could still plausibly continue. (p287)

The life she imagines is undramatic, almost bare, but there is a sense in which the sparse furnishing, the lack of ornament, colour and perspective simply represent the beginning of calm acceptance and the end of pain. Madeleine's dawning understanding of the nature of female relationships brings a new self-acceptance and sense of realism. In this, she resembles Judith Earle at the end of Dusty Answer, but Madeleine has the advantage that her understanding stems from the development, and not the termination, of a strong bond with another woman. Yet Madeleine cannot imagine what the future events of her life with Dinah might be because she has no models for this relationship and because the events which are likely to occur are of a kind judged to have so little importance as to be invisible and hence, in the words of the passage, to be only a "semblance of normal existence", as Raymond's analysis suggests female-female relationships are conventionally viewed (see above). However, Madeleine recognises that it is here that her chances of a fulfilled life now lie, and that her relationship with Dinah will provide her with the intimacy she needs. It will also provide her with a decent, ventilated breathing space, a place where she can be herself and where, she now begins to realise, her actions will not be censured.

The thought of such support being available from Dinah leads Madeleine temporarily to more optimistic plans: "One might yet find a niche in the community, serve others, put one's talents to wider use" (p287). Earlier, she had excused the economic and social uselessness of her own life by making reference

to the inadequate education accorded them as girls, and to the feminine roles they had been expected to play (see p21, discussed above). At this later point in the novel, she is able to revalue the feminine aspects of her own character. She imagines two newspaper advertisements through which she might seek work. The first begins "Refined educated lady of good appearance", catalogues the practical skills which she can offer, and expresses her willingness to try any kind of work, even "rough" household duties. However, such a revaluation will not be easily achieved. The optimistic listing of her skills causes her to describe herself as "a perfect woman nobly planned", but after this positive self-judgment Madeleine immediately reverts to the more conventional, negative valuation of the feminine roles she has occupied. In the second advertisement she describes herself as an "Emotionally frustrated unadaptable class-conscious matron", goes on to catalogue all her emotional shortcomings, the reasons for her rejection by her lover, her inability to consider living for "family friends community spiritual values or any other form abhorrent vacuum", and concludes with "seeks instantaneous return status quo, failing which immediate euthanasia" (p288). Both ads are ironic in tone, the touch of comedy again suggesting that one of the steps towards accepting her situation and enjoying her relationship with Dinah will be for Madeleine to learn to take herself less seriously.³⁶ That she does begin to accept her situation is indicated in the text by the fact that this

³⁶ It could also be argued that the fact that part of Madeleine resists Dinah's comforts and is still occasionally inclined to see the relationship as second-best is one of the novel's strengths, in that it avoids sentimental over-optimism in its portrayal of the sisters' relationship.

despairing note is immediately followed by a small triumph for practical comfort, as she eagerly accepts a bowl of soup from Dinah (p288).

So, the practical comfort which Dinah provides helps Madeleine to feel less despairing about her life. Furthermore, the fact that Dinah bustles about attending to the practicalities, feeding the dog and washing the soup pot, seems to be one of the factors which allows Madeleine to open up again, to tell Dinah about her trip to see Jocelyn. The provision of the practical comforts provides the basis on which they can learn to support each other through talk as well as action. Again, discussing the present leads them into discussing the past, and this time also into speculations about how difficult it is to be a woman and how difficult heterosexual relationships are:

I can't help thinking it's particularly difficult to be a woman just at present. One feels so transitional and fluctuating ... So I suppose do men. I believe we are all in flux - that the difference between our grandmothers and us is far deeper than we realize - much more fundamental than the obvious social economic one. Sometimes I think it's more than the development of a new attitude towards sex: that a new gender may be evolving - psychically new - a sort of hybrid. Or else it's just beginning to be uncovered how much woman there is in man and vice versa. (p292)

Dinah's thinking is not fully formulated - as it might have been in her pompous, more "masculine", past - but she realises that there are attributes of women which had seemed to be part of their natural psychological make-up which can be changed.³⁷ The new sort of woman that she and Madeleine are going a little

