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**The Politics of Self-Narration:
Contemporary Canadian Women Writers.
Feminist Theory and Metafictional Strategies**

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May, 1998**

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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Abstract

This dissertation focuses on the politics of self-narration and the use of visual images and strategies in Margaret Laurence's The Diviners, Daphne Marlatt's Ana Historic and Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale and Cat's Eye. I argue that these authors are reworking the metafictional form by using visual strategies (such as reflection, distortion and point of view) to explore the complex relationship that is created when the woman narrator when she is both subject and object of her own fictional autobiography.

I use the artistic form of anamorphosis as the overriding metaphor for discussing this relation and its manifestation in these texts. Paintings and drawings in which the anamorphic form is used depend upon strategic distortion, indirect viewing and perspective for their effect. Anamorphoses present exploded, fragmented images which, through the strategic positioning of the viewer, are reconfigured into recognizable forms. The emphasis in these works of visual art is upon the moment at which these images are reconfigured. In literary works, I argue, the emphasis is on the process of creating a distorted image and on that which is contained in the spaces that are revealed through the process of exploding that image. This metaphor allows me to explore the interdependence of the visual and written elements of self-representation in these novels and the simultaneous, shifting, mutually informing relation between a narrating, subjective "I" and a narrative "eye" (with its emphasis on the visual, on perspective, and on point of view).

The resistant, reinscriptive and interrogative strategy of "literary anamorphosis" moves these novels beyond the confines of linear, literary forms to create a distinct, feminist, narrative space in which women writing in Canada can articulate the complex

● politics of their positions in but not of the masculinist Master Narratives that have historically defined and controlled them.

**For my Grandfather, James Paton
with love and thanks for his continued love, support and encouragement.**

"but they had their being once
and left a place to stand on"

(Al Purdy, "Roblin Mills Circa 1842" qtd. Laurence The Diviners).

"I am concerned mainly, I think, with finding a form which will enable a novel to reveal itself, a form through which the characters can breathe. When I try to think of form by itself, I have to put it in visual terms"

(Laurence "Gadgetry or Growing" 55).

"We have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative--whose continuity, whose sense, is our lives. To be ourselves we must have ourselves--possess, if need be re-possess, our life-stories. We must 'recollect' ourselves."

(Oliver Sacks "A Matter of Identity" 105).

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Résumé

Cette thèse est axée sur la politique de l'auto-narration et sur l'exploitation d'images et de stratégies optiques dans *The Diviners* de Margaret Laurence, *Ana Historic* de Daphne Marlatt, *The Handmaid's Tale* et *Cat's Eye* de Margaret Atwood. Je prétends que ces auteurs retravaillent la forme métafictionnelle en utilisant des stratégies optiques (comme la réflexion, la distorsion et le point de vue) pour explorer les rapports complexes entre la femme et la narratrice lorsque celle-ci est à la fois sujet et objet de sa propre autobiographie romancée.

J'utilise la forme artistique de l'anamorphose comme métaphore principale pour décrire ce lien et sa manifestation dans ces oeuvres. Les tableaux et dessins dans lesquels la forme anamorphique est utilisée dépendent de la distorsion stratégique, du point de vue indirect et de la perspective de leur effet. Les anamorphoses représentent des images explosées et fragmentées qui, grâce à la position stratégique du spectateur, sont restituées sous leur formes reconnaissables. Le moment où ces images sont restituées est central à ces oeuvres visuelles. Dans les oeuvres littéraires par contre, on insiste davantage sur le processus de création de l'image déformée et de celle qui habite les espaces que nous révèle son exploration. La métaphore me permet d'étudier l'interdépendance des éléments visuels et écrits de l'auto-représentation dans ces romans et de la relation simultanée, mouvante et mutuellement informative entre le "je" narratif et subjectif et "l'oeil" narratif (qui insiste sur le visuel, la perspective et le point de vue).

La stratégie résistante, ré-inscriptible et interrogative de "l'anamorphose littéraire" situe ces romans *au-delà* des confins de la forme littéraire linéaire pour créer un espace

narratif féministe à part dans lequel les femmes-écrivains du Canada peuvent articuler la politique complexe de leur place *dans* (et non pas *de*) le récit-maître masculin qui les a de tous temps définies et contrôlées.

Introduction

In a 1970 letter to Al Purdy, Margaret Laurence wrote of her struggle to begin writing The Diviners: "I don't want to think of that goddam novel. Dunno how to tackle it. I realize more and more that realism bores me to hell, now. No way I can do it in straight narration. Can't think of another way. Stalemate. Words fail. Maybe I should take up painting or music?....Every form and voice I've used before are useless now. This has to be quite different, of course, because it wants to attempt something different" (Lennox 177,195). In her letters to Purdy, Laurence contemplated a move away from "the tradition of realism...which now seems to me totally unviable in fiction" (Lennox 196) and thought of "making the [novel's] main character a sculptor, or an artist" (Lennox 211). What interests me here is that Laurence's interrogation of the "unviable" form of narrative realism involved an examination and reinscription of forms of representation other than the written. By incorporating elements of visual art and music into The Diviners she produced a narrative form that was distinct from other contemporary narrative strategies.

The resulting novel initiates a distinct, innovative narrative strategy in which the complex intersection of the personal, the narrative, the political and the cultural can be articulated. If realism and other dominant forms of literary experimentation¹ were, even in the early 1970s, no longer adequate tools for representing Canadian women's positions in

¹ Cranny-Francis(9), J. Frye (16), and Hite (Other Side 2) have influenced my understanding of feminist responses to modes of contemporary narrative experimentation.

relation to existing literary strategies and cultural systems, then some other form of representation had to be created to accommodate these experiences and positionings. For Laurence, the active, interrogative reworking of her participation in these dominant modes involves a movement outside of the written to include and adapt strategies used in other artistic forms like music and visual art. Looking beyond masculinist narrative forms, and through those forms to examine the gaps in their ostensibly uniform definitions of themselves, involves reworking both the form itself and representations of the woman subject within it. The authors that I discuss here simultaneously explore the machinations of dominant, exclusionary models, and articulate their own form of expression in their own terms within and beyond these models by claiming and reworking representations of women's "othered" positioning in those models or "Master Narratives."² My reading of Margaret Laurence's The Diviners (1974), Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale (1985) and Cat's Eye (1988), and Daphne Marlatt's Ana Historic (1988), explores the ways in which the project of narrating Canadian women's cultural positioning in, but not of, the centres of power, definition and control articulates the complexity of the "ex-centric"'s (Hutcheon Canadian 3) relation to existing Master Narratives and to the relationship between the woman subject and her self-narrative.

I focus on the use of the visual as a destabilizing, interrogative strategy incorporates the political into existing critical discussions which have focused on the

² I use this term frequently throughout this dissertation. For my purposes, it refers to a set of texts that make up a discourse that "has served to power and define centres, margins, boundaries and grounds of action" (S. Smith 18). I will define specific Master Narratives later in this study.

textual implications of resisting linear narrative strategies in contemporary women's fiction. Other readings of feminist metafiction have explored the ways in which women's distinct points of view rework hegemonic definitions of "Self" and "Other", "Subject" and "Object". I will argue that the incorporation and adaptation of the visual allows these writers to resist such oppositional terms in favour of more provisional, mutually constitutive and resistant terms which engage masculinist narrative forms at a more fundamental level. This shift alters those forms radically through an on-going, resistant engagement.³ Women writing⁴ in the contested space *in* but not *of* the Master Narratives of fiction and of history reinscribe and resist existing narrative and generic forms in order to create a distinctly feminist form⁵ which accommodates their experiences and concerns as writing, speaking subjects. The resulting narratives are powerful, innovative explorations of the limits of narrative form and of the points at which the artistic, the political⁶ and the personal intersect. My study will focus on the ways in which Laurence, Atwood and Marlatt create such a narrative position. I argue here that these women resist

³ I will discuss the ways in which my critical method departs from other contemporary feminist readings of metafiction at greater length in Chapter II.

⁴ In the texts that I discuss here, "women writing" becomes a fairly complex concept. In this case, I am referring to both the writing narrators within the texts and to the authors who have written the novels that we are reading.

⁵ Gayle Greene notes that "we may term a novel 'feminist' for its analysis of gender as socially constructed and its sense that what has been constructed may be reconstructed" (*Changing 1*).

⁶ For my purposes, Kate Millett's definition of politics is still the most useful: "The term 'politics' shall refer to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another" (31).

mainstream definitions of metafiction⁷ and, through the disruptive inclusion of images and strategies borrowed from visual art, initiate a separate, radicalized⁸ form of narrative that has more in common with the artistic strategy of anamorphosis⁹ than it does with existing or historical narrative forms¹⁰. The emphasis on self-narration in these texts draws the personal and the political together. Further, through their use of visual strategies which blur the boundaries between subject and object, history and fiction, art and life, author and narrator, they initiate a form that is able to represent the paradoxical, "interspatial"¹¹

⁷ Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text" (*Metafiction* 2).

⁸ My use of the terms "radical" and "radicalized" throughout this dissertation is most closely aligned with their use in political theory. In this sense, "radical" connotes a consciously challenging, interrogative, counter-discourse which sets itself up as being "an essentially contradictory reaction" to western philosophies which view themselves as objective (Gottlieb 2) and which enacts this challenge by confronting not only the manifestations of such philosophies, but the fundamental premises upon which they are founded.

⁹ Anamorphosis is an artistic strategy based on the deliberate distortion of an image in a work of art. Looked at directly, the image seems disproportionate or even incomprehensible. But from a strategic angle, or through a carefully positioned mirror, the image takes on another, more proportionate, shape. Access to the work thus depends on both the artist's deliberate explosion of the image and on the point of access of the viewer. An extended definition and discussion of this term follows in Chapter II.

¹⁰ For a comprehensive history of the appearance of the term "anamorphosis" in discussions of literature see Sylvia Soderlind "Illegitimate Perspectives and the Critical Unconscious: The Anamorphic Imagination". I address Soderlind's discussion at length in Chapter II.

¹¹ I first encountered this evocative term in a short story by Australian writer Phillipa C. Maddern. In "Inhabiting the Interspaces," Maddern explores the life of a woman who

position of women in western cultures in terms which address and resist such oppositions.

For my purposes, the distinction between visual art and narrative is structured around the premise that works of visual art are concerned with perspective, or point of view, and works of narrative are concerned with context¹². It is through this distinction between perspective and context that the two forms of representation are drawn together in women's anamorphic narratives. By narrating works of visual art into their texts, the self-constructing woman writer can articulate her position beyond and within definitions of context as a narrative construct. As Janet Frame suggests in The Carpathians, evoking visual art in these narratives allows the interspatial woman to articulate "being as a point of view" ("Note"). The process of narrating works of visual art problematizes the distinction between the forms and yet simultaneously draws them together, reconstructing the narrator as perspective within and through the context in which she writes.

Each of the novels chosen for this discussion engage with the Master Narratives of fiction and history on a number of levels and are structured around moments of resistance,

lives in the empty spaces of an urban office building. This character lives in the gaps between the false and structural ceilings, between the walls, and in neglected parts of the structure. While she inhabits the same location as the building's "legitimate" tenants and workers, the "interspatial" woman stands in a different relation to that space. She is an interloper, in but not of the official activities and accounts of the space that she inhabits. I found this term useful for describing the decidedly in-between position of women who are represented and drawn from these invisible spaces in the novels that I discuss here.

¹² The OED makes this distinction explicit. It defines "context" as "[t]he connected structure of a writing or composition...the parts which immediately precede or follow and particular passage or 'text' and determine its meaning" while "perspective" is "[t]he appearance presented by visible objects, in regard to relative position, apparent distance, etc."

interrogation and active re-vision. The self-consciously constructing first person narrators in these novels explore the extent to which narratives are shaped and, ultimately, limited by the defining structures of fiction, history and autobiography through which they are read. I have chosen The Diviners, The Handmaid's Tale, Cat's Eye, and Ana Historic because each participates simultaneously in all of these categories and yet cannot be unproblematically included in any.¹³ This ambiguous relationship to narrative definitions is a fundamental part of the political engagements of these novels. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, these texts all incorporate visual techniques into their narratives. Each of these texts engages with visual artefacts (photography, paintings, mirrors) and uses visual strategies (of reflection, misprision, distortion) as a fundamental part of their interrogative, resistant narrative re-vision.

The act of challenging the authority of narrative categories opens the space for destabilizing other definitive and authoritative structures. This challenge is voiced through

¹³ The majority of the women that I have identified as practicing "literary anamorphosis" are from post-colonial countries, and, more significantly because of their distinctly interspatial positioning, from the "settler colonies". The texts cited below use two distinct formal strategies that can be identified as anamorphic. Some, like the novels discussed in this study, use a separate reflecting section that mirrors and distorts the self-narrative, while others enact their anamorphic distortion by focusing on the physical position of the viewer and by "stepping inside the picture and opening it up" rather than by depending on the distancing, reflective image of the mirror. This reflecting section or textual mirror distinguishes the four texts that I discuss here as explicitly anamorphic and therefore as excellent paradigms for discussing anamorphic fiction. These practitioners of the anamorphic form include (but are certainly not limited to): Janet Frame Faces in the Water (New Zealand), Glenda Adams Games of the Strong, Jessica Anderson Tirra Lirra By the River, Shirley Hazzard Transit of Venus, Kate Grenville Joan Makes History (Australia) Janette Turner Hospital Borderline, Susan Swan The Biggest Modern Woman of the World, Jane Urquhart The Underpainter and Margaret Atwood Bodily Harm and Alias Grace (Canada).

the self-consciously constructing voice of a woman narrator. Her act of self-narration renegotiates the oppositional relation between artist and art. In particular, the woman artist must create a space in which she is able to exist as simultaneously subject and object of her art. In each of the texts in this work, the process of creating that space necessitates a radical reworking of oppositional categories of self/other, artist/art, that privileges one position over another and elides and silences the "subordinate" voice. The resulting texts are fragmented and disruptive. They foreground the provisional nature of the narrator's positioning as subject of her work by fracturing the ordered, linear expectations of fiction and of history and by predicating that provisionality on strategies of visual artistic practice. The fragmented structure of the narratives is emphasized by the use in each of these texts of a related but physically separate section or appendix at the end of the narrative itself. These sections, which I have called "anamorphic markers", reflect (on) the preceding fictional texts. They contain within them reflections and distortions of central images and concerns that shape the "main" fictional narrative. Reading these markers back into the preceding text not only disrupts the linear flow of the narrative and enacts, on a number of levels, the process of anamorphosis (as a backward gesture), but it initiates alternate readings of those texts and the documents that fragment them by offering an alternate point of access to the texts.

A number of points of connection prompted my comparative discussion of these four novels: (1) their fragmented structure with separate yet paradoxically connected sections at the end, (2) their strategic use of a self-constructing first person narrator, (3) their exploration of the implications of the relation between the woman artist and her art,

(4) their engagements with the categories of fiction, history and autobiography and (5) their destabilizing use of visual images and strategies. By using these points as a basis for comparison, I am able to explore the ways in which women's writing both participates in and resists existing literary forms and strategies. Similarities between these texts establish a point of access through which I begin to theorize the practice of literary anamorphosis. But these texts also differ enough in their strategic use of anamorphic forms to allow me to explore the variety of ways in which this narrative strategy can be used.

In each of these novels, the politics of making a woman artist visible in her art negotiates a complex ideological space that is fundamental to the process of self-narration. Women's representations exist between the norms of artistic practice that encode women as silent objects and their own perceptions of themselves in which they are central to their own narratives. Susan Strehle notes that "Atwood's reflections on the representation of women in western art reveal a sophisticated awareness of the connection, important to feminist art historians and film theorists, between art forms that objectify women and political systems that oppress them" (179). In this sense, representing her reflected image in her own painting/narration becomes more than the clever self-reflexivity of Escher's¹⁴ and Van Eyck's "disconcerting ... washroom scribble[s], something you'd write with spray paint on a wall" (*Cat's Eye* 327). Rather, this act adds a disruptive (rather than an ordering) presence to the work which writes/talks back to the tradition in which it participates and which has excluded it. It invokes, challenges and interrogates images of

¹⁴ M.C. Escher's lithographs (Figs. 4-8) have played an important part in my attempts to articulate the complex relation between visual and narrative strategies of representation. I discuss Escher's influence at greater length in Chapter II.

women's narcissism, and of women mediated by and through disrupted mirror images, of women as artistic objects and passive recipients of masculine definition and representation.

My decision to focus on works by Canadian women was a combination of pragmatism--the availability of a wide range of texts and of current critical material--and of the particularly provocative connections between Canada and women's (post) colonial¹⁵ positioning. Place, and the process of constructing a workable subject position within and through the specific material realities of context, is an important element in each of the novels that I discuss here. Including it as a category in this inquiry emphasizes the political elements in the writing and puts the structures of dominance and cultural control into sharper historical and political perspective. For these Canadian authors and their self-constructing narrators, the processes of representing culture and subjectivity are not separate or separable. Linda Nicholson has suggested that the "elaborate constructions of post-colonial subjectivity encode a running parallel between the conditioning of Canada as a nation-state and the positioning of women within it, and then by extension the positioning of women within any governing patriarchy" (111). Masculinist linguistic and narrative structures similarly contribute to the "colonized" position of women within feminist theory. Petersen and Rutherford note that "[a]n important aspect of feminist writing has been (a) recognizing that language itself has been colonized by the male

¹⁵ Where the term post-colonial appears in this study, it refers specifically to "the culture[s] affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization until the present day...[whose] project [it has been] to interrogate European discourse and discursive strategies from its position within and between two worlds" (Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin 2, 196). It is therefore used as a term for cultural and political investigation rather than as a way of describing an historical moment.

experience and (b) trying to find a language that can describe female experience adequately" (10).¹⁶ For women writing in Canada, exclusionary colonialist practices are reflected and exaggerated in the colonial positioning of the culture in which they write. Canadian women must negotiate their "experience of both participating in and standing outside" (Irvine 10) of mainstream cultural forms through a series of interrelated interrogations. As a post-colonial space, and a country with extensive (if troubled) historical and cultural ties with Britain, Canada is *in*, but not truly *of*, the western cultural hegemony that has defined and perpetuated the cultural imperialisms of United States and Britain.

Homi Bhabha theorizes that the connection between postmodern form and post-colonial politics is constructed in the "in between spaces" of the contemporary link "between colony and metropolis" (212). Bhabha suggests that the migratory, diasporic and multiply (and often contradictorily) positioned world of the post-colonial subject leads him, through Fredric Jameson's theories of postmodernism and culture, to the assertion that:

the problem of signifying the interstitial passages and processes of cultural difference that are inscribed in the 'in between'...is, ironically, the disintegrative moment, even moment of enunciation—that sudden disjunction of the present—that makes possible the rendering of culture's global reach. And, paradoxically, it is [possible] only through a structure of splitting and displacement (217).

A number of the terms in and through which I have theorized the anamorphic form appear in Bhabha's "ex-centric" reading of Jameson's "third space". By divining the postmodern

¹⁶ Images of colonization and resistance appear in many feminist theoretical discussions including those of Irvine (10-11), Howells (*Private* 2-3) and Fraser (xi).

subject in "new world borders" Bhabha succinctly delineates the points at which postmodern theories of subjectivity fail the "ex-centric" subject. For women in the settler colonies¹⁷ the inadequacies of these forms are exacerbated by their investment in masculinist paradigms as well as their participation in Eurocentric cultural privilege.

While all of the texts that I discuss here share similar concerns with issues of form, content and voice, they each foreground a different way of articulating those concerns. While each of these novels could be fruitfully compared to the others, I have chosen to discuss them in pairs in order to highlight their differences. The Diviners and Cat's Eye focus on the problematics of renegotiating the relationship between categories of art and the artist. The Handmaid's Tale and Ana Historic focus on an exploration of the gaps in history's Master Narrative through the self-constructing voice of the women in those interstices. I begin with Laurence's The Diviners because it is in this text that I see the first example of literary anamorphosis. Laurence's early experimentation with visual strategies and fragmented, multivocal narrative form initiates the distinctly Canadian version of this disruptive form. The engagements with the expectations of autobiographical fiction in both The Diviners and Cat's Eye allow me to theorize the strategic use of self-narration in texts which explicitly focus on the problematic relationship between the woman artist and her art. I follow this chapter with a discussion of The Handmaid's Tale and Ana Historic. In these texts, self-narrative is one of a number of disruptive strategies which place the

¹⁷ Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin describe the "settler colonies" as having distinct political, as well as historical, connections. They are colonies in which "land was occupied by European colonists who dispossessed and over-whelmed the Indigenous populations. They established a transplanted civilization which eventually secured political independence while retaining a non-Indigenous language" (25).

author/narrator's engagement with Master Narratives at the shifting, undefined boundary point between fiction and history. By placing the novels in this order, I trace the anamorphic strategy from its beginnings in Laurence's text through its influence on later auto/fictional¹⁸ Canadian texts to its manifestation in more explicitly political novels of Atwood and Marlatt.

I read each of these novels from two distinct, but connected, points of access. The first part of each chapter is entitled "The Mirror". These discussions focus on the form and shape of the text by examining the function of the separate, mirroring, sections that are positioned at the end of these novels; and then by reading these sections back into the preceding narrative. These sections act much as the reconfiguring mirror does in anamorphic painting: they consolidate and focus the scattered, fragmented and distorted elements in the main narrative, drawing them together and enabling them to interact on different levels and in different relations to each other. But unlike the mirror, whose purpose is to create, reestablish or confirm the "proper" view of the deliberately disrupted subject of the painting which it reflects, the anamorphic marker in these texts resists a single reading and, like Atwood's description of the pier glass in the "Arnolfini Marriage" (Fig. 11), acts "like an eye that sees more than anyone else looking" (327). The act of reading this "marker" back into the novel foregrounds the narrative's resistance to linear form by reading these "appendices" as essential parts of the novels. This emphasis on mirrors foregrounds the strategy through which the anamorphic distortion is practiced

¹⁸ Brenner uses this term to describe narratives that are written at the point at which fiction and autobiography intersect.

here. Each of the "markers" gestures toward a number of points of access to each text. Each foregrounds specific, interrelated narrative concerns and strategies which comment equally on both the form and the content of the narrative. All of the preceding markers in the text are embedded in the final anamorphic marker, which, by drawing upon each of the elements that have been developed in the narrative, as well as gesturing outside of itself and back into the text, effectively illuminates the multiple voices (in The Diviners), issues of reinscription (in Ana Historic), the politics of self-construction (in The Handmaid's Tale) and the importance of multiple modes of expression and points of view (in Cat's Eye) in the gaps of Master Narratives.

The second part of my discussion, entitled "The Image", focuses on distorted images which form the central narrative of each of these novels. In these chapter sections, I explore the ways in which anamorphic distortion works without or beyond the confines of the reflective mirror. Like early anamorphic engravings (see Fig. 1), the act of "step[ping] inside the picture and open[ing] it up" (Ana Historic 56) depends exclusively on the point of access of the viewer (rather than on the distancing, reflective device of the mirror) for the distortion and provisional reconfiguration of the anamorphic image.¹⁹ This section is primarily concerned with the ways in which the process of constructing a workable, yet self-consciously contingent, subject position is articulated through the distorting, revelatory anamorphic image. These dominant images are the medium through which the process of self-narration is explored. In The Handmaid's Tale and Ana Historic

¹⁹ A number of the other texts that I have identified (see note 13) as using anamorphic strategies focus exclusively on this device and tend not to incorporate separate, reflective markers at the end of the text.

the narrators' project of constructing a workable subject position is articulated as the narrator engages with the Master Narrative of history. In The Diviners and Cat's Eye, the woman artist struggles to articulate her position as simultaneously artist and work of art within a discourse that defines her solely as the proper object of those representations. By focusing on the distorted, alternate voice of the woman narrator at the moment at which she is constructing a place for herself within and beyond the Master Narratives that have defined her, this reading shifts the hierarchical relation between subject and object, fiction and history through the resistant, interrogative voice at the interstices of the Master Narratives of fiction and history. By reading the anamorphic form from different points of access, I am able to explore both of the images that make up an anamorphic work: the reconfigured, but distanced, image in the mirror and the distorted, exploded image that the mirror reflects. This part of my reading is the mirror image of my first discussion of these texts: exploring the content and the voice of the narrator within the form. This mirrored reading, I hope, will not only explore but, to a certain extent, enact the inside/out structure of the literary anamorphoses that I theorize and read here.

II Defining Literary Anamorphosis

"Mirrors are crafty" (Atwood, "Tricks with Mirrors" Selected Poems 185)

Literary anamorphosis is a metaphor which describes a narrative strategy in prose fiction. It is a distinct form of feminist metafiction which explores the connection between the subject, the object and works of art in contemporary Canadian women's narratives. The anamorphic form is structured around and through a sustained play on notions of alterity, reinscription and strategic narrative instability. With its emphasis on distortion, fragmentation, political engagement and re-vision, it explores the complex and often contradictory relationship between the woman artist and her art.

The term "anamorphosis" first appeared in the seventeenth century (Oxford Companion to Art) and, translated from the Greek, it means to "transform back" (OED). It is most consistently defined as "a projection of forms outside their visible limits" (Perez-Gomez and Pelletier xi). In their specific use in visual art, anamorphic strategies

play havoc with elements and principles; instead of reducing forms to their visible limits, [anamorphosis] projects them outside themselves and distorts them so that when viewed from a certain perspective they return to normal. The system was established as a technical curiosity, but it embraces a poetry of abstraction, an effective mechanism for producing optical illusion and a philosophy of false reality (Baltrusaitis 1).

Looked at directly, anamorphic paintings and drawings appear to be a tangle of disconnected and chaotic lines and colours. Early anamorphoses depended on the strategic positioning of the viewer in relation to the work of art to reconfigure its disintegrating representations into "a recognizable form" (Perez-Gomez and Pelletier xi and Fig. 1). If the

viewer stood at a predetermined relation to the work, its jumbled lines seemed to rearrange themselves into properly proportioned images which again disintegrated with a shift in the viewer's physical position.

Anamorphoses from the seventeenth century introduced a convex or cylindrical mirror that would be placed in a strategic relation to the work and through which the reconfigured image could be viewed (Fig. 2). Instead of depending on the physical positioning of the viewer, these anamorphoses only attained recognizable proportions through an act of indirect looking: an act which required the viewer to consciously direct his/her gaze away from the ostensible object and instead, focus on the mirror that stands apart from, but related to it, replacing "the visual angle [with] the angle of reflection" (Baltrusaitis 2). While most anamorphoses were drawn as geometrically exploded versions of the object which was being represented (Fig. 3), some French artists cut up "normal" pictures and rearranged them on a painted board "in such a way that the picture could only be seen in a tilted mirror" (Baltrusaitis 28).

Perhaps the use of anamorphic form that is the most useful in this discussion of its later, literary, manifestations can be found in references to "secret portraits" that were made of Charles I that were kept by Royalists following the King's execution in 1649 (Fig. 2). These swirling, distorted portraits had a decidedly subversive, political use that speaks to the contemporary uses of anamorphic form in Canadian women's writing as a tool for simultaneously hiding, revealing, distorting and reworking gaps and elisions in the Master Narratives of fiction and history. In The Diviners, Cat's Eye, The Handmaid's Tale and Ana Historic, this political use of distortion and fragmentation is articulated in terms other

than those of the dominant narrative and linguistic strategies which these authors resist.

Instead, the novels take on an intensely visual quality through the use of visual images and strategies. At its most fundamental level, it is the necessary relation between the subject and object in the act of looking in a mirror that best articulates this emphasis on visual terms in these texts and in my method for reading them.

The most extensive theoretical discussion of anamorphosis and literature is Sylvia Soderlind's 1990 article, "Illegitimate Perspectives and the Critical Unconscious: The Anamorphic Imagination".

This discussion has helped me to place my own theoretical stance within an existing tradition of anamorphic readings. Soderlind argues that an anamorphic reading destabilizes conventional relations between the reader, the author and the text. A conventional reading "will concentrate on the 'centre'" of a narrative, but an anamorphic reading "will reverse the hierarchical relationship between centre and margin and will attempt to read the narrative through" ostensibly ancillary, marginal parts of the text.¹ She describes anamorphosis as a form of either visual or verbal art which "leads the eye of the viewer in specific directions while at the same time self-consciously pointing to its own status as art" ("Perspectives" 220).

Soderlind notes that the term "anamorphosis" "entered critical discourse...at roughly the same time as the term postmodernism" (214) and has been connected--erroneously, Soderlind argues--with postmodernism's "indeterminacy, undecidability and openness of interpretation" (218). Many contemporary appearances of the term connect

¹ Soderlind uses explanatory notes as an example of this technique, but I would also include appendices and epigraphs in that description.

postmodern self-reflexivity with the self-conscious construction of anamorphic works. But, as Soderlind notes, postmodernism "is largely concerned with features that seem to contradict [anamorphic] connotations of determinacy and constraint" ("Perspectives" 218).

While

it is commonly heard [in the critical discourse surrounding postmodernism that] all production is reproduction, all text is intertext, and originality is a dead concept...[in] anamorphic texts, the space opened up to the reader is an invitation, not to produce the text with the author, but to re-produce it in the author's (intended) terms (221).

A reading which recognizes the anamorphic strategies at play in this fiction "will reveal [the 'ancillary' parts of the narrative] as a carefully constructed mirror which eventually restores the text and resurrects its author as a central and controlling presence" ("Perspectives" 223). In the novels that I discuss here, this "central and controlling presence," the self-constructing narrator, is an essential part of the novel's strategy of distortion and provisional reconfiguration. The process of deliberately ordering the narrative, and the ways in which the narrator manipulates and distorts parts of her history, are foregrounded and explored (by the author and then by the reader) through the process of constructing and re-constructing her past. Like an anamorphic image which is made up of an interdependent distorted, carefully configured image and a reconfiguring, reflective mirror, each of these texts is structured around two distinct, yet mutually informing narrative strategies. In both painting and literature that use anamorphic strategies "mirroring is everywhere, both as content and...as form" ("Perspectives" 219). For Soderlind,

the curious effect of anamorphic art is a result of a primary misreading, or a thwarted attempt at interpretation, and the succeeding insight at the moment of formal restoration. If in a certain text the restoration of form is impeded

to the point of being impossible, the text no longer qualifies as anamorphic. Because of its artificiality and rigour, anamorphic distortion can always be reconstructed by a viewer, or reader, who assumes the right stance ("Perspectives" 219).

My reading of the strategy as it appears in contemporary Canadian women's fiction also challenges notions of determinacy in fictional and historical practice. While I focus on the issues of perspective, intentional distortion and reconfiguration, I suggest that the authors which I discuss here resist the single, definitive "right stance" that Soderlind suggests and instead incorporate multiple, contingent, but deliberately deployed points of access into their texts.

Soderlind describes the anamorphic form as "a phallogentric form of writing" that is a "god-game" ("Perspectives" 224)² in which the author "provokes and directs [the reader's] gaze, the finger ... pointing the way is indeed the 'name of the father,' the signifier of the writer/critic's desire to sire his text, to fill the lack and resurrect the 'phallic ghost' as an indisputable physical presence asserting a god-like paternity over his creation" (225). The decidedly masculinist terms upon which Soderlind bases her discussion of anamorphosis raise the question of how women would adapt and resist these terms in the development of their own anamorphic form³. Feminist writing often resists the

² This notion of a "game" connects nicely with my own reading of the Scrabble Game as a central metaphor in The Handmaid's Tale. Indeed, Scrabble is a more apt metaphor for the peculiarities of women's writing than other games would be. Like other games, Scrabble "requires a mutual adoption of rules by the players, rules that are, more often than not, set by the game's inventor" ("Perspectives" 224). But while the tiles and board in the Scrabble game are fixed, the potential combinations of those pieces are virtually limitless and depend on the subjectivity that controls them at the moment of playing.

³ In Ana Historic, Marlatt provokes and resists the notion of the masculine author's "paternity over his creation" through her dramatic exploration of the complex relation

problematically definitive narrative stances that Soderlind delineates in her discussion. As Patricia Waugh has noted, women writers "have resisted, rejected or expressed a 'dis-ease' with both the premises of the dominant aesthetics and the cultural definitions of subjectivity in the twentieth century" (Feminine 87). Just as other Eurocentric, masculinist discourses⁴ are altered by the irreverent, reconstructive voice of the woman writer, so the focus of anamorphic representations shifts in the hands of the woman artist. Women who use anamorphic distortion and misprision in their texts are as concerned with strategic distortion and with destabilizing "hierarchical relationship[s]" ("Perspectives" 223) as its masculinist practitioners. These women, however, are not interested in "revers[ing]" hierarchical relationships but rather, in breaking them down into each other: in exploring the ways in which hierarchies are self-perpetuating structures that depend upon a series of carefully constructed elisions and "historically determined...discursively situated" (Waugh Feminine 210) assumptions. The importance of these elisions in the construction and reconstruction of anamorphosis' exploded images resonates with possibilities for women who are exploring their own positioning in the gaps of history's Master Narrative. In this sense, women's participation in a form which, Soderlind argues, is intimately connected with the author ("Perspectives" 225) necessarily alters the ways in which it is practiced.

between women's bodies and their texts.

⁴ See Patricia Waugh Feminist Fictions: Revisiting the Postmodern and Molly Hite's The Other Side of the Story for discussions of the relation between feminist and postmodernist fiction. Hite notes that postmodernism "has everything to do with feminism [both seek to destabilize cultural relations, have a stake in the undoing of hierarchy and containment and are described in terms of subversive political implications] and nothing to do with women as points of origin, as authors" (17).

Anamorphic distortions and fragmentations in women's fiction serve a political rather than a spiritual ("Perspectives" 222, 223) purpose. In women's texts, anamorphic distortions include, as a necessary part of their critique of masculinist Master Narratives, the process of breaking down the image that they will eventually, but provisionally, reconstruct.

By approaching The Diviners, Cat's Eye, The Handmaid's Tale and Ana Historic as examples of literary anamorphosis, I am able to account for both their political critiques and for the visual emphasis and strategies in the texts in a way that other critical discussions have not been able to do. The use of visual images (mirrors, photographs, paintings and films) and strategies in the novels discussed here is not simply a form of textual disruption or a symbolic reference.³ Rather, it is a way of representing the world and a political/personal positioning that other critical methods and literary forms⁴ do not or cannot accommodate.

The fragmented, distorted, visually-based images that structure the novels which I would describe as "anamorphic" are firmly aligned with the historical underpinnings of this form. Anamorphic works are not immediately accessible to the viewer, nor are they limited to the boundaries of the frame and the canvas upon which they are drawn. Anamorphic

³ Critical discussions of these novels which suggest that their use of visual images fall into one or the other of these categories include Bowen; Cowart "Bridge"; Howells "Elaine"; M. Jones That Art; Ketterer; Rao; R. White; Wilson "Eyes"; Verduyn "Contra/diction/s"; and York Other Side.

⁴ These novels have been read, with varying degrees of success, as participating in a number of different, and often contradictory, categories and through a number of critical lenses: modern (Davey Post-National; Fabre; Keith "Laurence"; Waugh Feminine); postmodern (Bouson; Cooley; Garrett-Petta; Hutcheon Canadian, "Splitting"; Ingersoll; Keith "Apocalyptic"; Wilson Fairy Tale); documentary (M. Jones That Art).

images, in fact, are characterized by their ability to move outside those limits.⁷ Anamorphic strategies depend on the participation of the viewer in order to make their artistic and representational point. What is particularly important for the terms of my discussion is the relationship between the mirror and the image in anamorphic works (both literary and visual). In the visual art, a painted, engraved or drawn image is static. While interpretations and reactions outside of the work vary through the gaze and context of the viewer (Bal 264) the image itself is fixed. Mirror images, on the other hand, are inherently unstable and provisional. They depend exclusively on the moment of interaction between the object being reflected and the reflecting surface of the mirror (unlike a work of art whose similarly framed image exists independently of the object that it represents). Mirrors are inherently unreliable media--potentially distorting and always presenting a reversed image of that which it reflects. In anamorphic works, however, the mirror and the image are, as I mentioned earlier, interdependent: through the interaction of the two elements of these works, the image is no longer a static, fixed rendering but is, instead, a shifting, reconfiguring work whose form is, like any object reflected in a mirror, unstable and dependent upon a moment of "engaged looking" (Bal 285). In works in which the self-reflexive strategy of the first-person woman narrator is constructed as a reflecting, distorting mirror, the transformation of the proper object of the narrator's gaze (herself) from static, externally defined "image" to a provisional, contingent, self-reflecting

⁷ Perez-Gomez and Pelletier note that in anamorphic art, it has "often been observed [that] the projected image seems to lift up from the actual surface of the anamorphosis itself" (1).

representation in the mirror of her own text is a fundamental shift in the culturally constructed relationship between the woman and her position as object of art.

As it was first conceived in the sixteenth⁸ and seventeenth centuries, anamorphosis involved a strategic use of distortion and apparently "magical" reconfiguration to achieve its visual coherence. In literary works, however, it is not deployed in order to "magically" and "cleverly" reconfigure disintegrated elements into "properly proportioned" (Baltrusaitis 1), recognizable and conventional images. Anamorphic texts focus not on the coherence of a literary document (for, indeed, that internal consistency is interrogated as a literary convention) but instead on the process of "exploding" (Dragland 176) that image and on exploring the many gaps and distortions that make up its ostensibly coherent surface. The strategic emphasis on distortion in order to reveal the gaps and contradictions upon which the Master Narratives of fiction and history are built illuminates the narrator's paradoxical connections to, and distance from, those cultural and narrative systems: her position in but not of the systems through which she is defined and writes.

The connection to the visual anamorphoses in these novels is based on a shared emphasis on perspective and strategic, often interrogative, points of access. The novelists' emphasis on point of view moves beyond the epistemic notion of philosophical/ideological positioning to include, as a necessary part of its definition, the physical (material) position of the object of discourse. This combination of the material and the epistemic is evoked through the anamorphic model's dependence on physical positioning in the process of

⁸ The term "anamorphosis" first appeared in the seventeenth century but referred to a practice that was already thriving (Baltrusaitis 1, Strong 88).

disintegrating and reconfiguring the representations in the work of art. The connection between physical point of view and political/cultural/artistic⁹ position is particularly important in my own focus on the feminist stance and radical revision of conventional forms that characterize anamorphic fiction. This emphasis on perspective and point of view allows for a shifting, kaleidoscopic¹⁰ relation between fragmented pieces of the texts as they connect and inform each other.

My use of the term anamorphosis, then, with its emphasis upon self-conscious construction, on perspective and distinct points of access to a work of art, allows for the inclusion of disparate political, ideological and material positionings of women in masculinist, post-colonial cultures. It is an inherently political narrative strategy which resists oppositional definitions of, for example, "self" and "other" by using strategies that have traditionally been used in the visual arts. These strategies insist on a reciprocal and on-going engagement between artist, art and viewer, author, narrator, narrative and reader, and resist reading a work of art as a static, finished artefact.

⁹ By including the material position of women in their representations, the multiple, layered, and interconnected levels of the material circumstances (gender, sexuality, culture, geography and history) are factored into the artistic elements of the narratives.

¹⁰ The image of the kaleidoscope is both evocative and problematic. It differs from the static model of the "collage" (M. Jones *That Art*) in the shifting series of relations between the parts that form the image in a kaleidoscope. The anamorphic image is equally dependent on the shifting relation between point of view and the object that is viewed, but it is a more fluid relation: the blocks of light and colour are less rigidly proscribed and delineated in their shapes and movement. Nonetheless, I find it a useful (if limited) image for describing the ways in which the "shape of the whole picture" (*Ana Historic* 134) is changed by and through this narrative strategy.

The majority of critical readings of the visual images and intrusions (like paintings, photographs and mirrors) in these novels focus on the content of those images. These readings foreground the problematics of interpreting visual artefacts in a literary text¹¹ but fail to account for the ways in which the use of visual strategies resonates beyond the boundaries of the artefacts themselves to reflect and reflect on the rest of the text. Readings of the visual emphasis in these novels elide the ways in which strategies used in the visual arts are integrated into the narrative itself and are not simply, or even primarily, disruptive intrusions into the text. While usefully drawing attention to the significance of these images, these discussions as a whole deal insufficiently with the ways in which this alternative form of representation is a fundamental part of the political engagements in these novels.

Drawing together theories of a narrating, articulating, subjective "I" with the notion of a narrative "eye"¹² (with its emphasis on the visual, on perspective, and on point of view), I am foregrounding the interdependence of the written and visual elements of self-representation in these anamorphic novels. While the narrating "I" is thus most easily identified with the emerging, constructed subject-position of the narrator, the narrative

¹¹ See York Dailiness; Bowen; Brydon; Verduyn "Contra/diction/s"; Cowart "Bridge"; Howells "Elaine"; Wilson "Eyes and I's"; McCombs; Ahern; Ketterer; R. White and Lacombe for other critical discussions of the visual in the novels that I discuss here.

¹² Atwood plays with these terms in her article "An End to an Audience?". Describing the role of the writer in contemporary society, Atwood suggests that "the writer is both an eye-witness and an I-witness, the one to whom personal experience happens and the one who makes experience personal for others"(425).

"eye" draws attention to the ways in which the visual--the "gaze"¹³ and other forms of external objectification (spectacle, photography, notions of beauty, scientific "objectivity")-
-have been used to construct women as objects within western Master Narratives. The ideological significance of the narrating "I" (with its traditional connections with omniscience or autobiography) is thus informed by an emphasis on the perspectival, provisional and disruptive implications of a narrative "eye"¹⁴ through a strategy that foregrounds the revelatory but inherently unstable and problematic potential of the visual. By drawing the subjective nature of women's self-narratives into an active engagement with the ostensibly objectifying process of being looked at, these novels reverse dichotomous assumptions that the gaze is male and that which is gazed upon is female (Mulvey 19) by exploring the implications of the female gaze when the woman becomes the object of her own perception.

My reading of these contemporary women's novels explores the ways in which the problematic position of western, middle-class women whose "experiences [are] as both participants in and outsiders of dominant culture" (J. Frye 16) is often articulated in feminist theory and fictional practice through a discussion of "gaps" or "omissions" in the Master Narratives. Women's paradoxical presence/absence in these defining narratives is

¹³ In Lacanian theories, the "gaze" is defined as the "act of looking", with an emphasis on the active nature of the process of perception and interpretation. Laura Mulvey suggests that this activity is more often attributed to the male "pleasure in looking", while for women, participation in this process connotes "to-be-looked-at-ness"(19).

¹⁴ Images of eyes, spectacle, gaze and mirrors recur throughout each of these texts and forms a significant part of the strategic use of perspective and distortion in the exploration of the construction of subjectivity.

also articulated by feminist critics in visual terms as a "misprision-- a cultural and psychological misrecognition" (Donaldson 1) or "disvision" (Greene Changing 222).

The mutually constitutive relationships between past and present narratives, art and the artist, the author and the narrator and others in these novels evoke a trilogy of lithographs by M.C. Escher which explore, in a slightly more overt way, the same question of the presence of the artist in his work that Van Eyck plays with in "The Arnolfini Marriage" (Fig. 11)¹⁵. Escher's lithographs depict reflecting globes in various contexts and from various perspectives in which the reflected image of the artist can be seen in the process of drawing the work that we are viewing.

The first of these experiments with reflection, perspective and self-reflexivity shows a "reflecting globe...viewed sideways on, like a bottle with a neck" (Escher 13) in which the artist, the room in which he sketches, and elongated images of objects that are carefully proportioned in the picture appear to fill up the reflecting surfaces of the globe--creating a distorted but curiously multi-dimensional and fully revealed vision of the room in which the lithograph was produced (Fig. 4). The second, "Hand with Reflecting Globe" (Fig. 5) shows "a reflecting globe [which] rests in the artist's hand. In its mirror he can have a much more complete view of his surroundings than by direct observation, for nearly the whole of the area around him...[is] compressed, albeit distorted, within this little disc" (13). The third, "Three Spheres" (Fig. 6) shows three equal-sized spheres "placed next to each other on a shining table" (13). One has a matt surface, another is a clear globe filled with water

¹⁵ A painting that is cited extensively in Cat's Eye.

and the third, the middle sphere, is similar to the reflecting globes in the previous two works. The reflections and distortions in and of these reflecting surfaces draw the context of the work's production and the agent of that production into the representation. As Escher's descriptions of these works suggest, this "full" view is neither more "true" nor less distorted and selective than other forms of artistic selection and representation. But the inclusion of the moment of the production foregrounds and comments on the artifice of that production and draws the artist, on a number of levels, into the centre of his art.

What is interesting here, then, is not what these works reveal about the process of artistic production, but the ways in which they draw the authority of the image itself into question: Is this a distorted image of Escher himself? Is it idealized? How? Did the room in which he produced this lithograph look exactly like this? Which is the work of art: the hand in the foreground or the reflected image that it holds? The art moves from being a simple representation of a globe that Escher holds in his hand to being a dizzying commentary on the process, the subjective perspective, and the results of artistic expression. These three lithographs enact in a visual form some of the distortions, plays with levels of narrative focus and extra-textual inclusions and exclusions that are used in the anamorphic literary texts. I would suggest that these images help to illuminate the problematics of representing an artist within a work of art: the ways in which this representation both informs the work itself and serves to confuse its status as both artefact and representation.

Perhaps the most evocative of Escher's works for my purposes is "Drawing Hands" (Fig. 7). In this lithograph,

a right hand is busy sketching a shirt-cuff upon [a piece of] drawing paper...a little to the right it has already drawn a left hand emerging from a sleeve in such detail that this hand has come right out of the flat surface, and in its turn is sketching the cuff from which the right hand is emerging (15).

Escher's description of one hand that is clearly creating the other is perhaps less confusing and less intriguing than the representation itself. In the drawing, it is not clear which hand is producing which: both hold similar pencils, both emerge from similar cuffs drawn upon the same piece of paper and both are, in some form, drawing and creating the other. The mutually constitutive nature of the artist and his art in "Drawing Hands" and the physical resemblances between the them heighten the strategic ambiguities that Escher uses here to foreground the artifice of the work of art that we are viewing. In fact, the art itself, just like the process that constructed it, does not itself present this ambiguity. It is the act of viewing the drawing and attempting to decipher it (in order to make sense of which hand is the agent and which is the work of art, which is the subject and the object) and the affiliated assumptions of activity and passivity that inform this drawing which make it into a complex, troubling and contested space.

In each of Escher's layered, problematized representations of artistic production, autobiographical reference is intimately connected with the moment at which the work of art is produced: the art and the artist are inseparable, and yet only referentially connected. The assumption that we, the viewers/readers, make is that we are seeing Escher/Laurence/Atwood/Marlatt in these texts, but this "knowledge" comes to us, like the production and context of the work of art, from outside the text itself. The man in the drawings refers to Escher, the artist, only by association; and because we have seen

photographs of him, we can therefore look outside of the text in the hope of confirming the image's identity. Similarly, the autobiographical "a/illusions" in The Diviners and Cat's Eye (in particular) assume a play beyond textual references to artistic practice: they assume a certain amount of knowledge about Laurence and Atwood that will add another layer, another distorting mirror image, to the already problematized image of the self-constructing, self-narrating woman artist.

Mirrors are therefore among the most provocative visual images used in these novels. In Cat's Eye, Elaine Risley's use of mirrors and reflections in her paintings have influenced readings of the novel's exploration of the relation between the visual artist and her art. Roberta White suggests that Atwood's use of mirrors and reflection allows for an exploration of the levels of a work of art. In her discussion of the pier-glass in "The Arnolfini Marriage," she suggests that "the surrogate eye fascinates [Elaine] because it shows the outside of the painting's inside, peeling back its reality and revealing the figure of the artist" (66). This evocative image of "peeling back reality" consolidates a number of the images that I have used to theorize these visually-based texts. It helps to foreground the critical focus on images of mirrors and other potentially distorting visual images in the novels and the ways in which these images are connected with constructing and destabilizing subjectivity.

Self-representation is intimately connected with mirrors and photographs in these novels. The act of destabilizing the "objectivity" and authority of these ostensibly apolitical reflections informs the process both of interrogating the notion of a stable subjectivity and of accurately representing the world. Representations of mirrors and mirroring provide a

potent image for the exploration of the construction of a feminist subject in women's self-narrative texts. As Jacques Lacan has argued, mirrors are fundamentally linked with the process of constructing individual subjectivity. Feminist critiques of Lacan have both problematized his assumption that "one cannot become a speaking subject at all...without entering the symbolic order and accepting the phallus as the representation of the Law of the Father" (Waugh Feminine 60) and noted its value in attempts to understand and construct an alienated subjectivity (Waugh Feminine 55). Lacan's conception that an illusory unity (through the distancing mirror) is necessary for entry into the symbolic order of discourse opens a space for reading novels in which mirroring, doubling, and the self-conscious project of externalising play an important part. Representation, and in particular, self-representation, are central to Lacan's discussion of the "inside out structure of the gaze" (Four 82) in which both the narrating "I" and the distanced, potentially distorting narrative "eye" figure prominently. In feminist narrative, mirrors act on multiple levels. They function as a strategy for simultaneously representing women's position as both the "proper" object of the masculine gaze and as the object of her own gaze, as a medium for articulating the disruptive, distorting and reflective potential in the process of self-construction. Mirrors "question dichotomies between self and reflected image, between spirit and flesh, between psychological presence and physical body" (LaBelle 2) and, most importantly for my purposes, enact the self-reflective focus of the novels which I discuss here.

In his discussions of the interdependence of the Gaze and the Subject, Lacan introduces the example of anamorphosis. Lacan's use of anamorphosis in this discussion is

an exploration of the limits of the Cartesian subject "which is itself a sort of geometral point, a point of perspective" (Four 86) and the implied privilege that this theory gives to the possibility of a unified, speaking subject. In this discussion, Lacan focuses on the phrase "I see myself seeing myself" (Four 80) and its complex evocations of reciprocity, perspective and self-reflexivity. For Lacan, anamorphosis is intimately connected to notions of "relations" (86) and is ultimately "a trap for the gaze" (89) which is, he argues, not simply the physical connection between light and the optic nerve, but a complex interplay of those stimuli with the interpretive reactions to them carried out by the seer which results in a self-conscious act of seeing (84).

For Jenijay LaBelle, the significance of mirrors in women's texts moves beyond Lacan's reading of the relation between the subject and the object of the Gaze. "Through the mirror," she notes,

we can gain insight into the reciprocal interchanges between interiority and exteriority as these create what a woman is to herself and to her culture. The reflection in the glass is at once both the self and a radical otherness, an image privileged with a truth beyond the subjective and at the same time taken to the very essence of that subjectivity (9).

In anamorphic texts, however, the mirror is, itself, an unstable and distorting medium whose reflections are as potentially deceptive as those of any other form of representation. It is not, finally, the image that is unstable in this discourse, but the fragmented, destabilizing consciousness through which it passes as it is interpreted. The reflection of the viewer in a mirror is therefore a strangely multiple representation. It is not externally constructed (as an artist would draw a figure), but reflected by an ostensibly objective series of refracted beams of light on a reflective surface. The viewer is that which is

simultaneously represented (the object) and the ordering, naming subject who interprets the framed representation. Mirrors, therefore, with their definite boundaries, potentially distorting surfaces, incomplete reflections and provisional, reciprocal representations, serve as potent images through which women can articulate their resisting, reinscriptive and contingent self-narrative positionings.

Like an anamorphic painting, then, an anamorphic text appears to be a tangled, fractured and confusing combination of distorted, unconnected, even contradictory, images and narrative conventions when read as part of mainstream genres or as linear prose fiction. Such readings have struggled to classify these texts, often relying on multiply-qualified terms in order to define workable generic allegiances. The texts discussed here as anamorphic fiction are connected by their disturbed and disturbing positions "includable in but not quite covered by" (Dragland 176) existing critical and fictional paradigms. By reading these novels through an anamorphic lens, the contradictory elements that they contain can be read as mutually constitutive and mutually informing. The methodology that I propose here is positioned at the intersection of a number of related, but distinct, critical discussions of feminist fiction and shares some of the fundamental premises of their theoretical positions. By incorporating theories of visual art to account for the use of the visual in the novels, as well as of narrative form, this study suggests another point of access to these "unaccountable" texts.

Daphne Marlatt's Ana Historic, for example, has been described as "mixed genre fiction in exploded form" (Dragland 176)¹⁶ and Margaret Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale has similarly been categorized through the application of this sort of multiply-qualified generic definition¹⁷. The number of generic affiliations and potential labels connected with this novel ultimately confuse some critical discussions which attempt to negotiate between a number of conflicting definitions and generic expectations. Patrick Murphy, for example, has suggested that "The Handmaid's Tale demonstrates past-future history in pseudo-documentary framing, specifically its academic variant" (27). Anne Kaler's otherwise interesting discussion of the distorted images of the "female religious" in the novel gets similarly tangled up in her attempt to qualify her suggestion that Atwood

synthesizes Northrop Frye's four forms of prose fiction into one, combining autobiography in a journal/confession mode, an anatomy of how a dystopia works, a futuristic fantasy with romance elements, and a novel with horrific realistic detail into a full-fledged satisfying satire (43).

Struggling toward theories for reading these fissured narratives, many critical discussions have examined the ways in which the novels' fragmented form comments on the construction of subjectivity that they contain. These discussions help to establish a space for my own part in this struggle: my reading of these novels as "anamorphic" texts whose

¹⁶ This notion of "exploded form" connects with my attempts to theorize the ways in which literary anamorphosis uses distorted, exaggerated and exploded representations of the political systems that are being interrogated in the fiction.

¹⁷ The Handmaid's Tale's connections to the existing tradition of speculative fiction are clear, but this is not simply, or even primarily, a dystopic text. A shift in critical focus illuminates its relation to the gothic, the autobiography, the documentary and the historical novel. It is both a political text and a personal text, both feminist and a critique of contemporary feminism's "schools" of thought.

use of distortion, fragmentation, interspatial reference, politics and subjectivity is an inherently political engagement with the unrecognized "gaps" in the Master Narratives of fiction and of history.

My project, then, is to find a way of theorizing what the self-narrators in these texts have practiced. The reader must "return to the gaps and fissures" (N. Cooke "Politics" 217) of these narratives and learn to read the texts "other-wise" (Hite 3). Through that alternate reading we can then explore the extent to which The Diviners, Cat's Eye, The Handmaid's Tale and Ana Historic are participating in and initiating a distinct textual strategy for illuminating the "gaps between the stories told in black print" which are "not necessarily invisible to the reading eye (nor to the disciplinary one)" (LeBihan 99) and hearing the silenced, interspatial voices in them.

I have structured my methodology for this dissertation around my reactions to four critical works¹⁸ that have theorized feminist metafiction. Each of these works deals with alterity and with the problems that mainstream critical readings have had with many contemporary women's texts. They theorize these works as innovative, resistant narratives, which use strategies beyond those of Eurocentric, masculinist traditions to create distinctly woman-centred narrative forms.

One of the most influential critical discussions of contemporary feminist metafiction is Molly Hite's 1989 The Other Side of the Story. Her discussion of the relationship between women's writing and masculinist Master Narratives is based on the notion that

¹⁸ Molly Hite's The Other Side of the Story (1989), Gayle Greene's Changing the Story (1991), Manina Jones' That Art of Difference (1993) and Mieke Bal's Double Exposures (1996).

stories inevitably both obscure and encode other stories... when construed as repressed or suppressed stories of the Other, these stories become the enabling conditions for the writing and reading of feminist narrative... Stories in the modern sense are always somebody's stories: even when they have a conventionally omniscient narrator they entail a point of view, take sides. Such a perspectival notion of story implies that the coherence of one line of narration rests on the suppression of any number of "other sides" (4).