³⁷ Jane Miller sees the speech as uncharacteristic of Dinah and as a direct intrusion of the author's own opinions (Miller, 1986, pp203-4). Yet, as I have shown, it is characteristic of Dinah to propound "formulas for living" (p185). Her tendency to respond to personal crises with political rhetoric is evident in the letter she sends to her mother when her husband dies. Mrs Burkett lets Rickie read this letter, and the pair decide that "Good Cheer messages from Supreme

way towards becoming is a hybrid of qualities previously thought to be exclusively masculine or feminine - and hence she speculates that a new gender may be developing. She does not claim that she and Madeleine are of this new gender, but she does claim that they are transitional beings, representative of a general state of flux for women. As we have already seen, what each has had to learn to do is to leave behind her youthful adherence to feminine roles and learn that these are just roles and not "natural" aspects of being female. As evidenced by Dinah's own more "masculine" behaviour in relationships, she believes that it is the failure to accept that gender characteristics have no necessary relationship to one's sex, and that each person's behaviour and psychological make-up will necessarily exhibit both masculine and feminine elements, that generally causes the failure of relationships: "It's ourselves we're trying to destroy when we're destructive: at least I think that explains the people who never can sustain a human relationship. It's not good and evil struggling in them: it's the suppressed unaccepted unacceptable man or woman in them they have to cast out... can't come to terms with" (p292). Dinah describes this as if it were a general feature of human relationships, but in this novel it is more particularly a feature of heterosexual relationships. All the characters in the novel show a tendency to be destructive and self-destructive in relationships. None of them manage to sustain a relationship. Only Dinah and Madeleine each manage eventually to

Headquarters" are characteristic of Dinah (p148). Dinah herself claims that her husband "taught me to see ourselves historically" (p152). I would argue, then, that her comment on gender identities is not uncharacteristic of her, but represents a more refined and mature version of her earlier tendencies to see her own life in political terms.

come to terms with the elements of the other gender in themselves, therefore only they manage to forge a bond with each other which will support them through the difficulties of being a woman in a period in which gender identities are in flux.

This novel therefore shows a female couple transcending conventional gender categories in ways which heterosexual couples seem unable to. In that sense, The Echoing Grove both brings to culmination the process begun in Dusty Answer, and returns full circle to the place of Lehmann's first work. In the mature work, Lehmann is able not only to critique the ideology of heterosexual romance, as she had earlier, but also to envisage an alternative only glimpsed in her earlier work. A female friendship at last achieves its potential for support. In The Echoing Grove, Lehmann presents a vision of female friendship as offering salvation in a world where all other supports have vanished. The vision, based upon quiet empathy and unspectacular everyday comforts as it is, is very much an individual one, not a fully political vision. Female friendships are neither presented as a general answer to women's ills, nor is their efficacy in a world bound by economic and class strata fully investigated. But her vision of the supportive power of female friendship does allow Lehmann to revalue the feminine attributes of her characters and contribute to Auerbach's "evolving literary myth that sweeps across official cultural images of female submission, subservience, and fulfilment in a bounded world" (Auerbach, 1978, p6, quoted above). This is no small achievement.

CONCLUSION

We have seen, then, that it is in the presentation and enactment of sustaining female-to-female relationships that the pleasure of reading Lehmann's work lies. Such a relationship reaches full fictional realisation in The Echoing Grove, but the potential of female-to-female bonds is suggested in Lehmann's first published work as well as in other novels of hers and is represented and enacted by her autobiography, The Swan in the Evening. This bond, non-judgemental, based upon empathy and the provision of practical, everyday comforts, can be easily missed by critics expecting to find only heterosexual relationships valorised in her work. In fact, the popular idea that the strength of Lehmann's work lies in its presentation of the pains of women in love is, if not a misconception, then at least only a partial reading of her work.¹ I have shown that Lehmann may work within the conventions of romantic writing, but ultimately, she uses those conventions not to support, but to critique, the ideology of heterosexual romance. Lehmann's moral vision lies in this critique of the myth of heterosexual romance and her presentation of female bonding as a means of achieving grace and salvation. That this is not recognised as a moral vision is due to two factors. Firstly, the vision is not explicitly expressed. Being a vision of a non-judgemental morality, it cannot be expressed in the judgemental style conventionally taken to be a marker of moral tone. Secondly, since the moral mode envisioned is

¹ See, for example, Margaret Walters's claim that "Her novels [...] dig deeper and deeper into one central theme, the compulsive power of romantic love and its pain" (Walters, 1985, p44).

essentially based upon female relationships, it is doubly invisible because subject to dominant views of such relationships as insignificant. That Lehmann's work confronts these issues is, for me, what motivates the intense love of her writing which has driven this thesis.

This drive has taken me through consideration of the double critical standard at work in criticism of Lehmann's writing and has therefore necessarily entailed that as well as expressing my love of Lehmann's work, I have also expressed my anger at patriarchal views of that work. Thus, the two motives for feminist criticism which I identified, following Kaplan, at the start of this thesis, have been demonstrated to be inextricable in this case. Since women writers will almost always have been undervalued, any critic responding to their work out of love of it will, I believe, always want to refute the harsh judgments which have gone before.