I quote this section at length because Hite delineates a number of the points that have helped to focus the politics of my own approach to this literature. Hite's assertion that contemporary women writers are

attempting innovations in narrative form that are more radical in their implications than the dominant modes of fictional experiment, and more radical precisely inasmuch as the context for innovation is a critique of culture and a literary tradition apprehended as profoundly masculinist (2)

is a fundamental part of my reading of one of these narrative innovations. By connecting women's fictional experiments with their political/material positioning, Hite focuses on one of the ways in which the construction of women's anamorphic texts differs from the "self-display" (Greene Changing 19) of masculinist postmodernism and opens a way for both recognizing and reading the alterity in women's radical textual experiments.

Hite argues that "experimental fiction by women seems to share the decentering and disseminating strategies of postmodernist narratives, but that they also seem to arrive at these strategies by an entirely different route... [in essence] re-centering the value structure of the narrative" (2). The resulting "map" of this journey to experimental fictional method and its relation to and perspective on the destination, I would add, is characterized by encounters with entirely different landmarks, points of access and points of view. This alternate "journey" places the accounts, and the form of those accounts, in a different

relation to the "destination": putting the emphasis on the process of creating these narratives and challenging the notion of a single, stable "destination" of a single, stable traveller. Just as the journey, the landscape and the destination change, so does the subject position of the narrating traveller. In order to engage with this alternate relation to dominant methods that posit such a stability, Hite suggests reading "other-wise" (3), an altered way of encountering a text that provocatively circumvents many of the traditional, linear strategies that have dismissed the artistic, imaginative and experimental elements of women's texts.

Hite's argument charts the primary points of connection and resistance that characterize feminist metafiction but does not go on to explore the ways in which the politics of feminist writing alters masculinist fictional method. It is at this point that my methodology departs from Hite's. My reading will explore the political as well as the textual implications of resisting and reinscribing oppositional and linear strategies in fiction. The resulting work, I will try to show here, differs from Eurocentric masculinist metafiction in more than its content. Its construction is not simply a case of adding women's point of view to already existing forms, but is, rather, engaging with those forms at a fundamental level and altering them radically through that active engagement.

Hite's study has influenced a number of other critical readings of contemporary fiction. Of these, Gayle Greene's 1991 Changing the Story has been the most influential to the formulation of my critical method. Greene focuses on narrative patterns and forms of political engagement in contemporary women's "self-conscious" (1) metafiction. She suggests that feminist metafiction is inherently interrogative and that women writers "use

metafiction to challenge the cultural and literary tradition they inherit" (2). Greene argues that a "structure of circular return, a pattern wherein episodes set in the past alternate with episodes set in the present and are completed when past becomes present" (14) is a "distinguishing feature" (14) of contemporary women's fiction. While the novels in my discussion could lend themselves to a reading that suggests that the ostensible "conclusions" of their narratives circle back to their beginnings, it is at this point that my approach to these texts differs from Greene's. I argue that the circularity that Greene sees in these texts is not so much an uninterrupted loop that links beginning to end and which "leaves intact the linear sequence of language and narrative" (15) but is instead more of a spiral which continually moves into and out of the text.

The interaction and mutually constitutive relation between past and present, art and the artist, subject and object in these works is thus more like the dizzying self-reflexive spiral of a Möbius strip (Fig. 8) than the circle which Greene suggests. Once again, M.C Escher provides a useful example of this method. He describes his woodcut of a "Möbius band" as an "endless, ring-shaped band [that] has two distinct surfaces, one inside and one outside" but the apparent simplicity of the band is belied by the ants which "travel the front side as well as the reverse side. Therefore the band has only one surface" (12). The circular band is conventional enough, but it is the carefully deployed construction and representation of that band that renders its seemingly irrefutable duality illusory. There is no clear "front" or "back". In Escher's representation these become one, artificially divided, continuum. The image of the Möbius band both problematizes notions of duality and foregrounds the importance of perspective, illusion and distortion in the perpetuation of oppositional

definitions of front and back/foreground and background. The references that refract backwards and forwards within the texts and the series of reflections, reversals and refractions within them are more than circular. They are like "reflections in two mirrors set facing one another, stretching replica after replica, to the vanishing point" (Atwood, Handmaid's Tale 165). In three of the four novels which I will discuss here¹⁹, the apparent end of the narrative which Greene argues encourages such a circular reading²⁰ is not, in fact, clearly at the end of any of the texts. The "final" lines do not flow seamlessly back to join with those at the beginning of the narrative. In The Handmaid's Tale in particular, this unacknowledged gap between the last line of Offred's narrative and the novel's beginning, I will argue, is precisely where her self-narrative takes place. Further, in each of these texts, the "final" lines are followed by other, related but physically separate, sections which are intimately connected to the narrative but which are excluded from the progressive circularity that Greene has suggested (Changing 15).

While Greene's argument theorizes a specifically feminist textual strategy through this notion of circular narratives, then, it does not sufficiently problematize the relationship between feminist and mainstream narrative investments in linearity. Anamorphic works are simultaneously linear, "progressive" narratives and fragmented, fractured, spiralling accounts. If, as Greene asserts, "metafictions no longer allow the protagonist the power of

¹⁹ The Diviners, The Handmaid's Tale, and Cat's Eye, which Greene also addresses in her study.

²⁰ The two clearest examples of this occur in The Diviners, when Morag "returned to the house, to write the remaining private and fictional words, and to set down her title" (370) and in The Handmaid's Tale, as Offred "step[s] up, into the darkness within; or else the light" (307).

the pen to reconstruct her world" (*Changing* 200) this does not leave her without artistic and political recourse. I will argue that the anamorphic form opens a space for the protagonists of these novels to create narratives which are structurally other than the dominant forms that have "buried" them in the "rubble" (*Ana Historic* 134) of their Master Narratives. Greene argues that for the artists/protagonists in women's fiction in the 1980s, "[f]iction is no longer a means of revising the world, charting new ground, making new blueprints" (*Changing* 201).

The gap between what are generally read as the beginnings and endings of these texts echoes other gaps within the texts themselves--gaps which resonate throughout the narratives. These intra-textual fissures illuminate the "exploded form" (Dragland 176) of the anamorphic method. The spiralling, Möbius strip image that I suggest shapes the multiple, interconnected, levels of these texts allows for a simultaneous movement beyond and back into the "main" narrative. This movement accommodates the circular connection to the narratives' ostensible beginning and also includes their final, separate appendices as part of the narrative as a whole.

Manina Jones's *That Art of Difference* (1992) is the other text which has helped to form my theory of literary anamorphosis. Jones's reading of the strategy of "documentary collage" in Canadian writing similarly addresses the use of form in these texts. Her discussion of intertexts in contemporary fiction has provided a useful paradigm for theorizing the fragmented structure of these novels. Jones explores the ways in which the inclusion of "found" historical documents in these narratives shapes readings of the texts by breaking down the boundaries between the "fictional" and the "factual". The intrusion of

authoritative, "factual", documents into a fictional text (like Ana Historic) "reminds readers both of the 'factuality' of history and of the construction of that factuality through the collection and interpretation of textual or materially 'documentary' evidence" (Difference 8). She argues that this sort of fragmentation allows authors to transgress the boundaries between history, literature and criticism (9) and takes into account the "particular positioning" of the subject of the narrative. But Jones ultimately articulates this intertextual relation as dependent upon a "juxtaposition" (161) of the documentary material with the fictional text. The connection between the "fictional" and the "factual" texts in Ana Historic is described as an "excavation" of the "verbal site/cite" (146). According to Jones, the artefacts incorporated into this and other texts--photographs, newspaper clippings, letters, films--are stable. Their interrogative function within the narrative is defined as dependent on a "transgressive or 'wrong' reading of documents" (141) that illuminates the contrived nature of history's authoritative narrative and "subverts" (141) its authority

I would argue, however, that the process of reading the historical and visual artefacts in these texts is not an archeological project, but is an epistemological one. As Mieke Bal suggests in her discussion of "modes of vision" for reading visual art, the act of re-viewing artefacts does not involve simply digging up elements that have been "lost" (though this notion is addressed in each of the novels discussed here) but is, rather, concerned with negotiating "a different way of getting to know" (Bal 285). My engagement with Jones' reading of documentary fragmentation adapts Bal's exploration of the relationship between the subject and object of visual art. The act of "put[ting] things on display," Bal argues,

creates a subject/object dichotomy. This dichotomy enables the subject to make a statement about the object. The object is there to substantiate the statement. It is put there within a frame that enables the statement to come across (3).

The act of "engaged looking" (285), however, breaks this structured frame and renegotiates the oppositional relation between subject and object. Bal's reading of the deployment of visual art in museums and galleries reworks the traditionally hierarchical relation between subject and object.

Bal's theory of the relation between the subject, the object and the work of art informs my own reading of the use of visual images and modes of "display", framing and re-vision that shape the anamorphic texts. Bal suggests that "vision is connected to such issues as 'the mind's eye', empirical evidence, the possibilities and limits of observation, the separation of object from subject that the sense of sight alone appears to guarantee" (299). Through "engaged looking" (285) the "viewers are aware of and bodily participating in the process of looking...they engage in interactions of various kinds...This mode of looking involves the subject within the field of vision" (264). Bal has thus theorized a "bond between vision and patriarchal domination" that is "bound up in power-knowledge...and is still so pervasive that the first move in undermining it is to show that it is not the only possible or reasonable [point of view] and that it has a vested interest in pretending it is" (263). "Showing" a point of view other than this dominant one involves an active, resistant form of re-vision that accommodates alterity, resistance and non-oppositional narrative stances.

The act of intimately involving the viewer/reader in the material, as well as in the representational, aspects of a work of art is the point at which literary anamorphosis

departs from (postmodern) metafiction. The reader is not a voyeur, watching the actions of the characters and the work of the author from a distanced, "objective" point of view. Instead, the reader has access to the text and actively participates in its interrogative re-vision of historical and cultural artefacts--an act which mirrors and informs (and is informed by) the "engaged reading" of the characters as they re-view the historical artefacts in their narratives. The past, the present, the cultural and the personal are all mutually constitutive and mutually informing texts in these anamorphic constructions. Context is not separate or separable from the narrative, nor is the narrative--however personal and provisional--separable from the context in and through which it is written. Metafiction is, indeed, as Greene suggests (Changing 200) an inadequate form for representing such a complex relation. Feminist fiction's complex engagement with the multiple, defining layers of dominant narratives requires a narrative form that is "more radical in [its] implications" (Hite Story 2) than any previously available to the interrogative, resistant feminist protagonist.

Jones' use of juxtaposition in her theory of documentary collage, then, excludes the possibility for this sort of mutually constitutive relation among texts, authors, readers and narrators which is fundamental to the decoding of anamorphic art. The artefacts which fragment these women's novels are not set in an oppositional, "contrasting" relation to each other. They are, rather, read through each other, changing through that interaction and shaping the ways in which the narratives act and interact with each reading of the

text²¹. In this sense, the ways in which Jones theorizes the "documentary" is a useful referent for understanding the non-hierarchical relation between the fictional and the factual in anamorphic texts, but the static, clearly separate nature of the image of the "collage"--with its dependance on fixed points of relation between its elements--is incompatible with the shifting, interactive and mutually constitutive relation between the fragmented elements of these anamorphic texts. The anamorphic form is neither dependent upon nor ancillary to the Master Narratives within and against which it is created. Instead, it emphasizes the mutually constitutive relation between narrators, narratives and their interpreters/readers. This emphasis disrupts the linear, hierarchical forms of narrative authority and creates a strategically provisional, interrogative strategy that accommodates multiple positions and points of view. Recognizing and accommodating these differences through an emphasis on the strategic use of visual strategies and distorting narrative methods as identifiable elements of a separate, radicalized narrative form illuminates the gaps in these texts and opens a space for reading their distortions and fragmentations "other-wise" (Hite 3).

²¹ In The Diviners, for example, Morag's series of conversations with Catharine Parr Traill strategically connect Canada's literary past with Morag's/Laurence's construction of its literary and personal present. Traill is simultaneously a "factual" historical figure, an ordering author and narrator, a fictionalized Canadian icon and a character in Laurence's novel. Morag's conversations and her eventual "translation" of "CPT's" maxims from the context of a nineteenth century (literary) pioneer to her contemporary context illustrates the ways in which the familiar figure of Traill is changed through this exchange and simultaneously shapes it in each of the contexts and personae in which she appears.

III

The Woman Artist in The Diviners and Cat's Eye

To become the subject of one's own life is not only harder [than being the object of male desire] it has all the qualities of that nightmare condition: finding oneself upon a stage, required to play the violin, an instrument one has not previously personally encountered (Heilbrun 129).

Both Margaret Laurence's The Diviners and Margaret Atwood's Cat's Eye have been described by critics as thinly disguised autobiography. The use and reinscription of the kunsterroman in these novels encourages and subverts this type of reading. By strategically deploying these self-reflexive fictions as uncomplicated autobiography, Laurence and Atwood re-work this form in order to interrogate both the genre itself as the charting of "a progressive narrative of individual destiny" (S. Smith Discerning 18) and the reception of that form. They focus not on the events in the narrator's life but on the context of her self-narrative project and on the ways in which she constructs and perceives that project. The multiple, contingent subject positions that the narrator negotiates are reflected in the work she creates. These works of visual and written art and the process of narrating them into her self-narrative inform the act of constructing a workable subject position as both art and artist.

The strategic use, distortion, parody and exaggeration of autobiographical elements in these texts initiates a distinctly feminist metafictional form. This form employs the strategies of literary anamorphosis¹--an emphasis on the visual, on subjective

¹ I have defined the distinction between literary and visual anamorphosis in Chapter II.

explorations of political practice and ideological systems and on distortion of these systems—in order to reveal the woman hidden in the interstices of the Master Narratives. As it is manifest in these novels, the anamorphic form holds up a distorting mirror to the author/narrators and deliberately and parodically conflates the relationship between artist and work of art in the narrative. By focusing these texts on the process of becoming both the creating subject and the created object of their own works of art, Laurence and Atwood engage with a number of excluding and exclusionary institutional definitions of art, artistic practice, and the artist. Through that engagement they effectively establish a provisional space for the construction and deployment of women's self-representation.

i: The Author and the Narrator

Women's auto/fictional² writing is involved with issues of context, political and personal resistance, cultural identity and historical and empirical (re)constructions of lived experience. It is, however, the unrelenting emphasis in these works on the personal, subjective representations of systems of definition and control that has resulted in much theoretical confusion in the attempt to categorize them. For many feminist theorists of autobiographical fiction, the construction of the individual subjectivity within a political context distinguishes this writing from "factual" autobiography or other first person

² Rachel Feldhay Brenner uses the term "auto/fictional" to suggest a "split" between "reflexive" and "autobiographical" narrative positionings. From the "auto/fictional" point of view, "the autobiographer distances herself from her story and fictionalizes herself as one among the many characters in her story" (64). Janice Morgan theorizes a similar relation between fiction and autobiography in women's writing. She suggests this "hybrid form [is] often highly self-conscious in its expression, and...alters our expectations--indeed our very definition--of what constitutes the autobiographic" (5).

narratives. The act of writing self-narration is a political one in which "the process by which subjects produce themselves as women...make[s] 'visible' the contradictions in hegemonic discursive and political systems" (Robinson 190). Women's self-narration, unlike the stated purpose of disclosure that characterizes canonical notions of autobiography, "reveals gaps, and not only gaps in time and space or between the individual and the social, but also a widening divergence between the manner and matter of discourse" (Benstock 1041). It is "a hybrid form, one often highly self-conscious in its expression, and one which alters our expectations--indeed, our very definition--of what constitutes the 'autobiographic'" (Morgan 5)

In light of the body of feminist criticism that surrounds the generic conventions of women's autobiography, critics who "conflate the 'I' or subject of [Atwood's] writing with the real woman...not only...misread, but...miss the point (Grace, "Gender" 189). Critical responses whose "tacit premise...is that the author is somehow present in her work, not only in a secondary sense, as in the relation of producer to product, but in some wholly accessible and unmediated manner" (Hite "Forward" xiii) are buying into a "false categorization" (Russ 49) of women's writing. Such a categorization diminishes the artistic and fictive contributions of the authors as artists and contends that "woman have traditionally been...so imaginatively impoverished that all they could write about was themselves" (Ingersoll 24). Feminist inscriptions of bildungsromane and kunstlerromane are not simply linear quest narratives in which the ultimate identity of the protagonist is clearly traced from a defined beginning to an identifiable end. Rather, "the female

autobiographical 'I' is more a process than a product, and its discourse is more likely to be iterative, cyclical, incremental and unresolved, even a mystery" (Grace "Gender" 191).

The kunstlerroman³ inevitably engenders comparisons between the lives of the authors and those of their artist-protagonists. Laurence and Atwood take this form one step closer to their own experiences by provocatively incorporating and distorting elements of their own lives into their texts. Critical reactions to these inclusions have varied from assertions that the novel is "barely mediated autobiography" (Towers in Bouson, 161) to discussions of its sophisticated transgression and interrogation of life writing (Howells "Elaine" 204, N. Cooke "Reflections" 162). In Cat's Eye, Atwood "shapes [her former use of autobiographical strategies] into a new, complex and deeply satisfying image of the female self" (Grace, "Gender" 199) which reveals that "autobiography, even when intended, is obviously enough only another form of fiction" (Ingersoll 24). This form is at its most subversive in its fictional reinscriptions,

when it leaves behind the single-minded project of following a singular life-line, when it drops out of narrative as climax and opts for narrative as interaction with what surrounds us, then we are in the presence of writing for a life, a writing that ditches dualistic polarities...[and] dodges the hierarchies (Marlatt "Self-Representation" 206).

The paradox of the narrator's position and of a narrative "which purports to present an honest, first-hand life account subverts the expectation of truthfulness through the narrative mode itself" (Brenner 63) is central to these discussions. Critics of Cat's Eye have noted that "by telling the readers so much, Atwood has paradoxically exposed the

³ I discuss the specifically feminist reinscription of the kunstlerroman later in this chapter.

limits of autobiography and its artifice of reconstruction" and created a "transgressive form...which is itself a challenge to life-writing" (Howells, "Retrospective" 216). The use of autobiography in fiction, then, introduces a series of complex narratological and political questions into the text. This form both "draw[s] attention to its own problematical status as a fictional construct" (N. Cooke "Reflections" 164) and acts as "a way of both acknowledging and revising cultural determinants of identity" (Hite, Other xvi).

Both The Diviners and Cat's Eye not only challenge the premises of traditional autobiographical form but also overtly challenge linear concepts of time and its connection to narrative construction. Atwood, Howells suggests, "adds one important dimension to de Man's theory of autobiography...the dimension of time" ("Retrospective" 208) Further, both Laurence's and Atwood's use of the kunstlerroman connects this re-vision of linear time with a distinctly feminist reinscriptive impulse: "The return to the past signifies not the triumph of the past but becomes, rather, the means to a transformed present and new possibilities for the future" (Greene Changing 16).

The emphasis on autobiography in both of these novels is a form of strategic anamorphic distortion which exaggerates this generic category in order to interrogate the problematics of mainstream perceptions of the relationship between women and their art. It allows the narrator to explore the politics of artistic practice and the role of the artist within institutions which deny women's subjectivity⁴ and which encode women as the objects rather than the producing subjects of art. The relationship between the

⁴ Tania Modleski's suggestion that subjectivity "is an ongoing construction, not a fixed point of departure or arrival from which one then interacts with the world" (135) has informed my use of this term here.

author/artist and the self-narrator is specifically foregrounded and problematized through this deployment of the "autobiographical illusion" (N. Cooke "Reflections" 162) in both The Diviners and Cat's Eye. This strategy raises challenging questions about the already troubled relationship between the author and the narrator. It draws attention to the politics of the process of self-narration and the act of constructing a subject position within the multiple layers of the dominant discourses in which the protagonists live and write.

The relationship between the author and the narrator is less one of creator and creature, of author and text, than it is a mutually constitutive, mutually disruptive, inherently unstable relationship. By foregrounding this interdependence,⁵ all of these novels throw notions of textual authority and of historical/narrative veracity into question. By foregrounding the visual in these texts, Laurence and Atwood similarly disrupt and challenge the authority of the written narrative. Atwood has suggested that the artist/protagonist acts as a sort of conduit for artistic expression at a specific point in the work and for a specific purpose: "In writing, your attention is focused not on the self but on the thing being made, the thing being seen...It is not 'expressing yourself'. It is opening yourself, discarding your self, so that the language and the world may be evoked through

⁵ The mutually constitutive position that I suggest here is based on the idea that an "author" does not become an author until she has written the text: the act of creating her narrators, in effect causes her to create herself as "author"-- a figure, a character that did not exist before. My reading of this is similar to, but slightly more pragmatic than, Barthes' conception of a "paper author" whose "life is no longer the origin of his fables, but a fable that runs concurrently with his work" ("Author" 78). I would place my difference from this position in the multiple designations assigned to the writers of these texts. As their multi-layered narratives and narrators suggest, the "author" is one of a number of provisional, strategic subject positions that each of these women occupy, but which is not, and cannot be, the primary term through which they would define themselves.

you" (cited in Strehle 164). References here to "opening" and "discarding" are echoed in Atwood's emphasis on images of gaps and elisions in which the narrator paradoxically speaks (of) her silence. In *Cat's Eye*, Atwood draws attention to the process of paradoxically speaking silence through her focus on the self-reflexive artist in the "Arnolfini Marriage" (Fig. 11). Elaine "spend[s] a lot of time" with this painting, painstakingly examining its composition, and focuses on

the pier-glass on the wall behind [the two central figures], which reflects in its convex surface not only their backs but two other people who aren't in the main picture at all. These figures reflected in the mirror are slightly askew, as if a different law of gravity, a different arrangement of space, exists inside, locked in, sealed up in the glass as if in a paper-weight. This round mirror is like an eye, a single eye that sees more than anyone else looking (327).

This passage is central to my reading of this novel. It provides a clear signifier for the ways in which Atwood explores the relationship between art and the artist, insisting on the artist's participation in her work and foregrounding both that participation and the strategic deployment of form and content which she accomplishes.

By foregrounding the autobiographical the authors that I discuss here draw attention to both the authenticity of the narrative voice in their texts (is it the reliable voice of the narrator, or the barely disguised voice of Laurence or Atwood?) and the process of constructing a narrative on a series of interdependent levels. These texts make no attempt to disentangle the narrative from Laurence's or Atwood's positions as their originators⁶.

⁶ As poststructuralist and postmodern notions of the "death of the author" (Barthes, 145) or high modernist concepts of "authorless" texts would attempt to do. This term distances the agency of the author from the text. It also distances the text from the circumstances of its production and the act of reading it as an artefact from the context of the reader.

Rather, in a supremely metafictional gesture, they draw attention to, incorporate and problematize the author's presence. Brian McHale suggests that in postmodern metafiction "to reveal the author's position within the ontological structure is only to introduce the author into the fiction; far from abolishing the frame, this gesture merely widens it to include the author as a fictional character" (198). McHale argues that when this gesture is combined with an autobiographical element in a text, then "autobiography functions...as a distinct ontological level, a world to be juxtaposed with the fictional world, and thus as a tool for foregrounding ontological boundaries and tensions" (203). While both The Diviners and Cat's Eye are arguably participating in this sort of kaleidoscopic shifting and mingling of ontological levels, I would suggest that the incorporation of the auto/biographical presence of the "author" in these novels is further fueled by an impulse that moves them irrevocably out of the rarified philosophical emphasis of postmodern theory: an impulse that privileges contextualizing, politicizing and radicalizing both the narrative form and content of women's writing in multiply-excluded⁷ relations to Master Discourses. The self-conscious references to the author, then, become a distinct political strategy which insists upon an awareness of the material circumstances of the novel's production (it is a text produced by a woman, a Canadian, within a specific historical moment, and cannot be removed from that connection). In this sense, the author becomes a presence within the gaps of the narrative, illuminated through the artifice that characterizes the text itself.

⁷ By "multiply excluded" I am suggesting multiple levels of strategies of exclusion and marginalization: specifically the layering of exclusionary levels such as class, race, sexuality and post-colonial, geographic, linguistic contexts.

The relationship between the author and the narrator in these anamorphic texts functions in much the same way in which the reconfiguring mirror functions in anamorphic painting. The process of constructing the artefact is, in this case, as significant and as much a part of the piece as that which is represented. As the distorted painting cannot be "read" without the intervention of the reconfiguring mirror, so there is no point of access to these self-narrative texts without the self-conscious narrator. The agency in these novels is apparently that of the narrator: the overriding consciousness, the focal voice in the texts is hers while the author, subtextually present, is strategically absent. Yet through this controlling narrative voice, the author is nonetheless present in the artifice of her narrative construction. In this sense, she is granting the narrator agency in the same way that the anamorphic artist privileges the point of view in the reconfiguring mirror: the narrator, in this case, enacts perspective.

M.C. Escher's distorting, evocative lithographs provide a visual point of reference for articulating this artistic positioning. As in each of Escher's layered, problematized representations of artistic production (Figs. 4-7), autobiographical references are intimately connected with the moment of the work's production. As I discussed in Chapter Two, art and the artist are inseparable in these works. Critical assumptions about the identity of the figure represented comes to the reader/viewer of these works from outside the text itself.

Escher's self-portrait, "Hand with Reflecting Globe," is described as representing the "head, or to be more precise, the point between [the artist's] eyes, [which] come in the absolute centre [of the work]. Whichever way he turns he remains the centre. The ego is

the unshakable core of his world" (Escher 13). Elaine's self-portrait, "Cat's Eye," on the other hand, shows the figure of the artist off-centre. In The Diviners, Laurence similarly represents the artist's subjectivity "askew", noting that "there is no fixed centre" (243) for representing the subject in this ideological space. Unlike Escher's determination that the "[masculine] ego is the unshakable centre" of these works, Elaine's portrait articulates the de-centred, ex-centric position of the female subject--even as she appears in her own art. This, I think, is what most clearly separates these women's versions of the kunsterroman from the masculine, canonical versions. In these texts, the artistic subject is definitely not "the origin of meaning, controller of destiny, or locus of timeless truth" (Strehle 166) even within her own construction of her own subject position. Her voice is privileged, her point of view foregrounded, but it is always represented as one of a number of points of view. The processes which she illustrates as having elided and silenced her own voice at the same time draw attention to the positions that she is eliding or relegating to the background and interspaces of her own narrative in order to make her voice heard and her position "seen".

The politics of making the woman artist visible in her art negotiates a more complex ideological space even than Escher's multi-referential lithographs. The act of representing herself places the woman artist between the norms of artistic practice that encode women as silent objects and her inscription of herself as the focal point of her own narrative. Using the mirror to reflect (on) this representation places her self-representation in a different ideological category than Escher's and Van Eyck's self-reflexive "disconcerting ... washroom scribble[s]" (Cat's Eye 327). The presence of the reflecting,

distorting mirror foregrounds the work's strategic engagement with hegemonic images of women's narcissism and their place as artistic objects and passive objects of the masculine gaze.

In these novels, Laurence's and Atwood's representations of women artists are of "sibylline women who become their own muses" (Bok 82). Being both artist and muse, Bok argues, places the woman writer in a paradoxical relation to her art and her writing is thus best described as "a visionary experience" (80). Bok's focus on transcendence, the historical strategies of feminism and its connections with women's mysticism and mystics in her characterization of the "visionary" elements of Laurence's writing speaks to a number of the author's textual and personal concerns, but does not, I would argue, account for or address some of the more politically or textually radical elements of this particular novel. Indeed, this focus draws discussion away from the power inherent in these elements and denies the potential for pragmatic grassroots action and change that Laurence so strongly espoused.

ii: The Mirror: Anamorphic Markers

Structurally, The Diviners and Cat's Eye are mirror images of each other. Both novels explore the process of a woman narrator constructing a workable subject position within multiple layers of exclusionary and potentially silencing discourses. Cat's Eye is a novel which narrates a series of visual artefacts and which is structured around the process of translating from one mode of representation into another: the visual into the linguistic. Elaine's self-construction acts as a companion piece to a series of contextualizing,

unstable and deliberately mediated commentaries of her paintings at two gallery showings. The Diviners, on the other hand, is a narrative work which foregrounds many of its narrative concerns (subjectivity, narrative voice, women's politics) through the use of a number of visual strategies and images (the innerfilms, memorybank movies and photographs). Again, the visual is narrated, but in this case, it is the narrative form and its instabilities that are foregrounded. This part of my chapter will focus on the images of mirrors and mirroring strategies in The Diviners and Cat's Eye. I will explore the form and shape of the novels and their resistance to linear narrative strategies by focusing on the separate, reflecting sections at the end of each text and by reading these sections back into the preceding narratives.

By gesturing outward from their narrative forms, both Laurence and Atwood interrogate, resist, and reinscribe the codes which have constrained twentieth century women's writing. The emphasis on the visual in both of these works shifts their focus away from hegemonic notions of the written text and, by destabilizing this medium, begins to challenge its institutional status. The visual emphasis in these novels, like Lacan's descriptions of the development of the subject,⁸ depends on the illusory unity provided by a distancing mirror. Through the resulting "inside out structure of the gaze" (Lacan "Anamorphosis" 82), Lacan's subject is able to enter into the symbolic order of discourse. In The Diviners and Cat's Eye the inside/out relation is manifest in the separate sections at the end of the novel in which the previous markers are reflected and consolidated. This

⁸ Which is intimately connected with the project of self-narration that I describe here.

"central anamorphic marker" functions like Lacan's mirror or its reconfiguring counterpart in anamorphic art. The act of gesturing outside of the text to the process of its own construction⁹ through these markers and the simultaneous act of emphatically, unambiguously gesturing back into the text is a narrative parallel to Lacan's "gaze". It is closely associated with the perspectival, provisional emphasis of a narrative "eye", which returns and comments on the gaze of the narrative "I": the speaking voice in the text. What is contained in the marker, then, is not a unified decoding of the preceding text. It is rather a kaleidoscopic amalgam of the events that shaped those texts. More significantly, it is a manifestation of that which is contained in the gaps and interspaces that are revealed through the interrogative processes in the central (main) narrative. In this sense, the process of contextualizing and constructing a place for Morag's voice is completed, and begun again, in the concluding "Album" section of The Diviners.

In The Diviners, as in each of the novels that I discuss in this study, anamorphic markers are scattered throughout the text. They refract through the text from the opening image of the enigmatic "river [that] flowed both ways" (3), to the recurring references to a cycle of storytelling in which the "knack of words" (126) and other forms of divination are temporary "gifts[s], or portion[s] of grace" which are "finally withdrawn, to be given to someone else" (369), to the final, multivocal manifestation of this spiralling cycle of storytelling in "Album". The "Album" section is not simply an appendix to the novel. It is,

⁹ Through the markers and intertextual reference and, more basically, through the incorporation of this separate(d) narrative voice into the published text.

rather, an integral part of the text, one which not only concludes it in a physical sense, but leads the reader back into the narrative more effectively and more compellingly than the more often cited "final" line of Morag's third\first person narrative. In a novel that stresses the contextualized process of constructing a workable, albeit provisional, "place to stand on" for the woman subject, the inclusion of "other" voices in the Album section seems to exclude it from the body of the text itself. It is for this reason, I think, that the majority of critical readings of The Diviners have chosen to ignore this final section, and this omission results in many of the problems that so many critics have with the text. Frank Davey is disappointed that the novel "ends so weakly" ("Silence" 41) and, even in his reading which focuses on the Tonnerre family, Leslie Monkman describes the fusion inherent in the scene in which the knife and the plaid pin are returned to their owners as the "last chapter" of The Diviners rather than the Album section which contains Jules's and Pique's own "songs" and more clearly and consistently embodies both the fusion that he mentions and the inevitable "conflicts and dichotomies" (150) that result for Pique.

Lorraine York explores the implications of the "Album" section more fully than most other critics. She notes that "the presence of the songs and lyrics in the 'Album' emphasizes the fact that written words and cameras are not the means by which all of the characters in The Diviners express themselves" and reinforces the fact that the often-cited line in which Morag turns to "set down her title" (453) "are not...the last to appear in the novel" (Dailiness 164). York argues that "Morag's arrangement and embroidering of [the six photographs that appear in the text] represents in miniature Laurence's composition of

The Diviners—a novel composed of six sections, if one includes, as one should, the 'Album' section at the end of the novel" (159).

Gayle Greene draws attention to the continuity of narrative concerns from the body of the novel in the "Album" section, suggesting that "Lazarus is 'born again' in Jules' songs...Jules' songs live again in Pique's songs; and all are made to live in Laurence's The Diviners" ("Uses" 187). Greene's argument not only draws attention to the continuation of the preceding narrative concerns and images through the songs in this section, but also to the construction of the narrative by Laurence herself. Both the use of the strangely intimate third person narration and the inclusion of "Album" are, I would argue, anamorphic markers which both draw attention to the construction of the narrative and comment on and interrogate the paradoxical and often misread relationship between the authors and their narrators in these women's kunstlerromane.

This final section is, however, more than simply a fitting conclusion to a text that has so carefully negotiated the spaces between and within personal engagements with the Master Narratives of history, narrative construction, family and cultural mythologies. It ultimately provides an effective point of access for reading this disruptive and disrupting text. The "Album" section foregrounds and provides a marker for the narrative focus on multiple, interconnected, interdependent voices and with the ways in which the present and the past, myth and history, the personal and the political are in constant and mutually informing interaction in The Diviners. Reading "Album" back into the rest of the novel reveals the artifice and the artistry of the novel's construction. The four songs which make up the "Album" contain and refer back to the markers in the text.

The Diviners enacts an endless, spiralling incorporation of multiple voices¹⁰ in a single narrative. Its multiplicity challenges the notion of the singular character of a narrative voice while paradoxically reinforcing that singularity. Voices are heard, silenced, reinscribed and superseded in this novel, but never lost. It becomes clear early in the text that while Morag's voice shapes the narrative, the singular nature of the way in which she constructs herself in this forum—her voice—is the result of a complex weaving of a number of other voices: those which have influenced her or with which she has been involved. When she is arguing with Brooke, for example, Christie's colourful phrasing intrudes into Morag's voice (210) and later, she wonders at the ways in which the forgotten words of Gaelic are retained in the voices of the native speakers' inheritors as "an echo" (304). As in Ana Historic¹¹, the individual voice is represented as unique precisely because of the particular combination of voices that are collected in it. For Laurence, the significance of such a paradoxically individual yet collective voice is characterized both by the process of its construction and the inevitability of its continuation and reconstruction. The notion of inheritance thus takes on a different meaning in these women's texts. Beyond the transference of "tokens", it is a living narrative legacy in which the "inheritors" (369) are engaged in an ongoing dialogue with the voices of their pasts¹².

¹⁰ See also Hildegard Kuester for a useful discussion of this use of multiple voices and the "inside-outside perspective" (155) that results.

¹¹ I discuss this aspect of Marlatt's novel in Chapter IV.

¹² This sort of dialogue is similarly used in each of the novels that I discuss here. In Cat's Eye it is represented through Elaine's engagement with Cordelia, in The Handmaid's Tale and Ana Historic through imagined conversations with absent mothers.

This notion of "inheritors" and the process of receiving and acknowledging inheritance helps to contextualize my reading of the "Album" section of The Diviners. The endless process of bequeathal and inheritance is acted out a number of times in the novel. The activity becomes more concentrated and more frequent as Morag's own narrative draws to a close. At its most far-reaching level, Morag's series of dialogues with Catharine Parr Traill and the ultimate emphasis in these interchanges on voice, place, identity and the process of selection in constructing a workable history and voice focus on the development of the individual voice in the midst of a potentially overwhelming cultural history. But on a more personal level, her connections to Christie, Prin, Jules, Brooke, Ella, Royland and others seem to be a mutually informing exchange of voices, "tales," experiences, and identity. In a dizzying Chinese-box (or Möbius strip) revelation, this interdependence is articulated in Morag's self-conscious construction, re-vision and retrospective examination of her life. The resulting narrative is not only an examination of her own experience but an exploration of the context in which she, as a speaking subject, was formed.

The process of constructing identity is drawn around and within Morag's development of a workable narrative voice. Most of The Diviners is narrated by a strangely intimate third person narrator with periodic, fragmenting authorial intrusions. This latter voice disrupts the authority of the shaping narrative consciousness and opens up the text to the possibility of other points of view and alternative readings of events. Like the layered construction of Morag's self-narrative, Laurence's novel has at least three distinct levels: Morag's narrative; Jules's words and music; and Pique's song. Morag's

narrative, in turn, is fractured again into two discrete levels: the third person narrator that she (?) has constructed and the first person narrator which is generally manifest as italicized intrusions into the body of the third person narrative. The duality is not only evident in format changes: the switch from the first to third person that occurs through most of the narrative (and which does not intrude from the time she reaches late adolescence to the point at which she begins to consider leaving Brooke) and the change from standard font to italics. But duality is also evident in the way Morag refers to her own process of writing in the last line of her narrative. She describes this process as writing "private and fictional words" (370): words both paradoxically intimate and public, constructed and natural, the effort of both self and subject.

The emphasis in this narrative is on the process involved in constructing a workable narrative voice, on hearing the voice of the fictional author in the hubbub of voices that she has constructed. Throughout the novel, acts of (re)inscription¹³ illuminate the ways in which the process of "inheritance" shapes the construction of a narrative voice. For Morag, the paradoxical first/third person voice through which she narrates her story incorporates and resists both the distanced omniscience of the third person narrator or the troubled self-containment of a traditional first person narrative. Both modes privilege one voice over others and elide the ways in which other voices are incorporated into, yet are paradoxically silenced or interspatially related to, these central voices. By foregrounding both the reciprocity and the conventional silencing of voices in the

¹³ For example, *Lazarus's Tales*, *Jules's Tales* and *Christie's Tales* which are embedded in Morag's narrative.

narratives that Morag encounters in the process of creating her self-narrative, Laurence explores the importance of perspective in the construction of voice and narrative.

The Diviners concludes, if indeed such a circular and constantly re-visionary text can be said to conclude, with "Pique's Song" in the "Album" section. While the bulk of the narrative of The Diviners is an exploration of the process of Morag's self-narration, "Pique's Song" is the daughter's (Morag's "inheritor") form of self-narrative construction. This self-narrative draws together images from the stories of her parents and, on a symbolic level, is a culmination of the text in its reflections on/of the preceding narrative concerns. In this sense, I would suggest that the last line of The Diviners is found in "Pique's Song" which concludes with the affirmative and equally non-oppositional "The valley and the mountain hold my name" (382) rather than the more often cited "final" line, "Morag returned to the house, to write the remaining private and fictional words, and to set down her title" (370) (which, although it contains an implication of beginning in its ending, is not the last line of the text).

The anamorphic marker here is something that not only condenses the images that inform the novel and intensifies them beyond their manifestations in the body of the text, but it also exaggerates these elements to such an extent that they become simultaneously familiar and unfamiliar. Pique, for example, uses a number of the literary devices that have become characteristic of both her parents in their narratives. She incorporates a number of oppositional, juxtaposed images that echo Jules's production, while at the same time including some of Morag's images associated with deracination and the quest for "home". She talks about "that home I never knowed" which reinscribes and echoes issues which

have been the focus of her parents' texts. Pique also uses and repeats phrases that link her text directly with the other voices in the novel. Her use of the phrase "living places," for example, resonates with multiple voices. Its original appearance in the text occurs not in the words to Pique's song, but when Morag refers to Jacques Tonnerre's "livingplace, his living place" (366) on Galloping Mountain where Jules will be buried. The later inclusion of this phrase in Pique's text again enacts the transmission of voice and words and connects them irrevocably and evocatively with place in these mutually constituting narratives.

The three songs by Jules that precede "Pique's Song" in "Album" are a vital part of this reading. In a novel that is structured around notions of context, process of selection, and reinscription from varying points of view, Jules's songs serve to contextualize Pique's and to reinforce notions of continuity in other voices that have previously been circulated in Morag's narrative. They further provide an alternative point of access to Manawaka and Morag's representation of the town and its inhabitants. Jules's songs emphasize the importance of place in the construction of identity. Each of these compositions link the significance of and fundamental connection to the land in the articulation of Métis identity. In "The Ballad of Jules Tonnerre," that identity is consolidated at the historical moment in which they gathered with Riel to fight to "keep their father's lands" (457). Inheritance, the denial of that inheritance, resonate with concerns with other forms of intertexts in Morag's self-narrative¹⁴. In Jules's song, the significance of inheritance and an intimate connection

¹⁴ As in Christie's tales and her narration of the photographs at the beginning of her narrative.

with the land combine to provide the potential for an alternate point of access to Manitoban and Canadian history other than the ways in which it is taught in Manawaka schools.

Jules's narrative is clearly distinguished from Morag's not only by its physical separation from the rest of the text, but also by its use of form, language and imagery. This is clearly another narrative voice in The Diviners. Jules's use of the musical form, rather than a prose narrative, is a significant marker in this separation since Morag the writer/the narrator/the storyteller neither reads nor writes music (364). Jules's songs focus on family history, on race and oppression, on the importance of place, on levels of exclusion, marginalization and silencing, on continuity--spiritual, cultural and physical--in the transmission of Canadian history and culture

While Jules's songs are constructed around distinctive imagistic patterns and concerns, they are nonetheless involved in a dialogue with Morag's narrative through their emphasis on personal history and identity and on the inevitability and necessity of continuity and inheritance. The imagery in Jules's songs emphasizes an uneasy coexistence between elements or states of being which are normally constructed as oppositional: "They fought like animals, they fought like men" (458); "And Nothing was his Everything" (462); "Fire and Snow" (464). These songs represent, from a different point of view, a similar quest for non-oppositional strategies through which Morag engages with history's Master Narrative. Just as Morag creates and traces a tenuous personal history through the mythologized ancestral figures of Piper and I focus on the use of the visual as a destabilizing, interrogative strategy incorporates the political into existing critical

discussions which have focused on the textual implications of resisting linear narrative strategies in contemporary women's fiction. Other readings of feminist metafiction have explored the ways in which women's distinct points of view rework hegemonic definitions of "Self" and "Other", "Subject" and "Object". I will argue that the incorporation and adaptation of the visual allows these writers to resist such oppositional terms in favour of more provisional, mutually constitutive and resistant terms which engage masculinist narrative forms at a more fundamental level. This shift alters those forms radically through an on-going, resistant engagement.¹⁵ Women writing¹⁶ in the contested space in but not of the Master Narratives of fiction and of history reinscribe and resist existing narrative and generic forms in order to create a distinctly feminist form¹⁷ which accommodates their experiences and concerns as writing, speaking subjects. The resulting narratives are powerful, innovative explorations of the limits of narrative form and of the points at which the artistic, the political¹⁸ and the personal intersect. My study will focus on the ways in which Laurence, Atwood and Marlatt create such a narrative position. I argue here that

¹⁵ I will discuss the ways in which my critical method departs from other contemporary feminist readings of metafiction at greater length in Chapter II.

¹⁶ In the texts that I discuss here, "women writing" becomes a fairly complex concept. In this case, I am referring to both the writing narrators within the texts and to the authors who have written the novels that we are reading.

¹⁷ Gayle Greene notes that "we may term a novel 'feminist' for its analysis of gender as socially constructed and its sense that what has been constructed may be reconstructed" (*Changing 1*).

¹⁸ For my purposes, Kate Millet's definition of politics is still the most useful: "The term 'politics' shall refer to power-structured relationships, arrangements whereby one group of persons is controlled by another" (31).

these women resist mainstream definitions of metafiction¹⁹ and, through the disruptive inclusion of images and strategies borrowed from visual art, initiate a separate, radicalized²⁰ form of narrative that has more in common with the artistic strategy of anamorphosis²¹ than it does with existing or historical narrative forms²². The emphasis on self-narration in these texts draws the personal and the political together. Further, through their use of visual strategies which blur the boundaries between subject and object, history and fiction, art and life, author and narrator, they initiate a form that is able to represent

¹⁹ Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as "fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text" (*Metafiction 2*).

²⁰ My use of the terms "radical" and "radicalized" throughout this dissertation is most closely aligned with their use in political theory. In this sense, "radical" connotes a consciously challenging, interrogative, counter-discourse which sets itself up as being "an essentially contradictory reaction" to western philosophies which view themselves as objective (Gottlieb 2) and which enacts this challenge by confronting not only the manifestations of such philosophies, but the fundamental premises upon which they are founded.

²¹ Anamorphosis is an artistic strategy based on the deliberate distortion of an image in a work of art. Looked at directly, the image seems disproportionate or even incomprehensible. But from a strategic angle, or through a carefully positioned mirror, the image takes on another, more proportionate, shape. Access to the work thus depends on both the artist's deliberate explosion of the image and on the point of access of the viewer. An extended definition and discussion of this term follows in Chapter II.

²² For a comprehensive history of the appearance of the term "anamorphosis" in discussions of literature see Sylvia Soderlind "Illegitimate Perspectives and the Critical Unconscious: The Anamorphic Imagination". I address Soderlind's discussion at length in Chapter II.

the paradoxical, "interspatial"²³ position of women in western cultures in terms which address and resist such oppositions. "Morag" Gunn through her knowledge of the Highland Clearances and through Christie's stories of her father, Jules incorporates similar notions of inheritors and connects his songs to equally mythologized ancestral figures²⁴. For Jules, the stories and legacies of these ancestors are incorporated into a form of fundamentally oral legend that focuses on inheritance, naming and a personal vision of the events of the past: "They say the dead don't always die./ They say the truth outlives the lie --/ The night wind calls their voices there./The Métis men, like Jules Tonnerre" (375). The continuity echoed in the resonance of the name in this song reflects back to the development of Morag's voice(106/118) and the ways in which she has incorporated and reinscribed the stories of Riel and characters from her own history in the construction of her narrative voice.

Jules's songs provide a point of access into the "other side" of Pique's inheritance. They illuminate another level of the complex process through which the author chooses

²³ I first encountered this evocative term in a short story by Australian writer Phillipa C. Maddern. In "Inhabiting the Interspaces," Maddern explores the life of a woman who lives in the empty spaces of an urban office building. This character lives in the gaps between the false and structural ceilings, between the walls, and in neglected parts of the structure. While she inhabits the same location as the building's "legitimate" tenants and workers, the "interspatial" woman stands in a different relation to that space. She is an interloper, in but not of the official activities and accounts of the space that she inhabits. I found this term useful for describing the decidedly in-between position of women who are represented and drawn from these invisible spaces in the novels that I discuss here.

²⁴ Indeed, Jules will not let Morag take his photograph nor will he "make up songs about [him]self". He says that "maybe I don't want to see what I look like"(281).

her own form of self-expression in the many voices and influences that have shaped her life. "Pique's Song" thus enacts the notion of inheritance through which Morag shapes her engagement with history. By actively incorporating elements of both Morag's and Jules's narratives and songs, Pique's text clearly reinscribes both of these traditions, and consequently, everything that has informed them. The resulting song is not an unambiguous synthesis of her parents' forms, but instead an enactment of the process of selection that is so central to Morag's text. "Pique's Song" foregrounds the emphasis on point of view that informs both parental narratives and which is encoded in the structure of the novel as a whole. Through this act of incorporating, selecting and reinscribing Pique's personal Master Narratives, her song forms not a conclusion to this novel, but instead allows/creates a space and the possibility for further reincarnations/reinscriptions for all of the narratives that make up The Diviners.

Pique connects Jules's emphasis on place with Morag's focus on naming in her own construction of identity: "The valley and the mountain hold my name" (382). This connection serves to contextualize Pique's narrative voice and its origin in her parents' texts. But she also constructs her song in a way which is distinctly other than these narratives and which is distinctly her own. In the first stanza, she draws upon issues of naming and place, and adds a reference to the power of telling "tales" which acts as a marker to draw this passage back into a dialogue with the significance of the other "tales" that are told and reinscribed in The Diviners. These have acted, and continue to act, in this song as a way of establishing a place for Pique, for transmitting and reconstructing history and for constructing a personal mythology. Pique focuses on the "the tales they used to

tell me" (381) and the ways in which these tales formed her identity and engagements with them: "it seemed so low/ There's a valley way down there/I used to dream it like a prayer/And my fathers, they lived there long ago" (381). The mention of the "fathers" in this stanza gestures back into Jules's texts and to his focus on fathers and the transmission of history.

In the second stanza of her song, Pique articulates the concept of multivocal contributions to the construction of a single narrative voice: "There's a mountain way up there/ I used to dream I'd breathe its air/ And hear the voices that in me would never die" (381). Multivocality is again connected not only to Morag's emphasis on narrative inheritance, but also to Jules's connections with place. Once again, this image illuminates the importance of this reciprocal, continuously reflecting gesture that characterizes the interaction of the tales, voices, and formal sections of the novel as a whole.

Finally, the most significant aspect of this song appears in its last line. Here, Jules's narrative voice echoes the paradoxical juxtaposition of mutually constitutive images in the "valley and the mountain" and links Pique's act of self-narration with those of Jules and Morag, as well with all of the narratives that have informed them. Most importantly, however, this image links the beginning of The Diviners with its "end". The final sentence of "Pique's Song," "The valley and the mountain hold my name" (382) spirals back to the "beginning" of Morag's text. As I pointed out earlier in this discussion, it is my position that The Diviners does not end with Morag "return[ing] to the house, to write the remaining private and fictional words, and to set down her title" (370) but with "Pique's Song." The novel, therefore, does not conclude with Morag's voice but with that of an

"inheritor" whose connection with and separation from everything that has gone before is acted out in the body of this "new" narrative and through this inherited narrative voice. Pique's paradoxical image of the "valley and the mountain" is a distorted, modified reflection on/of the enigmatic opening image of the "river [that] flowed both ways" (3). Both reinforce the mutually constitutive (rather than the oppositional) relationship between the landscapes. Both images foreground the overriding notion in The Diviners that past and present are coexistent and are constantly informing and modifying each other. By reading "Pique's Song" closely and following its reflective gaze back into Morag's narrative, a number of the text's interrogative structures are reinscribed and reflected slightly "askew" through yet another narrative point of view. Like Morag, Pique resists and challenges linear theories of the transmission of the Master Narratives of history, foregrounds the process of selection, and explores the individual's relationship both to her personal and cultural past and to present cultural systems. Central to all of these acts of resistance are the ways in which identity is constructed through, around, and against other voices and identities as well as other cultural systems.

The positioning of the central anamorphic marker in Cat's Eye is more troubling and problematized than those in The Diviners, The Handmaid's Tale or Ana Historic. In each of these novels, this marker is placed strategically at the end of the text, separate from the body of the narrative. The marker acts as a reflective and reflecting mirror that, as in the "Album" section in The Diviners, leads us back into the text with a new,

potentially disruptive perspective on the novel's construction and on the strategies of the narrator. Cat's Eye, on the other hand, is framed by markers and carries its reflecting gaze throughout the text in the successive appearances of works of visual art, and through the ongoing concerns about the actions of creating, displaying and interpreting visual art which surround the moment that contains the central marker in this text, Elaine's "Retrospective". Cat's Eye's self-constructing narrator connects the process of defining her identity to the production of her art at the moment at which it was created. This is, in turn, connected with Elaine's project of contextualizing her paintings within her contemporary self-narrative. Linking Elaine's paintings to the moment at which they were created while exploring their position as artefacts—distanced historically and referentially from the context which shaped them by the shifting "transparencies" of time—Atwood shapes her narrative into a structure that mirrors Elaine's process of constructing the narrative that we are reading. Her non-linear, spiralling and self-referential narrative method foregrounds the ongoing process of selection involved in the creation of both a work of art and of a subject position.

It would be tempting to argue that the "Arnolfini Marriage" is the central marker in Cat's Eye. Like Elaine's self-narrative, it foregrounds self-reflexive artistic production, reflection and the capricious nature of mirrors. Both are concerned with "showing" more in a reflection than in that which is reflected, and Van Eyck's painting ultimately connects with and comments on Elaine's fascination with the alternate worlds in mirrors. Elaine's reading of this painting focuses on this mirror world in which, she says, the figures reflected

are slightly askew, as if a different law of gravity, a different arrangement of space, exists inside, locked in, sealed up in the glass as if in a paperweight. This round mirror is like an eye that sees more than anyone else looking(327).

The dialogue between Van Eyck's painting and Elaine's reading embodies a number of the elements that inform and structure Elaine's text and her approach to her art.

The appearance of "The Arnolfini Marriage" in Cat's Eye focuses on the possibility of representing the world in a way that accounts for and accommodates radical differences in perception and perspective and which destabilizes notions of reality and realistic representation. Van Eyck's inclusion of other figures, including himself, in the pier-glass behind the wedding couple forces the viewer outside of the carefully framed and constructed image of the Arnolfinis at the centre of the painting and encourages the viewer to consider elements outside this "official" portrait, including the moment and self-conscious act of its production. Elaine describes the mirror as a kind of "eye," which sees/shows a world "askew" and reveals the "interspaces" of the official record of the Arnolfini Marriage. All of the elements of the painting on which Elaine focuses are ultimately reflected in the structure of her self-narrative. In spite of these parallels, however, I would suggest that Van Eyck's painting is not the central anamorphic marker in Cat's Eye (like the "Album section is in The Diviners). It is, rather, one of a series of reflecting markers which progressively illuminate and reflect (on) the narrative's strategic distortion. These markers gesture toward and refract outward from the central marker in this text: the final two paintings that Elaine describes at her Retrospective.

One of the characteristics of a central anamorphic marker, and one of the main reasons that I would suggest "The Arnolfini Marriage" is not this marker in this novel, is that it embodies not only the structural strategies of the text with which it is acting (which I think Van Eyck's painting does) but also that it contains within itself distinct, defining, elements that comment on and inform the "main" text. As I suggested in my reading of "Pique's Song," the central marker echoes the concerns of the narrative and reflects back into it, revealing or foregrounding previously hidden or unperceived elements. In this sense it is important to look beyond this tempting "decoy" marker ("The Arnolfini Marriage") and to plot the other markers which lead us finally to the central anamorphic marker in Cal's Eye. Arwood uses Elaine's Retrospective as a way of examining the importance of context. Through the play on the term "retrospective," on the narrative's "reflective" character and the use of mirrors in works of art, Arwood contextualizes the relation between past, present and works of art in Elaine's self-narrative. The process of narrating Elaine's life echoes the production of the Retrospective: it is a process in which order, relation and interpretation are debated, provisionally structured and finally (contingently) justified and accepted. In this sense, Elaine deploys her Retrospective as a marker. The process of narrating her own life through and against the process of ordering this exhibition becomes a counter-discursive narration of her own paintings. Through it, she resists Charma's official narration of the show in the "professional-looking computer-and-laser-printer" (404) catalogue, and even self-reflexively resists her own readings of the paintings.

The Retrospective is not a showing of Elaine's complete works, but a selection. Elaine walks through the gallery, looking at "what is here, what is not" (404). The two titles of sections which are not paintings in either of Elaine's shows²⁵ are the first and the last in the text of Cat's Eye: "Iron Lung" and "Bridge". These paintings frame the rest of Elaine's narrative and gesture outside of the existing text (just as the mirror in Van Eyck's work gestures beyond its text) to other, perhaps unstarted, unfinished or excluded, Risley paintings: an act which foregrounds this process of selection and the provisionality of the narrative that we are reading.