Other aspects of this reading have proved similarly difficult to disentangle. At times it has seemed as if the emotive response and the academic one were indeed incompatible, as I suggested in my introduction that they might be. My aim was to show that feminist criticism can work within the discourses of academia to express insights which seem to be the opposite of measured, intellectual, academic responses. This was especially difficult to achieve when discussing The Swan in the Evening, but I believe that I have demonstrated that allowing my personal response to breach the boundaries of academic argument was not only valid, but indeed the most valid way to approach the difficult questions raised by this text. In doing so, I believe I have shown how the

personal can inform the academic and vice versa.

That the texts I have been analysing have allowed me to juggle (I will not say balance) these various incompatibles in this way yet still reach a conclusion which seems to me to be exciting and genuinely energising for the feminist project proves beyond doubt that Lehmann's work, whatever its apparent complicity with patriarchal structures, has at its heart a vision which is truly "woman-centred" and thus, for me, necessarily feminist. I have arrived at my analysis of this vision by using patriarchal views of "femininity", by using an Irigarayan strategy of accepting some aspects of definitions of femininity and womanhood which have been used to oppress woman and trying to use those definitions against themselves. This has been the riskiest part of my project, and the one which will probably prove most controversial. Not all feminists would agree that one can discuss "women" as a group in this way. Not all would agree that it is useful to try to build a revaluation of women on existing ideas about femininity. My argument has been that it is not only fruitless but, indeed, impossible to try to redefine "femininity" with no recourse to the way it has been defined and used in the past. It is necessary to intervene in conventional usages of gender terminology. There is no other way to gain some control of the common uses of this terminology. To redefine it would be to redefine it for ourselves only.

Similarly, to attempt to simply revalue femininity is to miss the complexities in the way that term has been used. To attempt to revalue femininity without examining some of these complexities would be to revalue it only for feminists

and would be likely to have little effect upon the value placed upon femininity in the dominant discourses of our society. I have attempted a more complex strategy, motivated by the discovery that aspects of what is called femininity, even when known by that term, have not been universally devalued, but have been highly valued when exhibited by certain groups of men. A major part of my strategy has thus been to try to claim for women the ability, previously seen as a purely male trait, to make active and valuable use of femininities without becoming engulfed by those femininities. This runs the risk that when reclaimed for the female, such strategies of using femininities will no longer be highly valued. However, having teased out the theoretical implications of some of the stances which I might have taken, I believe that for this thesis at least, the risk was a necessary one.

One final point remains to be made, and it is this. I have argued that it is necessary to work within dominant discourses in order to try to change them. I believe that I have done this, and that I have shown that Lehmann's work does this. However, in some ways neither of us transforms the patriarchal structures in which we intervene. Lehmann provides a critique of the ideology of heterosexual romance and the fictional genres which support that ideology. I have shown that The Echoing Grove transforms the genre of the romantic melodrama, and opens it up to possibilities which it could not conventionally encompass. But on the harder task of transforming the ideology which underlies that fictional genre, Lehmann has, arguably, failed. Instead of offering a model of transformed heterosexual relationships, she offers an alternative to those

relationships. In that, she exhibits the first two of Kristeva's three tiers of feminism: critique of patriarchal values, and celebration of the feminine. But although she allows one of her characters to point to the idea of a new gender, and to the possibility of new kinds of relationships between the sexes, nowhere in Lehmann's work is that new gender or that new type of relationship envisaged. Thus, she does not move forward to Kristeva's third stage of feminism, in which gender identities are completely deconstructed and the first two stages become unnecessary.

Similarly, I have critiqued patriarchal readings of Lehmann, and have celebrated the femininity of her work and the strength of her vision of female bonding. But, like Lehmann herself, I have not progressed beyond these to consideration of textual strategies which would go beyond masculinity and femininity to deconstruct both of those terms. The gender performances which I consider in Section 2 are not radically subversive like the drag acts which Butler discusses, and allow characters only subtle revisions of feminine roles. Indeed, I have described a delineation of gender performances which serve more to strengthen characters' gender identities (albeit not entirely conventional gender identities) than to dismantle them. Moreover, at the end of the last section, "masculinity" and "femininity" still stand firmly as polarised opposites. Indeed, in many ways, my celebration of female bonding moves them further apart. This has been a deliberate strategy, for although agreeing in principle that the ultimate aim of feminism might be to render gender identities redundant, my examination of the arguments has led to me to believe that the time is not yet

right for such a strategy. Women need some time to assert their own gender identities before they can be expected to dismantle them. Indeed, if the price of dismantling gender identities is the loss of my feminist pleasure in discovering strong female-to-female bonds in the work of writers like Lehmann, then I am not sure that the gains would outweigh the losses.

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