"Iron Lung" exists as a recurring image throughout the early portions of the novel. The romanticized image of a young girl, encased in a metal cylinder which "breathes her" not only appears in the reality of Elaine's experience at school, but reappears in her reconfiguring dreams (250). "Bridge" is similarly present and absent in the text. Like "Iron Lung," it is never included as part of Elaine's art work, but is a pervasive symbolic presence in visions, dreams and her experience from her introduction of herself in her narrative, "[t]his is the middle of my life. I think of it as a place, like the middle of a river, the middle of a bridge, halfway across, halfway over" (13) to the title of the final section. This image works in the same way in Cat's Eye as Laurence's image of the "river [that] flowed both ways" in The Diviners by reinforcing the novel's preoccupation with what Linda Hutcheon calls "the presence of the past" (Canadian 22).²⁶ Elaine's description of time at the beginning of her narrative similarly belies linear, oppositional definitions of past

²⁵ With these two exceptions, each of the titled narrative divisions in Cat's Eye are, in fact, the titles of paintings that appear in one or both of Elaine's art exhibitions and which she narrates over the course of her Retrospective.

²⁶ For the origins of this term, see Hutcheon's Poetics 4.

and present. Time is, she says, "like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of the other. You can't look back along time, but down through it, like water" (3). Elaine's references to the bridge reinforce the spiralling structure of the novel as well, drawing the reader back to this early reference with its imagistic repetition from the "final" section in "Unified Field Theory" (408).

The ways in which the Retrospective intersects with Elaine's re-vision of her past becomes increasingly sophisticated as the novel progresses. Initially, Elaine explores her ambiguous relationship with institutions. She equates the galleries which order and display her work with the rigid definitions and the obligatory reverence generally associated with organized religions:

Its the carpets that do it to me, the hush, the sanctimoniousness of it all: galleries are too much like churches, there's too much reverence, you feel there should be some genuflecting going on. Also I don't like it that this is where paintings end up, on these neutral-toned walls with the track lighting, sterilized, rendered safe and acceptable (85-6).

The connections that she makes between these institutions and the public display of art and with the ways in which these perpetuate each other is a recurring element of Elaine's narration of her troubled, interspatial position within these codifying cultural systems. Her resistance to ideas of naming and categorization immediately follows her articulation of the workings of institutional definitions. "Everything is post these days, as if we're all just a footnote to something earlier that was real enough to have a name of its own" (86).

Another in this series of markers occurs as Elaine begins to explore the ways in which her art, and her perceptions of her art, functions outside of her own interpretation and control of it. This marker draws upon the recurring references to the Retrospective in

its focus on the construction of elite institutional control of artistic practice and informs later images of the multi-layered and often conflicting interpretations that are generated around and within a single representation:

I called the whole series Pressure Cooker. Because of when it was done and what was going on in those years, some people thought it was about the Earth Goddess... Other people thought it was about female slavery, others that it was a stereo-typing of women in negative and trivial domestic roles. But it was only my mother cooking, in the ways and places she used to cook, in the late forties (151).

The structure of Elaine's reading of "Pressure Cooker" reflects Atwood's construction of this novel. Disparate voices and points of view surround Elaine's detailed description of this painting. Each voice provides a different, often contradictory, perspective on the work. Added to these external voices is Elaine's own contextualized voice, which draws attention to the material circumstances of the painting's production. In this case, "Pressure Cooker" is Elaine's mother "cooking, in the ways and places she used to cook," but it is also, and simultaneously, the narrative structure assures us, "about" issues of women's roles, domesticity as it was lived in the late forties. It is "about" the validation of women's labour in spite of its official trivialization. The construction of this passage does not encourage the reader to privilege Elaine's interpretation over those which surround it, but rather, insists on the simultaneity of all of those potential interpretations and encourages a number of alternate readings. The ways in which "Pressure Cooker" illustrates the process of identifying and articulating the "blank" spaces of the institutionalized definitions of art and history is, I would suggest, fundamental to Atwood's concerns with multiple points of access and the process of rendering visible aspects of "reality" which have been elided in

these Master Narratives. The act of "hearing" the disparate "voice overs" of a single painting, and the act of "viewing" the emerging and fading image of the interpreted, externally constructed woman mirrors the process through which women in art, as artists and as subjects, are simultaneously represented, interpreted and elided in artistic and cultural practice.

Elaine's childhood enactment of this sort of strategic fading-in, fading-out slipping from one physical space to another in her art is introduced shortly after this exploration of the ways in which the visible and the invisible are defined in relation to each other and are, it seems, mutually constitutive. "Fainting," she says, "is like stepping sideways, out of your own body, out of time or into another time. When you wake up it's later" (171). Like an anamorphic drawing that shifts with the point of access of the viewer, or her depiction of the materializing woman in the interspaces in "Pressure Cooker," Elaine's relationship with time here involves encountering it "askew," stepping "sideways" in an epistemological system that insists on time's inexorably linear structure. Gesturing forward to Elaine's reading of "The Arnolfini Marriage," this passage focuses on the relative nature of time and the relationship that the individual subject has with its definitions and manifestations.

The last of these reflecting markers incorporates each of these elements: the disruption of the relation between past and present, the multi-layered interpretation and the strategic use of provisionality in the politics of women's self-narratives. It adds to these the dual process of autobiographical influence and individual reinscription. Josef's film, which depicts "two women with nebulous personalities and cloudy hair [who]

wandered through fields with the wind blowing their thin dresses against their thighs," (365) emphasizes the process of selection and reinscription inherent in creating a narrative in any form. It also foregrounds Atwood's play with autobiographical reference and juxtaposes it with Elaine's own attempts at contextualizing and maintaining contact with her past through her own art. As she narrates her reactions to Josef's film, she once again acknowledges the validity of the simultaneous existence of multiple versions of one experience: "He was entitled to his own versions, his own conjurings, as I am" (365). Conjuring up a workable Josef in the construction of her own narrative, just as she conjures up her cooking mother and conjures herself out of the unpleasantness of the playground, Elaine examines the complexity of the existence of the innumerable overlapping "transparencies" that characterize not only time, but the multiple narratives that attempt to make sense of and order time, experience and identity.

Each of these markers leads the reader inexorably toward the central marker which contains and reflects back the issues contained within them: Elaine's Retrospective at "Sub/versions" and, in particular, the final two paintings in the display, "Cat's Eye" and "Unified Field Theory". This movement is accomplished in a number of ways: each chapter opens with Elaine's contemporary participation in the organization of the show; through a network of interlocking images which come together in a provisionally cohesive narrative at the Retrospective; and, finally, through Elaine's chronological narration of her personal history that leads us from her childhood drawings to this institutional exhibition of her work. All of the elements of the preceding markers meet in this central marker: Charna's "official" reading of each of the paintings and Elaine's response to them; her resistance to

but ultimate incorporation into institutional categorizations (412); the autobiographical elements in her own works of art (430) and her use of perspective, mirrors, and their relationship with time. "I walk the room, surrounded by the time I have made: which is not a place, which is only a blur, the moving edge we live in; which is fluid, which turns back on itself, like a wave" (409).

Within this context of mutually informed and informing images, "Cat's Eye" and "Unified Field Theory" act as the focal points of Elaine's narration of her Retrospective, her life and the construction of her narrative. Unlike the other paintings included in the Retrospective, Charma's catalogue commentary is neither alluded to nor directly cited in Elaine's descriptions of these works. They are the only examples of her work that are narrated exclusively in Elaine's voice. This, as well as the content and strategic placement of the paintings, suggests their positions as anamorphic markers.

Together, "Cat's Eye" and "Unified Field Theory" reflect and reconfigure the markers and images around which the novel is constructed. Like a pair of eyes, the paintings provide a point of access for "see[ing] [Elaine's] life[-narrative] entire" (398). This Möbius-strip-like reciprocity and spiralling continuity is a reenactment of the novel's form, foregrounding the ways in which images, events, perspectives and definitions spiral away from each other and reconnect endlessly through the process of constructing a provisional subject position in a work of either visual or written art, and in a life. Both paintings also distort and reflect their counterparts, each illuminating and articulating the other's gaps and fissures.

"Cat's Eye" is a self-narrative. Elaine describes this painting as "a self-portrait, of sorts" (407). In this self-portrait, as in the written narrative that surrounds and contextualizes it, Elaine (its ostensible subject) is deliberately, strategically and yet only partially disclosed and does not occupy its centre: "My head is in the right foreground, though it's shown only from the middle of the nose up: just the upper half of the nose, the eyes looking outward, the forehead and the topping of hair" (407-8). Elaine is foregrounded here, but is not the focal point of the painting. Just as her reinscriptive narrative is structured around Elaine's voice, but is ultimately as concerned with the context that formed that voice, so "Cat's Eye," with its decentred, partially disclosed subject, negotiates the precarious space between traditional autobiographical representation and an exploration of the process of constructing a workable subject position. Later, Elaine's description becomes a commentary on the strategy of her painting. Describing the "incipient wrinkles... A few gray hairs", she reveals that "this is cheating, as in reality, I pull them out" (408) and effectively reinforces the distance between the autobiographical subject of the painting as an artistic representation and the "reality" of the subject that is ostensibly represented. This commentary, like the ongoing commentaries within Elaine's narrative, serves to subvert the authority of her own work as a simple, realistic representation.

The focus of the painting shifts, revealing that its focal point is not Elaine's half-present, half-absent face but the pier-glass behind her which is "Behind my half-head, in

the centre of the picture"²⁶. The presence of the pier-glass in this painting not only reflects the emphasis on mirrors, mirroring and reflection in Cat's Eye, but echoes Elaine's earlier reading of "The Arnolfini Marriage". This reading shapes the ways in which she has defined her relation to her art. She is fascinated by the ability of the pier-glass to reveal what is hidden and to represent the world "askew" (327). The presence of the mirror here reflects the distortions in the text that simultaneously reveal the ordering, constructing author in the reconfiguring "mirror" of the narrative and its distorting properties. This distortion serves to destabilize the presumption of the authority and the presumed authenticity of the reflection that we have just encountered.

Most obviously, the painting's title is also the title of Atwood's novel²⁷. Embedding this alternate "Cat's Eye" into the narrative of Cat's Eye reinforces the multi-layered, sophisticated relation between art, artist and narrator which Atwood develops throughout this text. Like the image of the women "extending like the reflections in two mirrors" that Atwood uses in The Handmaid's Tale (165) and Dragland's evocative image of "MarlattwritingAnnewritingAnawriting" (179), the dizzying Chinese-box layers of

²⁶ Atwood's passages which discuss the view from behind, "a view over which I had no control" (294) and which, as a result, must be narrated by others (193) and therefore requires an alternate point of access to be seen, are provocative echoes of Woolf's description of the "spot the size of a shilling at the back of the head which one can never see for oneself" (86). Atwood's use of mirrors is, perhaps, a way of seeing and representing this spot without the help of others and its association with the expanded vision in the pier-glass further draws attention to her emphasis on perspective, on illuminating the invisible elements of a text and on expanding the representation beyond the boundaries of its conventional frame.

²⁷ Atwood uses a similar technique in The Handmaid's Tale where the title of her novel is echoed in the text: "The Handmaid's Tale" is also the title that Pieixoto gives to Offred's testimony.

"Cat's Eye" reflected and contained in Cat's Eye illuminates the complexity of this relation. The work of art which Atwood narrates and which (the fictional) Elaine paints are mutually constitutive. "Cat's Eye" reflects (on) the process of constructing a work of art that is, and is not, a self-portrait. Its skewed, distorted and reflecting surface shifts the gaze of the viewer/reader back out of the painting toward the context in which these representations appear: the auto/fictional text of Cat's Eye.

The talismanic marble for which both works are named provides the final point of access to the construction of this marker. Its presence links both works and signals the importance of vision (with its multiple meanings) to the varied points of access that the text(s) incorporate. The presence of the single "eye", here however, suggests that the provocative marker is, on its own, incomplete. The self-portrait contains and reflects the "I" of the marker and on its emphasis on the personal and on the construction of a subject position. The second "eye" of this marker is located in the presence of the cat's eye marble in "Unified Field Theory".

"Unified Field Theory" completes both Elaine's gallery retrospective and the construction of the central anamorphic marker in the novel. Sherrill Grace suggests that:

in the painting all [the elements of the work] are interconnected, contained and joined by the repeated curves of the night sky, the bridge, the moon and the marble. The image of the Self portrayed in this painting remains enigmatic and mysterious, but the mystery never the less exists in a unified field of time-space where nothing is lost and nothing connects" ("Gender" 202).

Drawing attention to the pivotal, inclusive structure of "Unified Field Theory," Grace touches on its strategic place in the text. Like "Cat's Eye," "Unified Field Theory" draws

upon each of the images around which Elaine's narrative is structured. But while the representational strategy of the painting "Cat's Eye" foregrounds the play on autobiographical elements in the novel Cat's Eye, "Unified Field Theory" foregrounds the talismanic, symbolic elements of the novel. Each symbol--the bridge, the night sky, the cat's eye marble carried at the heart of the falling Virgin of Lost Things--draws the reader back into the text and comments on the corresponding autobiographical reference in "Cat's Eye". The bridge itself, as I have mentioned earlier, is a potent metaphor for continuity and non-oppositional construction. Like the younger-than-life reflections in the convex mirror in "Cat's Eye," the bridge provides yet another way of articulating the continuity between past and present and the endless, mutually constitutive relationships between both states. Beyond its reflection of the other painting, however, "Unified Field Theory" also draws the reader back to the beginning of Elaine's narrative and provides an alternate, visual rendering of her opening statement that "Time is not a line but a dimension, like the dimensions of space. If you can bend space you can bend time also" (3).

Each of the earlier paintings Elaine describes in her narrative are re-presented in "Unified Field Theory". So, while "Cat's Eye" serves as a visual re-presentation of the autobiographical elements of the narrative, "Unified Field Theory" incorporates and reinscribes Elaine's complex relation to her art. "Falling Women" (268), the group of bell-skirted women floating down from a bridge, are consolidated in the single image of the floating Virgin of Lost Things in this painting. The positioning of the blue-centred marble draws attention to the recurring references to hearts throughout the text--turtle hearts

(170), Mrs. Smeath's heart (57), Roman Catholic iconic representations of the heart of the Virgin Mary (183), and cardboard Valentine hearts (162-3). This cultural symbol is replaced in Elaine's reflection with her personal talisman, the cat's eye marble. The marble itself, invisible in the painting that bears its name but rendered visible in the reflective companion painting, draws attention to Elaine's focus on perspective and vision. In this way, it is doubled to provide a pair of eyes (one represented visually, the other in language) through which the two forms that the narrative has taken to this point are brought together to create another form which incorporates both and reveals the inadequacies of both -- just as Elaine's narrative has done up until this point. The cat's eye marble is for Elaine a source of hidden power to which she has exclusive access. This power is located in the marble's ability to provide her with access to alternative perspectives or heightened vision (141,155).

Half or shadowed faces are similarly reflected from and through each of these works. In "Unified Field Theory," the "lower half of the moon" and the Virgin's face, which is "partially in shadow" reiterate the partially revealed face in the foreground and the "shadowed" faces of the girls in the pier glass in "Cat's Eye". It reflects beyond the marker itself to draw upon the title of an earlier painting, "Half a Face" (227) (which, paradoxically, shows "Cordelia's entire face" [227]) and "Leprosy" in which Mrs. Smeath "sits in front of a mirror with half of her face peeling off" (352). These images in turn reflect back to the comic book horror stories that Cordelia and Elaine read as teenagers (211). These strategically incomplete renderings provide visual points of reference for Elaine's exploration of the ways in which any act of representation or self-representation

is necessarily only a partial one. Indeed, the paradoxical title of Elaine's portrait of Cordelia which is reflected in the narrative's "eyes" is an explicit reference to this inadequacy. A single text, as *Cat's Eye* emphatically illustrates, can only represent fragments of an entire subject.

The result of this necessarily fragmented representation is that each text contains in itself a number of gaps which support and construct the existing representation and contain its alternate images. As in the familiar "Old Woman or Young Woman" trompe d'oeil (Fig. 9), gaps create a space upon which the foregrounded representation is dependent²⁸. While "Half a Face" painting shows Cordelia's entire face it is, as its title suggests, only a partial representation of Cordelia. In a text in which the past constructs the present and the present, in turn, reconstructs the past, Cordelia has become only a partial, incomplete presence. She is a vivid part of Elaine's past, but exists in her present only as a series of dis-visions (6-7, 20, 44, 153, 226, 313, 412). Elaine ultimately attempts to articulate the enigma of Cordelia's presence/absence, and of her own slightly skewed representation of herself in "Cat's Eye," when she says "I could give her something you can never have, except from another person: what you look like from outside. A reflection.... We are like the twins in old fables, each of whom has been given half a key" (411). Cordelia is a gap in the present of Elaine's narrative, missing immediacy, voice and

²⁸ Gaps and images of blanks, fissures and silences occur throughout *Cat's Eye* and reflect the notion of interspatial illumination that occurs in Elaine's art: she describes the hole in her back yard in which she is buried as a "blank square"(108), and the sound of the Dominion Observatory Official Time Signal which signals that "Time is passing; in the silence before the long dash the future is taking shape" (139) and later, reiterates this notion of silence in her conversations with boys, "the trick in these silent words is to walk in the spaces between them" (238).

the ability to provide an alternate point of access to both her own (missing) text and Elaine's²⁹. She has only a "tendency to exist" (242, 414) in Elaine's past and in her art. But, like the shrouded head with which she is associated in Elaine's art, she is at best an indistinct figure whose existence and its meaning in the present is never fully reinscribed in Elaine's narrative. In the painting, Cordelia's absent presence is manifest in Elaine's use of the shrouded head in the immediate background. Its enigmatic presence is later echoed in Elaine's self-portrait and in her younger reflection in the convex mirror. In this case, the representation of the "other," older, present Cordelia is achieved through the shrouded absence of this representation. This, of course, also reflects Cordelia's penchant for disguise, acting and play with costume and echoes Elaine's dream in which a robed figure carries Cordelia's severed head (360)³⁰

The "underside of the ground" in "Unified Field Theory" paradoxically contains both the expected collection of "stones," "beetles" and "small roots" and components of the night sky "as seen through a telescope. Star upon star, red, blue, yellow and white, swirling nebulae, galaxy upon galaxy" (408). Not simply combining, but juxtaposing, the night sky with the subterranean elements under the bridge is characteristic of the markers in this text. This resistant strategy provides yet another reflection of the symbolic elements

²⁹ Elaine acknowledges the ways in which her narrative privileges her own point of view and elides Cordelia's: "She will have her own version. I'm not the centre of her story, because she herself is that" (411).

³⁰ This image, in turn, relays back to the time when Cordelia mishandled Macduff's veiled "head" in a production of *Macbeth* (245) and a later dream in which Elaine has been given a wrapped head (250) and forward to the image of the woman in Josef's dream (298) and to Elaine's own reinscription of this image in "Life Drawing" (366).

that are closely connected with both Elaine's narration of her past and her self-portrait. The sky-filled ground, or ground-filled sky, that fills the gap beneath the bridge also fills the gap in the "empty sky" (408) of "Cat's Eye". The "behind" of "Cat's Eye" becomes the "underneath" of "Unified Field Theory" but both are illuminated, revealed interspaces of the preceding narrative. The telescopic lens that Elaine describes (but doesn't show in the painting except as a visual mode) again foregrounds her emphasis on perspective and draws the reading back to Stephen's influence on Elaine's perception of time and space and their mutual fascination with stars and the process of defining and interpreting them.

Stephen's notions of the relationship between time and space inform Elaine's concept of time throughout her narrative from the beginning ("time is not a line but a dimension" [3]) to her inscription of her relationship to time ("I walk the room, surrounded by the time I've made; which is not a place, which is only a blur, the moving edge we live in; which is fluid, which turns back on itself, like a wave" [409]). Time is "like the creek which flows... underneath the earth, underneath the bridge, down from the cemetery" (408) in "Unified Field Theory" and, like Stephen's stars, which are "fragments of the past... the stars as we see them are echoes of events that occurred light-years distant in time and space" (332), these descriptions connect and define the past as both absent and present--as simultaneously moving and stationary.

iii: The Image: The Woman Artist and Her Art

By focusing their texts on women artists, Laurence and Atwood strategically locate their narratives in a discursive space from which they can interrogate, reinscribe and resist the production of artistic canons and cultural constructions of an exclusively masculine artistic voice. The self-constructing woman narrator at the centre of Cat's Eye and The Diviners engages in a complex reinscription of the kunstlerroman. Re-viewing the kunstlerroman from a woman's point of view effectively reinscribes the genre by exploring not only legitimized forms of artistic process and practice, but the ideological mechanisms that support and sustain that practice. For these writers, the introduction of the politics of the process of becoming an artist must begin--when the subject of that process is a woman--by establishing that she is an artist. This involves defining and re-defining art and artistic practice and separating the subject constructing the art from the object represented in it. While this is often easily accomplished in traditional kunstlerromane, it is more complicated when the subject of the narrative is denied agency and authority in the Master Discourse of artistic practice which, as Elaine notes, has a "bias towards dead, foreign men" (16). For Elaine and Morag, this therefore involves a struggle against definitive institutional categorizations (for Elaine as a narrowly defined "feminist" and for Morag as "autobiographical"). This part of my chapter will focus on the figure of the woman artist as a central image through which the resistant project of the protagonist's self-narrative is explored. Through the self-narrator's struggle to articulate her position as simultaneously the subject and object of her own works of written (The Diviners) or visual (Cat's Eye) art, the problematic relationship between women and artistic representations is explored and interrogated in these texts.

The distinction between the author and the subject of art is strategically blurred in the feminist kunstlerroman. The woman both constructs her text and is constructed in it: she is both subject and object. Like Escher's mutually-constitutive "Drawing Hands," she becomes, as a result of critical and artistic conventions, indistinguishable from her art. This reinscription, then, is less about an artistic tradition and its influence on the individual consciousness than it is about the ways in which that consciousness draws herself out of the gaps in those traditions and defines herself through and against them. For both Morag and Elaine, the multiple layering of Master Narratives that contribute to the definition of institutionalized artistic practice has to be identified, reinscribed and resisted at the same time as they are constructing their own artistic space. In this sense, the feminist kunstlerroman continues to be intensely personal. But instead of placing the "artist-hero" resolutely at the centre of the work, the anamorphic strategy places this figure slightly off-centre, slightly askew. This positioning reveals and includes both the process involved in the self-construction of the woman artist and the context in which she writes/paints.

Politicizing the kunstlerroman expands its traditional focus from connections between the biographical and the artistic to include the gendered, cultural, ethnic and national contexts of the artist, and the influence of these categories on her artistic process and product. The material circumstances of the artistic production are inextricably connected to the work of art itself and to its reception. Virginia Woolf's discussion of the woman artist foregrounds this connection. She suggest that fiction

is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners. Often the attachment is scarcely perceptible...but when the web is pulled askew..., one remembers that these webs are not

spun in mid-air by incorporeal creatures, but are the work of suffering human beings" (41).

Her notion that the woman artist needs "five hundred a year and a room with a lock on the door" (100) translates into "the power to contemplate...[and] the power to think for oneself" (101) and helps to define the fundamental relation between the woman artist, her cultural context and her art. Both Laurence and Atwood recognize the implications of this relation. Through Morag and Elaine, they explore the multiple levels that make up the relationship between women and artistic representation.

The complexity of the relationship between the woman artist, her art, and the definitions of her context is explored, in part, through allusions to "The Lady of Shalott". The dominant cultural construction of this image, the woman's position as a figurative work of art within this construction, her counter-discursive representation of herself and, ultimately and coextensively, her creation of her public works of art reflect (on) Morag's and Elaine's struggles to negotiate these canonical relationships and representations. The potency and prevalence of this image is a result both of its connections to canonical English literature and to western cultural mythology. The stylized image of a woman weaving reflections endlessly onto works of art that remain separated from the rest of the world, who works isolated and invisible, whose artistic production depends on her separation from the world around her, and whose entry into that world is accomplished at the expense of her art, and, ultimately, of her life, provides Laurence and Atwood with an image that resonates with the cultural codes that it embodies and that provides an ironic

twist to that myth when incorporated into these highly interrogative women's self-narratives.

The protagonists in The Diviners and Cat's Eye are both artists and works of art. They are creating imaginative, representational works and creating themselves as provisional subjects within their narratives, while being constructed as art through the various cultural and personal relationships in which they are involved. This "composite being" (Woolf 43)¹¹ is the defining consciousness of these self-narrative texts. Her troubled, multiple and contingent position foregrounds the complexity of constructing both her own narrative space and a corresponding space that participates--however tenuously--in the various Master Narratives in which she is working. This position paradoxically takes the reinscription of the kunstlerroman in Cat's Eye and The Diviners one step beyond the traditional use of this genre to include the process of producing a subject position--and of articulating the instability of that position--into a narrative that ostensibly traces the "development" of the artistic consciousness. Destablizing the authority of the genre opens a space for more complex, self-reflexive and political explorations of the relationship between art, artistic institutions, culture and the artistic voice.

By producing herself as a work of art, the woman artist resists the cultural productions that have informed her definitions of herself and her art and creates a space in which the woman as a work of art and the woman as an artist can coexist. Perhaps most significant, however, is the fact that Morag Gunn is a novelist whose art is both the

¹¹ Laurence uses a remarkably similar phrase in The Diviners, when Morag refers to her "composite self" (210) when she is married to Brooke.

medium through which she articulates her encounters with these dominant systems and the subject matter embedded in these representations. For Laurence, this relationship involves constructing not only the art itself but a place from which and within which to produce it. For both Laurence and Atwood, the process of negotiating and constructing this space involves a complex series of engagements with the Master Narratives and systems that have defined and deployed her as "object" and her own complicity in those systems.

Frank Davey argues that Morag's reinscriptive "tales"--the ones she tells throughout her narrative--are "addenda to Christie's tales, addenda that amplify the small roles that women have within them" ("Silence" 37). Davey's argument provides the most interesting embodiment of the simultaneity of resistant, interrogative and reinscriptive positions through which Morag has moved in her engagement with her personal and cultural histories. Davey's statement actually enacts the terms which Morag resists. Her narrative is not, I would suggest, an "addendum" to Christie's tales, but an active, reinscriptive articulation of the women who are in the interspaces of these dominant cultural myths. The terms upon which Davey (like Glenn Deer's similar difficulty with the ancillary voice of Atwood's handmaid, which I discuss at length in Chapter IV) bases his argument in fact "amplify the small roles women have" within these Master Narratives, and in the critical tradition. This paradoxical critical position, at once recognizing this form of exclusion and enacting it, is part of the difficulty in articulating the gaps and fissures in Master Narratives: the recognition that these alternate versions are legitimate forms of expression in and of themselves and not simply companion pieces, commentaries or addenda but distinct alternative points of view. Articulating the problematics of this

position is part of the complexity of Laurence's narrative: it is "a question central to feminist writing...: how women find a language and narrative form to write about ourselves" (Howells *Private* 36). Laurence suggests instead that multiple narratives which express different points of view can exist simultaneously and can all provide equally valid, non-hierarchical accounts of the same event or practice.

The cultural conflation of women and works of art in these novels is explored through an examination of the complex and overlapping systems at work in the shift from a relatively androgynous social positioning as "child" to the carefully constructed category of "woman". The ways in which idealized femininity is encoded and enforced through external signifiers in these novels is a powerful visually-based strategy³² for distorting and for revealing the machinations of ideological systems. Through this strategy, they explore the relationship between woman artists and the ideological systems they carry in/on them. For Morag and Elaine, fashion, transmitted by other women and through women's magazines, becomes a potent agent through which both girls are reinscribed, re-viewed, reconstructed and appropriated into the idealized codes of appropriate female appearance and behaviour³³. Clothes, hair and cosmetics are deployed as the form that masculinist

³² Which, paradoxically, is described verbally. It is the tension that is created between these forms that creates the artistic space for these complex representations.

³³ For example, Morag's experiences as she begins to work at Simlow's Ladies Wear (89-91) reinforce the earlier taunting to which she was subject as she began school in Manawaka (25). For Elaine, the "watchbird" (138) of women's magazines has its corollary in the well-intentioned comments of Mrs. Finstein (277) communicated to Elaine through her mother and the more malignant attentions of Cordelia and her endless stack of shattering plates (171).

culture imposes on women's bodies. They are a visual signifier of the authoritative "voice over" (Ana Historic 48) of the Master Narratives.

For both narrators, the shift from childhood to adolescence is a time of indoctrination³⁴. It involves learning the difference between, and their proper relation to, the positions of active agent and passive object within the cultural institutions that have defined them. Morag becomes aware of the potency of the cultural codes which define and enforce feminine conformity when she starts school. The ritualistic transition from child to woman is inscribed here as a transition from relative privacy into a position as "public" object of the gaze. Morag's first encounter with her schoolmates is as the object of their scrutiny and their ridicule (25). This encounter immediately makes Morag aware of the difference between her clothes and those of the other girls on the playground (26) and she interprets this as something which tangibly separates her from the other children: a difference that she begins to work at eliminating.

The values inherent in the production of ideal femininity, as it is later manifest at Simlow's Ladies Wear, are juxtaposed with Morag's later and continuing concern with her relationship to language. Millie Christopherson, a clerk at the store, is revered by the young Morag for her knowledge of "colour harmony" (91). But Morag's comic construction of this character in her retrospective narrative foregrounds Millie's lack of formal education and "culture" by drawing attention to the idiosyncrasies of her speech.

³⁴ Marlatt addresses this indoctrination in Ana Historic as Annie, like Morag and Elaine, moves from childhood to adolescence. In The Handmaid's Tale, Atwood constructs this as a distorted, fun-house mirror image through the oppressive indoctrination at the "Red Centre".

Morag's concerns are foregrounded in her description of the transmission of "Good Taste" at Simlow's:

'Good Taste is learnt' [Millie] says to Morag. 'No soul in this here world is born with it, Morag. It is learnt, honey, and I am going to learn a teeny bit of it to you'. Morag is proud to have been chosen and listens carefully (91).

Following Millie's advice, Morag begins to reconstruct herself by dressing "nicely" (89) and "smarten[ing] [her]self up a whole lot" (94). For Morag, the process of constructing herself as an acceptable object of the public (masculine) gaze has its parallel in her simultaneous attempts to construct herself as a writer. Both are ultimately connected with the process of constructing a workable subject position in the narrative itself.

As Morag begins university in Winnipeg she enters into yet another engagement with the demands of an institution. Here, the relative values invested on language and on appearance as they were articulated in Manawaka are reversed. Ella and her two sisters value Morag's literary achievements but nonetheless engage on a "Glamour Campaign" (148) the chief agent of which is Bernice who

is their oracle in the area of beauty. Bernice knows which shade of nailpolish to wear with which colour of dress.... As Bernice prattles on... Morag and Ella give each other the Sarah Bernhardt gesture, meaning in this instance, woe. They will not, they feel, ever attain the status of high priestess at Beauty's Altar (148-49).

Through Bernice, Morag is given a "New Image" (151) which makes her feel "not like herself. Yet better" (149). Her active attempts to distance herself from her past in Manawaka are here transmitted through the external changes that she allows to be enacted on her body. By attempting to redefine her relation to her cultural context through a reconfiguration of the external symbols through which she acts with/on that context, she

is, at this point, the passive object of the agents of cultural definitions of femininity. For Morag, "Herself" is, at this point, undefined.

Institutions are equally powerful agents of indoctrination in Elaine Risley's childhood. Rigid social definitions of gender are literally carved into the stone walls of the school that Elaine will attend:

GIRLS and BOYS. When the teacher in the yard rings her brass handbell we have to line up in twos by classrooms, girls in one line, boys in another, and file into our separate doors. The girls hold hands; the boys don't. If you go in the wrong door you get the strap, or so everyone says (*Cat's Eye* 45).

This physical separation of the sexes at the point in which they enter the school draws attention to the different relationships these children have with this, and other, institutions. Further, by drawing the imperialist teachings of the school together with the sexist teachings of the women's magazines and of the girls themselves, the cultural/anthropological³⁵ terms with which Atwood inscribes Elaine's transition from child to adult is connected to larger systems of cultural production, and the "natural" division between the sexes is exposed as a deliberate construction.

Before her Retrospective, Elaine is as preoccupied with the process of creating herself and with being created as an "artist" (or resisting that characterization) as she is with the process of putting together the gallery show. She is conscious of the fact that she,

³⁵ Carol's initial interest in Elaine is described in terms which echo travel and anthropological texts and their characterization of the "exotic" and the "foreign". Indeed, both Carol and Elaine are described as "a little foreign" (47) and Elaine says "I'm not used to girls or familiar with their customs" (47). Later, Carol takes on the role of narrating anthropologist as she describes Elaine and her family to the other girls in the schoolyard (49).

like her art, will be on display at the gallery. The ways in which the process of being both art and artist is negotiated is the basis for some sophisticated textual strategies in which Elaine's self-construction is only a part of a complex layering of other forms of construction, definition and control. As she self-consciously creates herself for her appearance at the gallery, Elaine handles her body as she would a mannequin, "I tuck myself into my clothes, handling my arms and legs as if they're someone else's" (42). Echoing her mother, whose relationship with mirrors is part of an elaborate ritual, Elaine announces that "I look like the Witch of Endor" (34)³⁶. Mirrors, here and elsewhere in the text, transform the subject of the gaze into her own object and facilitate her production of herself as both a visual and a figurative work of art (44).

Like Bernice's reworking of Morag, the recurring image of women's faces as blank canvases foregrounds Atwood's concern with the concept of women as a site of cultural production³⁷. Early on, Elaine's adult face, like that of her mother earlier (20, 34), is a canvas upon which art is made: "Who knows what faces I'm making, what kind of modern art I'm drawing onto myself?" (5). Perspective, distance and mirrors all inform this parodic description of Elaine's relationship to her own face as a canvas, and ultimately, I would suggest, with her own relationship to the process of narrating/painting

³⁶ There is a similar scene in Ana Historic: Annie's mother "make[s] up someone who was not you but someone you might be" (56).

³⁷ This concern is also evident in Bodily Harm with its emphasis on the mutilation, appropriation, construction and reconstruction of women as sexual objects, status symbols and works of art, and in The Handmaid's Tale with its overt use of clothing as a signifier for women's roles and corresponding worth in a patriarchal culture.

herself in relation to her art and to her life: "too close to the mirror and I'm a blur, too far back and I can't see the details...I vary. I am transitional" (5).

The ways in which women's bodies are controlled, defined and objectified are explored through this use of mirrors, through images in the women's magazines that are voraciously read by the adolescent narrators, through the tyranny of women's fashion and through the mannequins upon which this form of art and definition is deployed in both of these texts. As objects of the gaze, these "life sized", idealized, arrested images of women's bodies foreground the construction of women as objects of artistic and cultural production. Atwood's use of mannequins is particularly powerful. They appear in a number of forms and in a number of ways throughout Cat's Eye. They are "hunchbacked axe murderers" (112) in the windows of a Toronto department store, part of Jon's shatter art (17), part of his job as a Hollywood special effects artist (42), and ultimately appear in a work of self-reflexive art of dismemberment in a feminist art show (348). Elaine's adult description of the department store mannequins as "disgruntled...their pelvises thrust out, their shoulders flung this way and that" (113)³⁸ informs her re-vision of "the endless time when Cordelia had such power over me," a time during which Elaine engaged in surreptitious self-mutilation (113).

³⁸ This image also appears in a more frightening and powerful form in Bodily Harm. In this text, the mannequins are deployed as furniture, one "harnessed to a dogsled, with a muzzle on" and chained to a toilet (208). In an interesting emphasis on the significance of context and the an awareness of the points of origin for works of art, Rennie notes that "If a woman did [the latter work]...they'd call it strident feminism" (208)— a mirror-image of a similar conversation with a feminist artist who uses a dismembered female mannequin "dressed only in ropes and leather straps" and who is told "If you were a man you'd get stomped for that" (349) in Cat's Eye.

The initial series of transformations from child to "girl" that both Morag and Elaine undergo establishes the groundwork for the later, more troubling re-constructions that both narrators experience as adult women. But while they illuminate the technologies through which these external constructions are accomplished, they also incorporate the fundamental aspects that will enable Morag and Elaine to "walk away" and become the products of their own art. The complicity of the woman artist in the social construction of herself as a work of art ultimately provides her with the tools to accomplish a form of reconstruction on her own terms. The process of distinguishing the shift from child to "girl" by means of external signifiers and control over movement and forms of expression is the first in a series of such externally imposed transformations.

After Morag and Elaine have reached adulthood the methods and the agents of transformation change from women who mould the child according to a cultural definition of "Woman" to one that conforms to the specifications of a single man³⁹. In both of these novels, the agents of the woman's transformation are male authorities in their areas of artistic specialization: Josef Hrbik, Elaine's art instructor and lover; and Brooke Skelton, Morag's English Professor and husband. For both women, their initiation into sexual relationships⁴⁰ involves being physically appropriated and externally reconstructed by their

³⁹ This is manifest in these novels through the physical/sartorial transformations that Brooke, Josef and the Commander (when dresses Offred up to go to Jezebel's) initiate for the protagonists. In *Ana Historic*, it is Ana Richards who bears these external trappings in her widow's clothing.

⁴⁰ At this stage in the novel, Morag has already been involved in a sexual relationship with Jules Tonnerre. But this relationship is a relatively clandestine and short-

lovers. In an ironic echoing of the Imperialist relation to conquered cultures, Brooke's relationship with Morag involves the denial and erasure of her past, the physical appropriation of her body (described by Morag as being "inhabited by him at last" [163]), loss of her name, the reconstruction of her appearance and the silencing of her voice. This connection is made explicit through Brooke's own Imperialist past. Teaching Milton, Donne and Shakespeare, his professional connections with English literature also place him squarely within the tradition of the English literary canon. Brooke is an active participant in, and perpetuator of, the English literary establishment while Morag, the Canadian woman, is participating in a growing tradition that exists outside the "legitimate" confines of English academic discourse. Brooke is threatened by Morag's writing. It grants her an autonomy that he distrusts. Writing, however, as Grace ("Portrait" 169) and Fabre (76) point out, is central to Morag's character. Brooke's attempts to construct Morag-as-wife are intimately connected with his attempts to define and control her art and are antithetical to her construction of herself as Morag-as-writer.

From his first contacts with Morag until his last (153, 275), Brooke is involved in the process of controlling not only the existing literary canon, but all of the texts which may seek, however tangentially, admission to it. Reading through Morag's first novel, Spear of Innocence, Brooke comments "I wonder...if the main character--Lilac--expresses anything we haven't known before?" (202) His reactions to Morag's novel echo institutional denials of the female voice that Joanna Russ has defined as part of a larger system of masculinist strategies of exclusion which "occur in certain key areas [including]

term one, while her marriage to Brooke is socially sanctioned.

belittlement of the work itself in various ways, isolation of the work from the tradition to which it belongs...and simply ignoring the works, the workers and the whole tradition"

(5). Morag's reply to Brooke's question, "No, she doesn't. But she says it. That is what is different" (202) resists these strategies and illuminates the significance of articulating a woman-centred point of view in The Diviners.

In a similar fashion, Josef has contracted with Elaine to teach her the techniques of artistic production: specifically and ironically, the process of "Life Drawing". It quickly becomes evident that the works of art that most concern Josef are not those on canvas but those artistic constructions that he can work on the living bodies of women. Like Brooke, Josef comments upon and diminishes Elaine's painting (272). He values her not as an artist, but as the raw material for his own work of art. Josef's goal is to transform Elaine into his artistic production and this reconstruction involves an elision of her past--a denial and repression of her experiences before her incarnation as his lover/artistic object. Like Brooke's reiterated "Hush" (177) which silences Morag's interrogative voice, Josef similarly seeks to control Elaine's speech (316). For Josef, Elaine's silence and her youth make her "mysterious" (304). In spite of her own feeling that she is "ancient, and overworked" (298), Elaine nonetheless appears to Josef to be "untouched," "when he says these things he runs his hands over my skin as if he's erasing me, rubbing me smooth" (298). Pygmalion-like⁴¹, he transforms her from a generic student who blends in with the

⁴¹ I am referring here to the Pygmalion of Greek mythology, rather than to the title of Shaw's play. In the former manifestation, Pygmalion is described as "a sculptor [who] made with wonderful skill a statue of ivory, so beautiful that no living woman came anywhere near it...Pygmalion admired his own work and at last fell in love with the counterfeit creation...He caressed it, and gave it presents...He put raiment on its limbs and

"cashmere twin sets, camel's hair coats, good tweed skirts, pearl button earrings" (276) in "Art and Archaeology" to his own version of a Pre-Raphaelite painting (304). Brooke's reconstruction of Morag, on the other hand, is less a desire for physical transformation than a desire to maintain her as an imaginative construct—one that, like his conception of the literary canon, remains static, controlled, and unchanging. He says, "I only want to know you as you are now, my tall and dark-haired Morag...never be any different, will you?" (161). Both Brooke's and Josef's inscriptions of Morag and Elaine are predicated on a refutation or denial of the woman's history and of the context which formed, and continues to inform (she discovers) her.

In a narrative so intimately involved with the self-conscious process of constructing a subject position and with contextualizing and historicizing that position, Brooke's elision of Morag's past and independent identity becomes an important moment in the development of her interrogative, resistant political consciousness. Brooke acts as an agent who reinforces the distance that Morag has placed between her past in Manawaka, her present, and her reconstructed self. Within Morag's narrative, his attempts to re-form her act as a distortion of the self-narrative project in which his re-creation appears. As Morag continues to construct herself, she recognizes that continuing to ignore the discrepancies between her own and Brooke's images of her involves being "chained forever to that image of yourself which he must have and which must forever be distorted" (211).

jewels on its fingers and a necklace about its neck" (Bulfinch's Mythology 62). Venus eventually grants the statue life and Pygmalion is rewarded for his peerless artistic abilities.

The process of narrating this period is perhaps the most complex in the novel. Morag's narrative voice must negotiate the spaces between her younger (external) silence and acquiescence, her internal resistance to Brooke's ideals, and her later, retrospective perceptions of that period. Unable to articulate her position clearly in the "real time" of the "Memorybank Movies," the narrating voice is, ultimately, able to represent this period in a sophisticated series of moving, visual intrusions in the context of her self-narrative. The twenty-year-old Morag sees her marriage as a way to move from the margins in which she has lived all of her life to the "centre" of respectability and legitimacy. Yet her role as "ex-centric" (Hutcheon Canadian 3) is not negated, but reinforced, by her marriage to Brooke. Morag's multiply layered reactions to Brooke's attitudes and ideals would not work as effectively if they had been presented chronologically or independently in the novel. The fragmented structure of her narrative juxtaposes this particular subject position with that which she is constructing in her "present" narrative. In this way, the person/subject that Morag was as a child and is as a mature woman serves to subvert and destabilize the internal assumptions of the "Memorybank Movie"'s narrative. These multiple positions emphasize the extent to which Morag is being subsumed and reinscribed by an artificially-constructed and externally-imposed ideal of the perfect "Wife".

Unlike Josef, Brooke does not focus his control of Morag on her appearance; but rather, in keeping with his relation to narratives rather than visual texts, he appropriates and suppresses her voice, her history and her name in order to create his own work of art. Initially, Brooke distances Morag from the education that she has valued so highly: first, by gently ridiculing her critical voice (155), and later, by asserting that, as his wife, "you

won't need the degree" (164). She is renamed both legally and familiarly. He seldom uses Morag's name, but instead calls her by more generic diminutives and endearments like "little one" (177), "good girl" (200), "Love" and "child" (183). More significant, however, is his elision of Morag's past and the knowledge and experience that she has gained before she became "Mrs. Skelton":

"Yes," Morag says, "I know." "You know in theory," Brooke says, "but you don't really know...". She knows in more than theory, about some things. Vernon Winkler, as a small boy, being beaten by Gus. Eva crying in the dance-hall, and the night that followed, and Christie taking the small unformed corpse...and giving it burial. The valley, the snow and the fire (160).

This "mysterious, nonexistent past" makes Morag more "interesting than [if she did have] a past" (157), "it's as though you were starting life now, newly" (160). Laurence's strategy of alternating between Brooke's inscription and Morag's later, ironic perception here ensures that Brooke's version of Morag is constantly involved in a dialogue with her own voice(s) and point(s) of view. His elision of her past (and Morag's complicity in it) is predicated on the silencing of Morag's interrogative voice. The child who endlessly asked "what means?" and the young woman who questioned Donne's "For God's sake hold your tongue and let me love" (155) and points out the denial of the woman's perspective in this work is silenced by Brooke's equally insistent "Hush love[s]" (160,176) and admonishments to "Listen" (160,163). Morag feels that, after she has married Brooke, she "will become unhaunted [by words] now and forevermore" (164) and that her past will become "more or less blank" (157).

It is when she starts to write her own novel that Morag very gradually begins to move out from under Brooke's restrictive definitions and her resistant, interrogative voice reappears in the narrative. At this point, however, it is a strictly censored interrogation, informed both by Morag's continued desire for a life and identity separate from that of Manawaka and yet also informed by the self-conscious form of the narrated "Memorybank Movie". Morag's silences during this period are spoken in her retrospective self-narrative: "Lhave, Lhave. But she does not say this" (188). Filling in the gaps that her stolen voice left when she lived the event, Morag's contemporary self-narrative voice reconstructs the significance of the event and its relation to the process of self-narration through its first person intrusion.

Just as Brooke distorts the ideological basis of Morag's narrative, so Josef's reworking of Elaine similarly distorts and exaggerates the images and concerns around which Elaine forms her self-construction in Cat's Eye. Josef's Pygmalion-like activities reconstruct Elaine in visual, external terms: distorting her concerns with reflection, artistic history, artistic production and the ways in which external signifiers reflect and distort other, elided, points of view. The title of the class in which they meet, "Life Drawing," gestures outside of the process of drawing a living subject to the process in which Elaine is engaged as she narrates this text: the ways in which one translates a life, point(s) of view or experience at any given moment into artistic practice. Elaine's continuing concern in her retrospective inscription of her life is with the relationship between her memories and re-visions of her experience and their reincarnation in her art. Her narrative is an ongoing process of contextualization in which she narrates her works of art, translating them from

a visual medium into words and through this process, gains some form, however provisional, of control over them and over her life: "I can no longer control these paintings" she says at her Retrospective, "or tell them what to mean" (409).

From the beginning, Josef's role as "teacher" is extended parodically and self-reflexively beyond the boundaries of the classroom. Elaine's enrollment in the class requires Josef's approval and her participation requires that she acknowledge his authority and, by extension, the authority of the established artistic community. She agrees to being remade as an artist when Josef admits her to the class. He says, "[w]e will see what we can make of you" (272) and this is later expanded to include "finishing" the "unfinished woman" (273). In this class, Elaine begins to recognize the problematics of negotiating the space between being an artist and being the object of art. Josef conflates the two practices and in doing so foregrounds the difficulties inherent in constructing art as a woman

This period of Elaine's life is an immersion in institutional definitions of art. In her night class she is initiated into the double role of being both the subject and object of art and in her day classes at the university she is becoming increasingly aware of the ancillary relation that women have to the Master Narrative of Art. The other young women who attend the daytime "Art and Archaeology" classes do not have artistic aspirations, "instead they want to be teachers of art in high schools, or, in one case, a curator in a gallery" (275). Unlike Elaine, these women participate in the transmission of art in and through institutions which, in the context of Elaine's narrative, have proven to be places of classification, stagnation, and canonical stasis. The "Art and Archaeology" class is, however, "the only sanctioned pathway that leads anywhere close to art" (275) at the

university and therefore the only access within that institution that Elaine has to the world of art. This further distances Elaine both from the institutionalized definitions of appropriate artistic endeavour and from the means to participate in that endeavour.

"Life Drawing" represents the mirror image of the dry institutional theorizing of the university classes. In spite of its unrelentingly practical emphasis, however, it, too, participates in exclusionary practices that deny women access. At this point in the narrative, Elaine's experiences with art have placed her in an ancillary position to its production and transmission. Like the representations of girls' lives that she read as a child these definitions, strategies and schools of art are "nothing...like [her] life" (29). In an echo of her earlier (chronologically later) description of the Art Gallery of Ontario's criteria for enshrining art within its walls (16), Elaine articulates her attempts to work in the interspaces of these institutional definitions through the realization that "art has been accomplished, elsewhere" (276): in the past, as the construction of this sentence reinforces, in a different place and by different people.

Elaine moves restlessly between these two ostensibly oppositional points and begins to remake herself in order to conform with the group of artists in the "Life Drawing" class: "this clothing was not a disguise, like the other clothing, but an allegiance" (276). In her "arty" clothes, Elaine distances herself from the tailored middle class femininity of Carol, Grace and Cordelia and the women in her university class who "make jokes about arty beatniks and talk to me less" (276) and aligns herself more closely with what she perceives to be the artistic "validity" of the (mostly male) students in the "Life Drawing" class. Elaine states self-consciously that she is "letting [her]self go" (277).

In the context of Mrs. Finestein's definitions of appropriate feminine behaviour and attire, "letting herself go" is an "alarming notion: it is said of older women who become frowzy and fat, and of things that are sold cheap" (277). But for Elaine it is a more resistant construction--the shedding of one externally imposed set of signifiers that signal an allegiance to a group for, it turns out, another set of equally value-laden ones. That this construction proves to be as provisional and externally-imposed as those which preceded it and those which will follow is part of the ironic exaggeration of these transformations. At this stage, Elaine is still not her own construction, but rather, that of a group, an individual or a culturally determined ideal.

Similarly, through Josef's reconstruction of her appearance, she comes to recognize her ancillary relationship to the dominant gaze "Josef is rearranging me" (304), she says,

I stand still and let him do this. I let him do what he likes ... he places me against the twilight of the window, turns me, stands back a little, running his hand up and down my side. I no longer care whether anyone can see in (304).

By "rearranging" Elaine here Josef illuminates that his image of her is made up of equal parts artistic reconstruction and spectacle. Placing her in the window, she becomes even more closely aligned with the idea of the gaze, and with the posing, static mannequins discussed earlier. This physical positioning, I would suggest, framed by the "twilight" of the window in the darkened apartment, foregrounds her semiotic positioning as Josef's artistic production. This reconstruction is so effective that ultimately Josef's work of art is unrecognizable to Elaine except in the terms in which she has learned to describe canonic

works of art in her "Art and Archaeology" class, the terms of institutionalized art history from the distinct point of access of the masculine gaze:

I catch a glimpse of myself, without expecting it, in the smoked-mirror wall of the elevator as we go up, and I see for an instant what Josef sees: a slim woman with cloudy hair, pensive eyes and a thin white face. I recognize the style: late nineteenth century. Pre-Raphaelite (emphasis mine 304).

As an externally constructed work of art herself at this point in the novel, Elaine has abandoned her own work (304) and participates in artistic production only through the refracted/reflected mirroring of Josef's creations and desires.

This image of the woman artist, distanced from her subject and seeing herself through a distancing and distorting "smoked-mirror" (304), is strategically exaggerated in Elaine's descriptions of Susie, Josef's former lover. As Elaine's relationship with Josef continues, she notes that he speaks of Susie "as a thing of the past, or beautifully dead, like someone in a poem" (306). Later, Elaine "prefer[s] to think of Susie as a woman shut inside a tower, ... gazing out the window over the top of her painted sheet-metal balcony, weeping feebly, waiting for Josef to appear" (306). Both references explicitly connect Susie with literary images of imprisoned women and particularly, I would suggest, with Tennyson's tragic figure of the cloistered woman artist in "The Lady of Shalott"⁴². This

⁴² Interestingly, allusions to this text appear in a large number of women's novels written in the "Settler Colonies". Beyond the two discussed here, other novels include (but are not limited to) Janet Frame's Faces in the Water, Jessica Anderson's Tirra Lirra by the River, Lucy Maud Montgomery's Anne of Green Gables, and Keri Hulme's The Bone People.

reference draws the focus back to the less obvious, but no less explicit connection to the protagonist who shares her name with the Lily Maid of Astolat: Elaine⁴³.

The reinscription of the Lady of Shalott image in both of these texts gestures toward a larger reinscription which involves and constantly establishes a series of provisional, workable "place[s] to stand on" for the woman artist. Both Morag and Elaine are described as descending from an imprisoning "tower". This allusive resistance to the isolated woman artist disrupts and explores both the traditional ending and the codes which inform it. Both Morag and Elaine insist on being seen, on recognizing and constructing their own subjectivity on their own terms, on viewing the world both through the mediating mirrors (in their recognition of the cultural codes that have formed their perceptions) and without them, and on speaking in their own voices. The woman artist in Tennyson's poem cannot participate in both the public and the private worlds. She can be either invisible and heard, "But who hath seen her wave her hand?/ or at the casement seen her stand?.../ Only reapers, reaping early/ In among the bearded barley,/ Hear a song that echoes clearly" (ll. 24-25, 28-30) or visible and silent: "A gleaming shape she floated by,/ Dead-pale between the houses high,/ Silent into Camelot" (ll. 156-158).

Arwood alludes to this circumscribed position of women in the Master Narrative of Art in Cordelia's recitation from Measure for Measure: "Then, if you speak, you must not show your face./ Or, if you show your face, you must not speak" (302). In The

⁴³ In "Lancelot and Elaine" (1859), "Elaine, the lily maid of Astolat" sits "high in her chamber up a tower to the east" (l. 2-3) and is a later version of the earlier Lady of Shalott (1842) (Palgrave cited in Hill, 13 n.3).

Diviners and Cat's Eye Morag and Elaine are deliberately and strategically making both their "faces"--their subject positions--and their voices public through their narratives.

Denying the cloistered, unrecognized and silenced image of the artist, both narrators "walk away" (Cat's Eye 322) from the confines of the metaphorical island tower and engage in a new enterprise: that of constructing a workable place for the woman artist within, and yet strategically separate from, existing institutional categories of art and legitimized artistic practice.

Part of this resistance involves a reinscription of the relation between the woman artist and the mirror. In Tennyson's poem, the woman sees the world indirectly, distorted and in the glass. In The Diviners, Cat's Eye, The Handmaid's Tale and Ana Historic, mirrors are strategically deployed as devices which reveal both the artist and her context. The mirror's distortion serves not to obscure but to reveal. "Reality" is not seen in the mirror and translated into the woman's narrative: the woman's narrative is the shifting, distorted mirror. In The Diviners and Cat's Eye, mirrors represent a gap between socially-constructed images of desirable, acceptable women's behaviour and appearance, and the subject position that women perceive themselves to be occupying. Diana Brydon has drawn attention to this mirroring in The Diviners. She suggests that Morag "has the power of creating [her] own mirrors through words, mirrors that reflect more than surface appearances or societal prescriptions for feminine behaviour" (198). Words, Brydon states, provide Morag with the "freedom to mirror the reality she perceives" (201). In this sense, the reflections in the novel involve reinscriptions of personal relations to and with dominant cultural systems. Like Elaine's more explicit use of visual art, these relations in

Morag's self-narrative are dependent on these totalizing systems being reflected in and through the narrator's own artistic construction.

In the "Memorybank Movie" tellingly titled "The Tower" (209), Morag describes "the apartment in Toronto [as] more than ever like a desert island, or perhaps a cave... Maybe tower would be a better word... [a] tower it certainly is... The lonely tower" (209). She mocks this epithet and her own "self-dramatization" but nonetheless describes her feelings of loneliness and imprisonment in terms of traditional fantasies of rescue and escape (209). She soon begins to act out this "self-dramatization" in a number of self-affirming, self-constructing ways. She grows her hair in defiance of Brooke's prohibitions against "look[ing] a mess" (209) and in an ironic enactment of her evocation of Rapunzel's method of escape from her particular tower (209). This image is at once a benign rebellion and a radical attempt at self-construction. She begins to distinguish herself from Brooke's imaginative object and to create herself in her own image. Through this action she initiates the process of "dramatically shatter[ing] the mirror image that Brooke has held up for her to emulate" (Brydon 201).

Morag describes this process of reclamation in terms which foreground the complexity of these externally-imposed constructions: "She is, she realizes, very very angry, and at the same time doubtful at her right to be angry, at him or at the composition of her own composite self" (210). Later she asks: "what if remaining [with Brooke] meant to be chained forever to that image of yourself which he must have and which must forever be distorted?" (211). The distortion that Morag describes here is not only the result of the ways in which she has been re-made externally, but is evident in the gaps,

blanks and omissions upon which this image is predicated. "The Tower" follows Morag's return from Prin's funeral in Manawaka, a moment at which she was, briefly, reconnected with the place, the characters and the language of her past. This return to her own past seems to accentuate her unhappiness with her "present" life in Toronto and draws the elements of her "own darkness" (211) to the surface. It is at this point that her previously nameless discontents begin to take a more distinct shape, and at which she realizes that "I do not know the sound of my own voice. Not yet anyhow" (210). This realization initiates her movement away from Brooke's externally imposed definitions.

Images of smashing glass frame this Memorybank Movie. Like the Lady of Shalott's enchanted, mediating mirror which "crack'd from side to side", the shattering glass here signals the woman's rebellion and denial of the reflected and reflecting gaze to which she has previously been subjected. Morag's destruction of the kitchen window in The Diviners and of a "peacock Italian glass bowl" which she "heaves... against the living-room fireplace" and which "shatters dramatically" (213) signals the point at which Morag breaks out of her circumscribed role and opens up a place for her growing artistic independence.

Elaine's movement away from the ideal of Pygmalionesque femininity is similarly constructed around images associated with the Elaine of Tennyson's poem. Elaine describes her relationship with Josef as "a dense minor key enchantment" the curse of which is the "spectre of pregnancy" (297)—the spectre which ultimately claims Susie. The image is further explored when Josef and Elaine ascend the tower-like Park Plaza Hotel, "one of the tallest buildings around" and they sit in the Roof Garden "looking over the

stone balustrade" (304-5). More tellingly, however, Elaine's mirror-image in this section of the novel, Susie, who Elaine herself constructed in carefully defined poetic terms, is "already a thing of the past, or beautifully dead, like someone in a poem" (306). Like so many of the allusions and innovative devices in this text, it is through the reading of two images together (in this case, Elaine and Susie) as in the pairing of the paintings in the central marker, that depth and perspective are achieved. As with "Cat's Eye" and "Unified Field Theory", this pairing acts like a pair of eyes whose mutually complementing gazes shift the one-dimensional mode of a single element or character to a three-dimensional addition of a wider, more encompassing, perspective. In this sense, Susie's experience, as Elaine notes, mirrors her own and "everything that's happened to her could well have happened to me" (321). The narrative's development of the Lady of Shalott image is fleshed out in the parallel, but divergent experiences and descriptions of Elaine and Susie. It is through Susie's construction as the imprisoned, refracted woman in the novel that this image is completed. Elaine "think[s] of Susie as a woman shut inside a tower...gazing out the window" (306) and Susie's "descent" from her tower, her experience of unwanted pregnancy and a botched, near-fatal abortion, provides Elaine with a distorted mirror-image—a "shadow"—of the dangerous potential undercurrent in her own relationship with Josef. Elaine's lack of artistic production during this period is echoed by Susie's sterility after her abortion (321). And, like the shattered glass in *The Diviners* and the "crack'd" mirror in "The Lady of Shalott," Elaine describes her life at this point as being "in fragments" (316).

Morag is similarly distanced from her art during her marriage to Brooke (210) and, ultimately, like Elaine, Atwood's Offred and Marlatt's Annie, she "turns and walks out" (220) of Brooke's tower and the confinement of his imprisoning ideals. Elaine's departure is set up in remarkably similar terms. After Susie's abortion, Elaine "walk[s] away from [Josef]" (322) just as she walked away from Cordelia earlier (193). Her self-conscious "act of walking away," her active ability to "make people appear and vanish at will" (322), belies Susie's more passive disappearance from the text. Like Morag, the act of walking out and away necessitates a narrative strategy other than the conventional one in which the rebellion of the woman artist results in her death. For both narrators, the next reference to her art is intimately connected with images of active, independent creation. Elaine teaches herself the forgotten techniques for painting with egg tempera (326) and Morag realizes that "if she is to have a home, she must create it" (240, emphasis mine). Her next Memorybank Movie, "Portrait of the Artist as a Pregnant Skivvy" (242), explicitly connects this creation of a home (so central to Laurence's narrative) and her construction of herself as an artist with Laurence's self-conscious reinscription of the kunstlerroman.

The provisional, workable "place to stand on" that both Morag's and Elaine's self-narratives create, is precarious and difficult to maintain. Their rejection of cultural definitions and their insistence on creating their own definitions does not suggest that they can stop their resistance to or their interrogations of Master Narratives. It is, they both discover, a continuing process and the act of "walking away" from culturally constructed definitions only begins another process—that of creating themselves within their own

narratives and in their own contexts: this is the point at which The Diviners and Cat's Eye as self-narratives truly begin.

The "Living Places" in which both Morag and Elaine ultimately create their self-narratives are positioned at the intersection of the visual and the written: provisional places in which the process of writing a narrative is as important as the resulting narrative itself. Smashing the mediating mirror of the Master Narratives which define and circumscribe them, realigning the narrative lens to render the invisible woman at the interstices of these Master Texts visible, and giving voice to these silenced figures is a sophisticated act of resistance and inscription. Laurence's and Atwood's use of mirrors in their narratives enacts another form of Lacan's description of the relationship between the "mirror image" and the "gaze"⁴⁴. In this case, mirrors challenge the singularity and universality of the gaze and suggest instead that it is fragmented, fractured and kaleidoscopic. This notion of a multi-faceted gaze necessitates the existence of multiple perspectives and points of access—each observing the same object but each with a slightly different, unique point of view. Fragmenting the narrative gaze by fragmenting their texts and destabilizing authority enables both authors to explore the ways in which identity is constructed and to resist the notion of the stable, universal subjectivity that Lacan describes. This focus on multiple, mutually constitutive but independent images does not deny the existence of Lacan's subject but, by reflecting and reflecting on the context of the

⁴⁴ Lacan posits an immutable, core subjectivity that is formed through encounters with mirror images.

construction of that subjectivity, on the ways in which this process is influenced by external definitions and categorizations, and the ways in which experiences (as part of context) colour and change that subjectivity, Laurence and Atwood are able to articulate the provisionality of that position.

The visual images around which both Laurence and Atwood structure their novels emphasize their focus on the simultaneous construction of a narrative, a subject position and a literary form which accommodates different media and modes of representation without sacrificing the integrity or the power of the process of this construction. By narrating her paintings and their context so intimately, Elaine not only explores the limitations of artistic representation, but also of the form of her narrative itself. Translating one form into another involves choices that mirror those involved in the initial production of an artistic representation. In this sense, Elaine's problems with the limitations of language as a medium for expressing her experiences and her subsequent admission to a "confusion about words" (268) enact the ways in which her art and her narrative are produced. Both are based on the weak points of the apparently immutable, universally applicable definitions of language and meaning. Morag has a similarly troubled relationship with language. While Elaine struggles and experiments with technique, colour, reflection and surfaces in her paintings, Morag wrestles with the complexities and ambiguities of language. As a child, her constant "what means" anticipate her later interrogative rereadings of the images of her past and the nature of that rereading. As it did in Elaine's Retrospective, "chronology won out" (404) in Morag's text. As she opens her narrative, she arranges and narrates her collection of snapshots. Like the opening image of the river

that "flowed both ways" (3), Morag's "ways of expressing the remembering" (11) in this "telling" of her photographs reinforces the mutually constitutive relation and enacts and reworks the reciprocity upon which the narrative is structured; what Earl G. Ingersoll describes as "a text performing itself as text" (26).

Each form of artistic expression in these novels fills in the gaps that are left in and by the other form. Elaine's self-narrative is structured around her paintings and the structure of the narrative foregrounds the connection and interdependence of the two forms. By naming the chapters and sections after the paintings in the gallery she not only draws attention to the artifice inherent in the structure of her narrative, but connects each narrative section to the paintings. She is, in effect, writing her own catalogue for the Retrospective which provisionally contextualizes each painting. Similarly, Morag deliberately embeds her snapshots in her narrative, creating an album of words as she "translates" them from the visual to the linguistic. In the process, she narrates beyond the boundaries of the image itself, discussing the unseen photographer (7), the actions and presumed actions of the subjects before and after the moment captured in the photograph (6) and provides names, places and dates where none are otherwise available (7-10)⁴³. In this sense, language functions like Van Eyck's pier glass that reflects beyond and yet within the boundaries of the painting. The "translation" of these images transcends the boundaries between Morag's narrative voice and her first-person intrusions into the text. In the latter, she states that "I keep the snapshots not for what they show but what is

⁴³ Annie similarly "fleshes out" the bare facts of photographs in *Ana Historic*, narrating not only the images themselves, but their gaps, as well. I will discuss this at greater length in Chapter IV.

hidden in them" (6). She ultimately reveals at least a portion of these interspatial elements in her metafictional narrative voice which, in turn, passes the authority for the revelation back to the photographic image: "Let the snapshot tell what is behind it" (9). Both texts, then, connect part of this process of exploring the ways in which these women produce their art to the act of narrating visual images. In Cat's Eye, the visual images are reproductions of Elaine's art, in The Diviners they provide a tangible, if incomplete, link to Morag's past, and the narratives, in turn, fill in the missing or elided elements of each visual image.

Paradoxically, this complex process of "filling in" the gaps does not complete or appreciably flesh out either representational form. Indeed, the reinscriptions that surround each of these images and the method through which they are deliberately chosen and arranged has, I would suggest, the opposite effect. Rather than providing the reader with a "complete" or "properly proportioned" narrative, this strategy of narrating the fissures in ostensibly authoritative texts reveals the potential for any number of other, similarly elided gaps within these narratives and images. In this sense, rather than creating a neat, self-contained work, these narratives keep expanding to expose more and more gaps.⁴⁴

By illuminating the fissures within generic categories that, in fact, contain that category's opposite—and which subvert the terms upon which the category defines itself—Laurence, Atwood and Marlatt foreground the ways in which politics acts upon and

⁴⁴ See illustration by J-F. Nicéron: "Geometrical diagram of a canonical anamorphosis, 1638" (Fig.3) for an example of how visual anamorphosis is achieved through a detailed expansion and exaggeration of the natural lines and proportions of its subject.

through an individual subject and the ways in which that subject, in turn, represents politics. By speaking from the interspaces, they demonstrate "that the observer does not issue a neutral report on external facts but rather changes the picture -- even determines which parts of it are visible-- in the act of observation" (Strehle 162 emphasis mine).

The process of narrating the visual in The Diviners and Cat's Eye is part of this transition, as is the parallel process of narrating the development of an individual consciousness and her history. Like the narrators' readings of their visual artefacts (paintings, photographs, mirror images), these self-narrative texts are self-consciously "ways of expressing the remembering" (Diviners 11). They do not simply foreground the uncomplicated relation of events from a life, but are intimately connected to the ways in which these lives are remembered and the ways in which that remembering is "translated" into a narrative.

The process of constructing "Living Places" beyond the externally imposed definitions in these self-narratives is intimately connected with the process of constructing a subject position. Both Laurence and Atwood work on a number of interconnected and mutually dependent levels to enact what they are articulating: a resistance to Master Narratives which silence and elide women's experiences and categorize those experiences as somehow unrelated to the real business of literary production. Joanna Russ has noted that

The techniques for mystifying women's lives and belittling women's writing...work by suppressing context. Writing is separated from experience, women writers are separated from their tradition and each other, public is separated from private, political from personal -- all to enforce a supposed set of absolute standards (118).

Constructing a subject position in defiance of these techniques is at the centre of these self-representations. The strategic inclusion of autobiographical elements in these novels is another step in the enactment of this notion of being simultaneously and problematically the subject and object of artistic representation. The focal image in both of these texts is that of the woman artist creating herself and her art. The provisionality inherent in these constructions reverberates throughout each of these texts. The defining voice of the self-narrating woman artist in both of these texts is the axis around which the rest of the issues in the novels revolve. Atwood and Laurence use autobiographical allusions to destabilize the novel's fictionality and parodically and strategically enact Laurence's notion of "history and fiction interweaving" (341).

Like the complex levels of interconnected systems of domination and control that have defined them for so long, Morag's and Elaine's resisting narratives are a sophisticated form of symbolic structures, strategic distortion and definitive processes. Neither The Diviners nor Cat's Eye describes a traditional relationship between the artist and her art, nor, indeed, a traditional, counter-discursive resistance to hegemonic systems. While canonical kunstlerromane and bildungsromane focus on the development of the artist as an iconic or iconoclastic figure with little, if any, direct references to her art, both of these works are produced by the artist that they represent. Further, these novels incorporate and comment upon a significant number of Morag and Elaine's artistic works. The continuing reciprocal relationship between these artists, their art, and the problematics of negotiating the spaces between these positions provide the basis for many of the most innovative reinscriptive forms in these novels. Morag's ironic reference to "The Portrait of

the Artist as a Pregnant Skivvy" (242) foregrounds the process of reworking the kunstlerroman. Morag's earliest narrative act is to write the woman into history. As a child, she re-tells Christie's "First Tale of Piper Gunn" (40) from the parenthetical woman's point of view. Her "Tale of Piper Gunn's Woman" (42), like Annie's recuperation of "Ana" Richards in Ana Historic, draws the woman out of the interspaces of this story of masculine accomplishment and tells it from an alternate point of view. This reinscriptive strategy continues as she reinscribes a canonical imperialist text in Prospero's Child (272) which, in turn, reflects the process of writing herself out of Manawaka's class constraints and the "composite" (210) script that Brooke has written for her. In Cat's Eye, Elaine's reinscriptive strategy involves creating her paintings twice: the first time, as works of visual art, and again as she "translates" them into her narrative. This process re-works the paintings themselves in relation to the context in which they appear.

The first person narrative foregrounds the complexity of these overlapping and interdependent structures. The self-reflexivity in these texts enacts the resistance that they describe. Morag's constant reinscription of her own narrative, the ways in which she repeats and reinscribes and makes very deliberate choices about her relation to Master Narratives of history and the ways in which she fictionalizes these accounts are an important part of the ways in which she has also constructed herself. Reading her narrative and the narratives that are embedded in her text foreground similar processes of selection and exclusion that are occurring in her own construction of herself in this particular work. Elaine's re-visions of her paintings in Cat's Eye and her emphasis on the ways in which they are deployed in specific contexts foregrounds a similar method of partial

representation which reveals what has been hidden or elided by the Master Narratives. This strategy in both texts draws more and closer attention to that which has, in fact, been elided in Morag's and Elaine's own narratives.

Like Woolf, both of these authors suggest that the material circumstances of an author's life form a basis--however tenuous-- of every artistic construction, but are not the only valid point of access to those works. The instability that reverberates through these texts does so in order to avoid the establishment of an alternative hegemony. This danger becomes clear in Laurence's text when she discusses the horrors of the Highland Clearances and connects many of the characters in Manawaka to these disenfranchised, deracinated figures⁴⁷ who, in turn, systematically categorize and exclude the Métis who inhabit the land that they have "settled" without being able to see that they are, in fact, disenfranchising a group of people in the same manner that forced their ancestors into exile.

The inevitability of this chain of events is something that both of these women resist. For Atwood, it is manifest in her distrust of feminism,⁴⁸ the institutionalized politics

⁴⁷ This connection is made most clearly through the family names of the Manawaka Scots: Cameron, McVitie, McKee, Duncan, MacLeod--descendants of Highland clans.

⁴⁸ The inability to easily identify an unambiguous other, I would suggest, does not repudiate the feminist terms that inform this novel, but rather serves as a way of problematizing readings of feminism that assume a clear, uncomplicated oppositional political ideology. Outside of her own text, Elaine is considered a "feminist" artist (90), but her own relationship to feminism is ambivalent and conflicted. This ambivalence is mirrored in the critical readings of the text. Bouson suggests that Atwood "contradicts feminist ideology that idealizes female relationships, viewing them as inherently egalitarian and cooperative" (159) and Greene states that "Cat's Eye repudiates the feminist terms that might make sense of the tale it tells" (*Changing* 201). Sharpe, on the other hand, reads Cat's Eye as entering into a new engagement with feminist theory and suggests that

of conformity and the "party lines" and "ghettoes" (90). For Laurence it appears as a similar antipathy toward colonialism and its affiliated forms of cultural/historical exploitation and control. By creating narratives that are predicated on their own interrogation even as they are being inscribed, Laurence and Atwood attempt to construct a narrative that will not form an alternative hegemony.

"instead of suggesting feminism's demise, she can be seen as marking out the dimension to which it must expand if it is to achieve broader relevance and engender solidarity among women" (175), and Howells notes that "the boundaries between science and art are dissolved [in the text] in what might be seen as an act of gendered transgression" ("Elaine" 210).

IV
The Invisible Woman in History:
Ana Historic and The Handmaid's Tale

"[I]t was up to Professor Wade and myself to arrange the blocks of speech in the order in which they appeared to go; but...all such arrangements are based on some guesswork and are to be regarded as approximate, pending further research" (The Handmaid's Tale 314).

Like The Diviners and Cat's Eye, Ana Historic and The Handmaid's Tale explore women's precarious placement in the interspaces of fiction's and history's Master Narratives.¹ While the self-narrative in The Diviners and Cat's Eye actively reconstructs the relationships between the woman artist and her art, the self-narrators in Ana Historic and The Handmaid's Tale reinscribe definitions of subject and object by writing/speaking the elided woman in the gaps of history's Master Narrative. Morag and Elaine base their engagement with definitions of women as the proper objects of works of art by challenging the basis of that assumption: the authority of the masculine gaze in creating that definition. Annie's and Offred's engagement with the Master Narrative of history involves resisting its claims to authority by exploring the process involved in constructing historical narratives. In this case, that process is revealed to be indistinguishable from the process of constructing fiction.²

¹ The Master Narratives of fiction and of history to which I refer here are the discourses through which definitions of works of fiction as "imaginative" and "moulded and contrived--or feigned" (Cuddon 271) and of history as "a written narrative constituting a continuous methodical record, in order of time, of important or public events" (OED) are deployed. For Mariatt, history is "the real story the city fathers tell of the only important events in the world. a tale of their exploits" (28). The authority for each of these Master Narratives is derived from within its existing body of work: it is self-defining and self-perpetuating, distrustful and dismissive of versions beyond these defined parameters.

² I discuss the implications of collapsing fiction and history at greater length later in this

Ana Historic and The Handmaid's Tale are narrative explorations of the ways in which women in masculinist cultural systems can engage, interrogate and reinscribe the Master Narrative of history by foregrounding the self-constructing voices at its interstices-voices that are officially elided and which carry with them alternative versions of history, voice and subjectivity. Through the use of visual images and strategies of representation, Atwood and Marlatt engage history from an alternate point of access. They situate their interrogative narratives in the gaps in history's Master Narrative. By focusing their political engagement on a self-defining woman narrator, Atwood and Marlatt ironically subvert strategies of erasure that have served to deny women's points of view and experience in dominant historical narratives. In this sense, both authors resist the Master Discourse of linear history by focusing on the ways in which women authors inscribe their own narratives on their own terms. These women articulate their problematically in-between position through a disruptive, interrogative form that renders the invisible women standing in the gaps of history both visible and audible. The provisional voices that these elided women construct resist, interrogate and, ultimately, reinscribe the ways in which they have been defined and silenced in the Master Narratives.

In spite of their differences, The Handmaid's Tale and Ana Historic are remarkably similar novels. Both use the voice of a self-constructing woman to engage with totalizing systems of biological determinism, the elision of women from the Master Narrative of history (with its attendant power to grant place, identity, status, tradition and continuity in culture) and the creation and perpetuation of narratives. There are also a number of direct

chapter.

parallels between these novels. Both illuminate the ways in which patronymic systems effectively elide women's identities and correspondingly use the self-narrator's emphasis on naming as a form of resistance and interrogation. Both include women-centred birth scenes which take place within powerful patriarchal systems and which are constructed around images of and references to women as "vessels" (Ana Historic 118, The Handmaid's Tale 146) and "natural resources" (Ana Historic 145, The Handmaid's Tale 75). Both texts illuminate an official distrust and dismissal of women's historical accounts (Ana Historic 31, The Handmaid's Tale 322) and focus their narratives on the people in the "gaps between the stories/ two versions" (The Handmaid's Tale 58, Ana Historic 106) in their search for "missing persons" (Ana Historic 134, The Handmaid's Tale 113) in the Master Narratives. In both novels, women are explicitly described as "handmaidens" (Ana Historic 55). The act of "writ[ing] against [their] absence" (Ana Historic 47) in and against academic historical discourses shapes the political agenda of both texts. For both Atwood and Marlatt, the process of exploring the instability of the political and cultural systems in and through which women create their identities is enacted through a sophisticated, intricate and satiric engagement with history.

Ana Historic and The Handmaid's Tale resist the terms of history's Master Discourse by breaking down the boundaries between fiction and history. In these texts, history is neither univocal nor linear but a kaleidoscopic series of connections, engagements, dialogues, oppositions, intersections and re-visions. It is not transmitted in an ordered, progressive manner, but intersects with and is informed by present experiences. It is constantly being interpreted and reinscribed. Atwood approaches history

"through the looking glass" in The Handmaid's Tale --disconcertingly constructing an ostensibly historical text (in the context of the narrative present) from what is the reader's (and the author's) future. Deploying an historical document in a text set in our future in itself destabilizes the notions of history as a linear, verifiable generic and disciplinary category that "progresses" predictably from past to present. Writing such a "history" (The Handmaid's Tale 279) of the future necessitates a fictive, speculative stance that belies definitions of history as an account of "facts" and "truths" and foregrounds the deliberately constructed, selective, fictionalizing processes involved in writing historical documents. Marlatt interrogates historical practice through a similarly fractured narrative positioning. She, however, destabilizes history's authoritative stances by deploying a series of mutually informing moments of fissure and juxtaposition in the construction of her historical "documents". By writing her fictional text around a number of "public, institutional" (M. Jones That Art 145) documents and incorporating those texts into her fictional narrative, Marlatt creates an on-going dialogue between Annie's fictional recuperation of her personal past and the authoritative texts that have elided other such voices. Through her hybrid fictional/historical reconstruction of Mrs. Richards, Marlatt, like Atwood, effectively challenges history's claims to authenticity by illuminating the speculative nature of its authoritative "voice-over" (Ana Historic 48).

The projects of writing fiction and history are explored in these novels through the process of narrating the elided woman in the interspaces of both Master Narratives. For Atwood and Marlatt, the point at which fiction and history "interweave"; the moment at which these two discourses--one of "imagination" and the other of "fact"--refuse to

"remain contained in their borders but rather are crossed and recrossed" (Grisé 91) is the point at which their narratives take place. Critical readings that focus on the central position of the narrative voice suggest that "Annie finds herself repeating (and finds herself, repeating)" in *Ana Historic*. (M. Jones *That Art* 148) and further, that "Annie's subjectivity is...paradoxically intricaded...in her own altered reiteration or rereading of those texts in the process of historical re-search" (148). Pamela Banting suggests that "women and girls are written into narrative and history" in the same way that the "archival documents which support the official history" (Jones *That Art* 125) are collected and arranged in the novel. In *Ana Historic*, the notions of repetition, revision and "re-search" that Manina Jones foregrounds in her discussion are central to readings of the text's engagement with finding/writing/living female subjectivity within largely masculinist historical discourses³.

The processes of writing fiction and history are not only indistinguishable in these novels, they are mutually constitutive. In both texts, the introduction of the historical perspective "paradoxically reminds readers both of the 'factuality' of history and of the construction of that factuality through the collection and interpretation of textual or materially 'documentary' evidence" (M. Jones *That Art* 8). Marlatt's engagement with history's Master Narrative is not the radical, "through the looking glass" epistemological destabilization that Atwood enacts, but is rather more closely aligned to an archeological project that illuminates the fragility of both the epistemological and documentary

³ Cooley notes that the women in the novel "try to write themselves into existence" (76) and Manina Jones suggests in similar terms that Annie's interrogative reading of history "works to 'unfix' the female subject in/of history." (142)

structures upon which the authority of mainstream historical accounts are built. The task for Marlatt's narrator is "to unwrap a lot of cover stories" (Bowering 98) in order to rework the language of history that has rendered her inaudible/invisible. For Marlatt, the way in which official⁴ historical discourse privileges the factual over the imaginary/documentary is a fundamental problem. The absence of the imaginative creates unnavigable fissures in life-narratives. In an attempt to explore this elision, "i as Annie...invented a historical leak, a hole in the sieve of fact that let the shadow of a possibility leak through into full blown life " ("Self" 204) Images of fissures, holes and gaps "leak" into many of the critical readings of this novel. For many, this image of absence provides a powerful way for articulating women's relationships with language, identity and history. For my purposes, this critical evocation of absence and fissures opens a space for me to theorize the "interspaces" in both Ana Historic and The Handmaid's Tale.

The anamorphic form, with its emphasis on distortion, fragmentation, political engagement and re-vision is most intricately manifest in The Handmaid's Tale and Ana Historic. Like The Diviners and Cat's Eye, these novels are structured around and through a sustained play on notions of distortion, alterity, reinscription and strategic narrative instability. In The Handmaid's Tale, masculinist North American political systems are

⁴ By "official" I am referring specifically to documents (texts, photographs) that have been legitimized within the Master Narrative of history--what Marlatt calls "the real story the city fathers tell of the only important events in the world. a tale of their exploits hacked out against the silent backdrop of trees" (28). In both The Handmaid's Tale and Ana Historic, it is the process of documentation and of authenticating those documents that is interrogated; the process simultaneously elides and reveals these women.

distorted in Atwood's fun-house mirror representation of Gilead. These representations gesture outside the text to contemporary North American culture's institutional control of women and women's bodies³. *Ana Historic* engages with these same institutions through the complex layering of representations of history (personal, institutional, cultural) and the ways in which these diverse definitions intersect and splinter outward again.

So while the content of these texts clearly interrogates, resists, and reinscribes the Master Narratives of history and canonical literature, their form is an equally political engagement with the ways in which women's stories have been told and are told within the gaps in the "stor[ies] the city fathers tell" (*Ana Historic* 28). For both Atwood and Marlatt, the unstable space at the borderlines of culture act as moments of fracture through which, however provisionally, the elaborate, ostensibly inviolable narratives that have sustained dominant cultural systems are deployed. *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Ana Historic* are both set in societies that are at moments of profound change and in the process of constructing a cohesive cultural identity. These are frontier societies in which women's bodies are appropriated to populate the colonized space and to perpetuate the newly constructed masculinist cultures and political systems around which they were founded. Like the image of the Sabine women that Offred encounters so tellingly in the Commander's study (197), women are strategically coopted and inscribed in both the practice of these spaces as well as in the resulting cultural mythology.

³ Anne Kaler draws a parallel between the institution of "female religious" and the handmaids and Stephanie Barbe Hammer notes that Gilead is "the world--symbolically at least--as it is" (44).

In both The Handmaid's Tale and Ana Historic narrative re-visions of these "lost" women in history's interspaces are constructed as and through "found documents" (M. Jones That Art 9). In the border spaces in which these narratives are enacted the status of these documents is provocatively unstable and undefinable. Their precarious positioning between fiction and history resists any attempts at definitive authentication. Both of these found texts stand outside of legitimized historical accounts. Offred's text is, for Picixoto, troublingly ahistoric and unscholarly. Mrs. Richards' journal is labelled "suspect" (31) by the archivists who seek to classify it.

Like her historical research, Annie's identity is an active process of selection which becomes "a kind of re-citation book" (M. Jones That Art 144). The act of speaking as women in/about these versions of history defies the terms upon which that Master Narrative defined/distinguished itself. M. Jones suggests that "Annie's reading of historical materials...disturbs the conventions that prevent her from speaking, the constructs that situate 'woman's place' in history as a fixed and unchangeable position of silence" (142) Lola Lemire Tostevin and Pamela Banting (Body, Inc.) describe the breaking of this silence through the link in the novel between the act of speaking and the subversive interrogation of historical documents:

Beyond the presence of content situated in the past, there is the presence of form, of language, taking place in the moment of writing. The book's space is presence, its time is present, writer and reader, caught up in the body of language where we all live (Tostevin 34).

For Marlatt, "language does not represent anything else...Like the phantom histories we carry with us encoded in our tissues, language is 'both place (where we are situated) and

body" (Marlatt Touch 45). Dragland describes this connection in similar terms, noting that "part of [Marlatt's] disillusionment has been to discover that the language of history, which carries the past into the present, the language she is brought up in, is a foreign tongue to her as a woman" (183).

The title of the epilogue to The Handmaid's Tale foregrounds its connections to history as both a Master Narrative and fictive construct. Garrett-Petts suggests that in this novel Atwood "adopts the theory of history as narrative" (80). Cowart connects the novel's engagement with historical texts to its

acute mediation of historical witness, historical process, and historical parallelism, not to mention such related topics as the Logos in history, intertextuality as a form of history, and the mind as historical paradigm (History 106).

The structure of the text, he argues, is "a fictional act of historical witness" (History 106) and, like Hutcheon (Canadian 17), he connects this act with the problematics of the form of the novel itself. Bouson suggests that Atwood's emphasis on history and history-making in the novel

encourag[es] readers to speculate on the semifictive process of history-making and the ideological biases involved in any historical interpretation of the past. Atwood also enjoins her audience to recognize the terrifying reality--the material presence--of history (158).

Both texts interrogate historical narratives by foregrounding the subjective process of constructing the history of a single subject. Both effectively invert the priorities of western Master Narratives by drawing history from/through the individual consciousness as it lives that history. This highly subjective, intensely personal process of self-construction effectively exposes the limitations, expectations and machinations of these Master

Narratives. By revealing the fissures in these texts and focusing on the voices that occupy their interstices, both Atwood and Mariatt challenge the authority of historical texts by foregrounding⁶ the process of selection inherent in the construction of texts.

The instability of these texts makes them "unaccountable, and so on edge" (Ana Historic 81). The in-between space in which they are enacted is strategically deployed as a place of relative freedom in this fictional context. It opens up the possibility for articulating the elided positions in the interspaces of authoritative accounts and for creating an alternate narrative space in which interspatial women can be simultaneously subject and object of their own accounts of history.

i: The Mirror: Anamorphic Markers

As in The Diviners, the anamorphic markers in Ana Historic and The Handmaid's Tale are separated both physically and formally from the body of the novel. The structure of Ana Historic is reflected and reinscribed in the poem that forms a companion piece at its conclusion. The Handmaid's Tale's ostensibly dystopian form is complemented by and contrasted with the "realism" of the conference proceedings in the "Historical Notes". In each of the novels discussed here, the final, revealing marker is not only physically separated from the text upon and with which it works, but is effectively distanced from it (both formally and through its presentation of another point of view and an alternate voice) through its different generic and formal construction. In The Handmaid's Tale, the act of telling her own story draws the silenced and officially invisible (240) woman out of

⁶ See also Bouson, Garrett-Petts, Cowart (History) and N. Walker (Disobedient).

the blank spaces of the canon of Gileadean history. This process begins a complex engagement with notions of narrative authority, institutional definitions and the fictive, selective nature of writing history. Marlatt's use of a strategically fragmented form in Ana Historic similarly involves multiple, interdependent levels of interrogation and discovery. Annie's (re)search is a complex quest for the "missing persons" (134) in official historical documents, for her own elusive subjectivity and for the "erased" (148) parts of her mother's identity.

In Ana Historic, Annie develops her subject position through the overlapping and mutually informing stories of three women: the historical Mrs. Richards, Annie's recently deceased mother, Ina, and Annie herself. The articulation of the elided and mutilated histories of these women is part of both Women's history and of Annie's personal history, both of which contribute to the ways in which she establishes her provisional subjectivity. In a reciprocal, spiralling gesture, these histories are, in turn, informed by Annie's on-going self-construction. Distortion and exaggeration are important elements in this text's use of anamorphic strategy. In Ana Historic images of distortion connect and reflect Annie's archeological search through history for elided women with her own search for a workable subject position. Her "coming out" to Zoe at the end of her narrative is a personal parallel to her political reinscription of Ana Richards. Indeed, it also reflects Ana's own attempts to come out of the gaps of history and to "writ[e] against her absence" (47).

Atwood's The Handmaid's Tale is similarly structured. The personal and the political are fundamentally interconnected in this text, but they are ostensibly separated and contained within the novel's two narratives: Offred's story and Pieixoto's commentary.

The two sections of this text reflect (on) each other, illuminating and reinforcing their mutually constitutive relation by exploring the gaps and fissures that they both contain. The politics embedded in Offred's intensely personal narrative is foregrounded through its interaction with Pieixoto's authoritative reading. Gilead is both a distortion and a reflection of contemporary North American patriarchal institutions. Chinmoy Banerjee has argued that this distortion is an inadequately constructed representation. He notes that the "critical force" ("Alice" 78) of the imaginary world in which Atwood sets her novel is, unlike the basis of Huxley's and Orwell's dystopian settings,⁷ a world that is "grounded on a media-generated awareness of the threat of Christian fundamentalism and a somewhat retrospective sense of women's oppression in North America." (78) It is, Banerjee argues, a fiction whose dystopian distortion is not a reflection of the world as it is⁸, but rather, of another fiction. Banerjee's problem with the text, then, goes beyond its departure from the conventions of dystopian fiction (drawing upon the world "as it is") to the basis upon which the narrative is founded: the theocracy of Gilead.

The point is that the premise is made plausible only by its resemblance to certain current, mass-media generated events, rather than by a close analysis of history, and that the premise is something interesting to imagine rather than something that demands serious concern (79).

As an internally consistent imaginary setting Gilead does, in fact, have a number of serious flaws. Banerjee notes that the novel's focus on tele-evangelists as a ruling class is "flimsy

⁷ She suggests that both Nineteen Eighty Four and Brave New World "have such force because they embody the technological and totalitarian shadow that their times cast... on the horizon" (78).

⁸ as Hammer, Filipczak and Dorothy Jones suggest.

as a foundation for a dystopia" when phenomena such as "economic, ecological, technological, or military" (78) would be both more believable and more terrifying as the basis for the sort of revolution that Atwood proposes. The ecological crises that facilitated the religious/military founding of Gilead are a "backdrop" to the focus of the novel and "the world of Gilead [is based upon] a thin surface of arbitrary decisions" (80). It is valid, I think, to point out that the questions that these decisions generate are never fully answered or addressed. Gilead is at best a cardboard theocracy whose inner workings and external trappings are made available to the reader only through a narrow field of vision: the vision of a single woman trapped within that system.

It is here that Banerjee's argument, with all of its incisive questions about the fundamental basis of the novel, begins to sound eerily similar to Pieixoto's problems with the limitations of Offred's narrative (Handmaid's Tale 322) and to Glenn Deer's discussion of the problems with the narrative voice (219)⁹. Banerjee argues that it is not Offred's limitations that should be challenged, but Atwood's own in her choice and representation of Gilead:

To ascribe the limitations of the fiction to Offred is to shift the question, which then becomes one of why a perspective limited in this particular manner is the necessary perspective of fiction (80).

I will argue that the novel is neither dystopian nor gothic nor even simply a parody (84) of those forms. The Handmaid's Tale is not about Gilead, which Banerjee acknowledges, it is a text that is deployed around the self-construction of a woman within an oppressive

⁹ I will discuss Deer's engagement with the construction of Offred's narrative voice later in this chapter.

patriarchal system. The exaggeration in the novel and the resulting revelation of gaps and inconsistencies in the context of this central focus is, I would suggest, its point. The radical distortions and inadequate representation of a culture are mirror-images of representations in masculinist texts of women's relation to the cultures in which they live. The incomplete, ill-defined, cardboard cut-out image of Woman as she exists in the Master Narratives of fiction and history¹⁰ is reflected in this text in the inadequately fleshed-out "background" of Gilead (which would traditionally be the focus of a dystopian text). The inadequacies in the conception of Gilead that Banerjee discusses do not undermine the (shifting) focal point of the novel: the ways in which the invisible woman in history is drawn out of the interspaces and articulates herself in a necessarily fragmented and often contradictory way because of the contradictions inherent in her position.

Banerjee's problems with the "Historical Notes" are similarly well-founded and yet troublingly inadequate. This section is included "apparently to ground and explain the tale" (89). It is an attempt by Atwood to "cover her tracks" (90) and to fill in the gaps left in the fictional construction of her/Offred's narrative. Read, as they are positioned, at the end of the novel, they are "both a parody of academic communication and a straightforward section of explanatory notes." (89) Yet this section functions differently and less problematically when read as an anamorphic marker: as a point in the text which contains and reflects (on) the elements which have preceded it. The points that Banerjee addresses are most evident when the novel is read linearly as a dystopia or as a parody. But when the

¹⁰ A point which is made explicit in *Ana Historic* in Marlatt's frequent references to women as "background" (35) and as parenthetical to the official narrative of history (83).

text is read "otherwise" and the constant references to reflection, gaps and distortion in the novel are read not through a conventional, linear text with a single, stable narrative consciousness—a progressive "story" in a coherent, cohesive setting—but rather as a reflection on/of the rest of the text, then the troubles with its construction begin to evolve into another sort of reading. Indeed, many of the inadequacies that Banerjee cites can instead open up the potential for strategic reinscriptions of ways to discuss the issues raised in/through the novel.

Offred's attempt to establish a workable "place" from which to speak within systems which systematically silence her narrative voice is an act of resistance. In The Handmaid's Tale this resistance is manifest in its emphasis on mirrors and visual distortion. The anamorphic strategy is structured around moments of "fracture" in this text¹¹: gaps in the narrative façade of Gilead through which contemporary western culture momentarily and disconcertingly intrudes. These "flashes of normality" (58) draw attention to the strategic distortions in Atwood's construction of Gilead and through Offred's self-narrative to the political engagements of the Master Narratives of history. Ana Historic has a similar strategic illumination of the "other" elements in the text. These "revelatory moments" are points at which the reader sees through Annie's engagement with history to the construction of her self-narrative. In both texts, these narrative fissures act as the reconfiguring convex mirrors that focus their engagement and interrogation of Master Narratives. Examining the ways in which the project of establishing a subject position is

¹¹ What Offred calls "tiny peepholes" (31).

politicized in each of these texts illuminates the interspatial positioning of women in the Master Narratives of history and language.

In both The Handmaid's Tale and Ana Historic the narrative focus on establishing a "place to stand on" (Purdy, qtd. in Laurence Diviners) is inscribed through and against the Master Narrative's dependence on oppositional categories. By resisting binary structures of self/other, body/voice, history/fiction both narrators effectively establish an alternate narrative form which accommodates the interstitial positioning of these formerly silenced voices while negotiating a space for their political engagement with the systems which silence[d] them.

This negotiation is further illuminated through the anamorphic markers that are scattered through the text. In The Handmaid's Tale and Ana Historic (as in The Diviners and Cat's Eye) these markers initiate a form of intertextual connection between the "central" narrative and the separate texts which follow. In each of these texts, the marker reflects (on) the surface narrative, foregrounding hidden/encrypted elements embedded in them. Through their mutually informing relation, they reinscribe the points (upon) which they reflect.

In Ana Historic, Annie's search for the "missing persons" in the "rubble" (134) of authorized historical documents and narratives echoes—and is echoed in—her re-search into the identities of her mother, herself and the shadowy historical figure of Mrs. Richards. Through her reinscription of "Ana" Richards, Annie explores the ways in which women's bodies, identities, and experiences are subsumed and elided within the Master

Narrative of history. The relation between the final poem and Annie's narrative is one of a number of intertextual refractions that shape Annie's narrative. While the relation between the "Historical Notes" and Offred's narrative is similar to the relation between "Album" and Morag's The Diviners (a single, consolidating marker that reflects (on) the preceding narrative), the poem in Ana Historic is one of a number of reinscriptions and distorted commentaries on Annie's narrative.

The interconnected and mutually informing markers in the body of Ana Historic reflect through the text to meet and fracture again in the final, unpaginated, poem. The lack of a clearly defined relation between Annie's narrative and the poem (in its lack of title and pagination) is, itself, significant. In theory, the page upon which the poem appears could be placed at any point in the text or could be as effectively excluded or categorized as an "afterword" or "appendix". The poem reverses and exaggerates the text's focus on the political through its emphasis on the immediacy of the sexual encounter between Annie and Zoe¹². Its focus is on a single moment ostensibly devoid of historical referents. The poem foregrounds the connection between bodies and identity explored in the novel on a personal level that obscures the political and historical dimensions of this intimate inscription. The emphasis in this final document inverts the novel's focus on multiple,

¹² Presuming, of course, that the lovers in the poem are Annie and Zoe. This identification is implied from the poem's connection with the narrative that precedes it and the political, resistant tone of the poem, but the lovers are not identified in the poem itself. Indeed, they could as easily be Ana and Birdie Stewart, since the poem is not explicitly situated at any precise historical moment. And if the focus is shifted slightly, the mutual "giv[ing] birth to each other" could refer to the complex reciprocity of the relationship between Annie and her mother in which Annie's attempts to rescue her mother from the silence into which she has fallen is inscribed as a sort of rebirth: the daughter paradoxically giving the mother life.

interconnected women's lives through its focus on the experience¹³ of an individual consciousness at a single moment in her life. This introspective focus is simultaneously distorted and foregrounded when the poem is read back into Annie's narrative. Such a reflective reading introduces the process of narrating an individual subject position into Annie's political engagement with the Master Narrative of history. Reading these texts as mutually constitutive initiates a strategy which encourages a search for alternate ways of negotiating the binarism encoded in the inscription of women's bodies and voices in the texts of official historical documents. This strategy illuminates a complex exchange between historical documents, women's voices and the process of constructing an historical narrative

Ana Historic's focus on drawing the "missing" women out of the gaps and fissures of history and on giving them voices through the mutually constitutive articulation of Annie/Ana is echoed in the final poem's "she draws me out". In this line, the ostensible project of the novel is reconfigured as and within the lovers' sexual union. The intensely focused poem reflects back into the refracted, multi-vocal narrative of women's histories in the prose section of the novel. This section opens up the possibility that each of the histories included in Annie's narrative can and does contain similar revelatory points at

¹³ de Lauretis sets up a useful political definition for the otherwise vague term, "experience". She notes that "the notion of experience... bears directly on the major issues that have emerged from the women's movement--subjectivity, sexuality, the body and feminist political practice." She suggests that the term within this context is defined as "a process by which, for all social beings, subjectivity is constructed. Through that process one places oneself or is placed in a social reality, and so perceives and comprehends as subjective...those relations...which are in fact social, and in a larger perspective, historical" (Alice Doesn't 159).

which the machinations of political systems are engaged and altered through an encounter with an individual consciousness.

The representation of lesbian love-making—an act and a moment inscribed as completely separate from the influence of masculine codes of desire, power and definition in the poem—reflects issues of women's subject positions, experiences and the institutional elision of that subject position back into the novel. Céline Chan has suggested that the poem enacts "the doubling of the second sex in love, in joy, eradicates hierarchy, dichotomy and closure" (72). The final line of the poem "reading us into the page ahead" indeed resists closure. More significantly, however, I would suggest that this line leads the reader back into Annie's narrative¹⁴. Since there is, in fact, no "page ahead" this gesture outward from the poem suggests both a movement away from the existing text and a reflecting motion back into Annie's fragmented, prismatic, prose narrative. Such a simultaneously inward/outward gesture allows the reader to re-view Annie's metamorphosis and to read the individual histories of Annie, Ana and Ina as both part of a larger historical context and as informing the construction of an individual woman's identity.

The poem further reveals a significant gap in Annie's narrative. Annie herself. While she represents and explores the positions of a number of women in her engagement with history, her self-narrative project becomes clear only when that political narrative is read with and through the intensely personal voice of the accompanying poem. This

¹⁴ Dragland also perceives a circular structure in *Ana Historic*. He notes that "the last line of the last, unpaginated, entry in the novel is an echo of its opening" (181).

revelation, in turn, opens up the possibility of other, related and shifting personal revisions and experiences in the narratives of the other elided and rediscovered stories in the novel.

The focus on recovering the elided women in the Master Narrative of history, then, paradoxically obscures Annie's self-narrative focus. Reading *Ana Historic* progressively as "a novel" represents Annie as a narrator rather than as a self-narrator. In a linear reading, she is relating segments of her autobiography, constructing a historiographic fiction and reconstructing the biography of her mother. She is, in short, a narrator within an interrogative, woman-centred text whose project includes engaging with the Master Narrative of history. Annie's self-narrative voice is illuminated through a reading of the final marker which draws each of these projects into its reconfiguring lens and adds the level of inner-spaces¹⁵ to the text's focus on interspaces. In this sense, the reflecting/distorting poem refracts back into the "novel", illuminating the self-narrative in the interstices of its recuperative historical project. This reciprocal strategy reinscribes the masculinist paradigms of narrative structure and historical research which discard "parts [that] don't fit" (150) in favour of the shifting, provisional "fluid edge" of the poem

Throughout *Ana Historic*, Marlatt/Annie plays with the imprecise nature of the language in which women are encoded, and defined¹⁶. The text spirals around and through

¹⁵ I borrow this term from Doris Lessing whose novel, *The Four Gated City* (1969), is subtitled, "Category Inner-space fiction / For there is never anywhere to go but in." King suggests that inner-space fiction "is a synthesis, an exploration of subjectivity which leads the reader to new 'spaces,' new imagined worlds, which offer an alien perspective on contemporary reality" (55).

¹⁶ For examples, see 9, 13, 34, 52, 63, 127, 133, 148.

a play on the notion of "body language" as a feminist distortion and reinscription of patriarchal systems of biological determinism.¹⁷ Women's body language, then, is not only other than masculinist linguistic systems and textual practice, but cannot be "translated" into these forms: this "unconditioned language" (75) loses its referents and its essence when "split" (11) into the oppositional strategies of masculinist systems.

"Body language" reverses the externally-imposed forms of articulating subject positions by insisting that language and texts are generated from the inside out. It further complicates this inversion by introducing altered points of access, alternate voices and modes of articulation that cannot be translated/encoded/inscribed in the linear, external terms of the Master Discourse. Representing "body language" as a positive, affirming form that accommodates and derives from women's bodies and their actions (menstruation, birth, lesbian lovemaking), Marlatt encodes biological determinism "otherwise" and posits the female body not as a site of colonization, appropriation and penetration but as a place in which non-oppositional, non-hierarchical forms of expression and generation can and do take place.

¹⁷ Maggie Humm defines biological determinism as "the concept that physiological differences between men and women determine social roles" (Dictionary 23). Catharine A. MacKinnon suggests that such theories argue that "it is not the meaning society has given women's bodily functions but the functions themselves, existentially, that oppress women. The biological collapses into the social not because society enforces a meaning of women's biology, but because woman's body determines her social being as a pre-social matter. The fact of women's oppression is accounted for by the universal existential fact of her physiology: anatomy is destiny" (54).

"Body language," then, enacts the "frightening proposition" of "a body insisting itself in the words" (46) and the woman's body can become a medium that both subverts and conforms to the problematically gendered language of written/spoken discourse and in/through which the female subject attempts to write herself. Marlatt explores the ways in which bodies are eloquent in their varied and alternate methods of expression. Birth is simultaneously a moment, an act and a discourse in which "the difference" (126) is spoken through the "mouth speaking flesh...in this other language so difficult to translate" (126). For Annie, menstruation similarly becomes a way of inscribing a self-narrative that unambiguously represents herself. It is, she says, "the mark of myself, my inscription in blood. i'm here. scribbling again" (90). Indeed, like the poem, which gestures beyond the point at which the characters on the page end, Annie reads and articulates menstruation as a creative process that inscribes in a way other than that of phallogentric language and its restrictive tools. She is

writing the period that arrives at no full stop. not the hand manipulating pen. not the language of definition, of epoch and document, language explaining and justifying, but the words that flow out from within, running too quick to catch sometimes, at other times just an agonizingly slow trickle. the words of an interior history doesn't include... (90)

Answering Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's now famous question "Is the pen a metaphorical penis?" (*Madwoman in the Attic* 3)¹⁸ in the affirmative with her own inscription of biological forms of textual practice, Marlatt here outlines "body language" as it is manifest in this text. It stands outside of and other than linear, definitive, authoritative and

¹⁸ This also connects with *The Handmaid's Tale's* engagement with this notion of pen/penis when Offred cites another "Centre motto": "Pen Is Envy" (196).

documented forms of transmitting history and identity. It opens up the inner/interspaces that are elided in the Master Narratives of language and of history and provides a point of access for understanding the specific strategy for the transmission of women's stories and histories. It encourages and opens up the possibility of alternate readings and an alternate inscription of women's experiences that not only recognizes, but includes/incorporates the "inner-spaces" and the process of resistant, reinscriptive self-narration.

In the poem, sexual intimacy is represented as an act of creation, inscription and articulation. The lovers are "giving words," "hot skin writing/skin". Lesbian lovemaking is described in the poem as a mutually constitutive act in which Annie and Zoe "giv[e] birth to each other", creating each other through their intimacy just as Annie (re)creates Ana and "draws [her mother] out" of the interspaces of masculinist cultural and medical authority. The same phrase, "we give birth to each other" is repeated in both the poem and the novel (131). Its appearance in both texts and its connection to issues of writing and birth illuminates the politics of a woman-centred cultural inheritance in Marlatt's (re)inscription of "body language". The echoing answer to the question of "Who's There?" (9) that opens the novel thus quickly shatters into a multiply-signified gesture in the poem that draws upon place, language and "body language" in the mutually-constitutive act of "creation" in Annie and Zoe's lovemaking.

This moment foregrounds the complex reciprocity between reading and writing that shapes Annie's narrative. Throughout the novel, reading and writing, like the lovers who "draw [each other] out" are mutually constitutive acts. Each act "creates" the other. When Annie reads Ana's journal in the institutional atmosphere of the archives, "half-

hidden under pages of notes, under quotations from archival material, under sheets of xeroxed photographs (the facts)" (78), she immediately begins to write her out of that stifling context (14). But Annie's story does not conform to masculinist forms of narrative structure. She imagines Richard's condemnation of her story: "[it] doesn't go anywhere, you're just circling around the same idea--and all these bits and pieces thrown in--that's not how to use quotations" (81). How these "bits and pieces" interact enacts the reciprocal relation between reading and writing in this text. The connection between reading and writing, then, is most clearly manifest in precisely this "incorrect" strategic interleaving of whole segments of authoritative documents into her narrative. These documents, Annie's fiction, and her re-membered biography of her mother all inform each other in a similar manner. The mutually informing interaction between these disparate narratives enacts the form of women's writing that is eventually manifest in the poem: a writing that women "also live inside of" (133), that draws its strength and its focus from the experiences through/with which it interacts

"[G]iving birth to each other" in the poem foregrounds this intimacy and self-contained internal space while informing the other interspatial creative/maternal relationships in the prose narrative. Foregrounding the connection between bodies and writing here, Marlatt gestures back to her interrogation and reinscription of biological determinism in the text of *Ana Historic*. Bodies are the sites of both political struggle and personal identity. They are sites of external definition, indicators of splits between the subject and its status as object within discourse. Bodies act as texts which are inscribed and encoded within the ideological systems of Canadian culture. This latter focus on the

body as text returns the emphasis here to the simultaneous interrogation of other textual practices and systems of history, fiction, language and personal mythologies from the inside (the individual subject position) out (toward the culturally defined body and/or political position). The emphasis on "giving" as the poem opens, then, relays through its early lines. It is a multilayered image which reflects (on) the earlier concerns with the complexities and ambiguities of creation in Annie's narrative.

The intertextual relation between the prose and the poetic section is, however, only one of many intertextual reflections in *Ana Historic*. Such intertextual engagements in this novel act as the reflecting markers. They retract and inform the images in the final marker through the rest of the text. Manina Jones's reading of the text's "documentary collage" form suggests that *Ana Historic* embeds not just historical, but medical, philosophical and economic discourses within it, revealing the degree to which each is implicated in others and is always (rhetorically) embedded in relationships of power (That All 141).

constitutes and provokes a re-reading of the institutional writing she cites, from positions of difference and resistance that are, in a sense, made possible by the dis-location of authority through documentary citation (M. Jones That All 141).

Jones's argument foregrounds the interaction between these historical documents and Marlett's fictional creation. While the intrusion of the documents that Jones discusses strategically fragments and comments upon Annie's narrative, which, in turn, reconfigures the focus of the "authoritative, monologic" (M. Jones That All 140) discourse from which

Marlett

By placing excerpts from these documents in "relation to the stories of three women"

these fragments are drawn through her "interrelated dialogue" (M. Jones That Art 143) with the displaced documents. Their presence in the novel thus refracts beyond their immediate, disruptive, presence to mark and reflect (on) the other authoritative texts with which Marlatt engages. Annie's narrative acts as a sort of prism in and through which the other narratives embedded in her re-vision are reflected, altered and shaped. Within her subversive recuperation of the shadowy Mrs. Richards and her reconstruction of her mother's shattered history, Annie reinscribes, interrogates and resists Master Narratives of fiction that have perpetuated representations of women in texts and in colonized spaces. The "documentary collage" strategy that Jones discusses, then, is only one of a number of interconnected and mutually informing intertextual strategies. "Documentary collage" draws "historical... medical, philosophical and economic discourses" (M. Jones That Art 141) into Annie's narrative. But the other fictional and self-referential intertexts that inform Ana Historic gesture just as irrevocably and evocatively toward the disruption of authoritative definitions of fictional narratives. Through these gestures, these relationships define the novel's interrogative anamorphic textual strategy.

Reading the allusive intertexts in Ana Historic illuminates the engagement between and within canonical texts and narrative forms. The intertexts inform the structure and focus of the novel itself. Like the "suspect" (30) position of Ana Richards's journal in the archives, Marlatt's woman-centred Canadian text exists both within and outside of the legitimacy of the English literary canon. Instead of resisting this interspatial positioning, however, Marlatt's allusive references to Shelley's Frankenstein, Haggard's King Solomon's Mines, and Barrie's Peter Pan (and others less overtly cited) draw these texts

into the interspaces of her fiction: reversing the relation between these canonical texts and the women's "ex-centric" literary production. The fictional allusions, then, refract at a number of levels in the text. They inform and are informed by the documentary evidence that Jones discusses, Annie's fictional construction, her auto/biographical project and the process of Marjatt's own inscription of the text that we are reading. This Chinese-box layering further gestures toward allusions generated within the text itself--to those markers which reflect through Marjatt's fiction to meet and refract in the intertextual connection between the poem and the prose narrative. Just as the poem draws Annie's self-narrative out of the interspaces of her own text, so each of these intertexts foregrounds and comments upon the Master Narratives with which Marjatt engages. Annie's frequent references to "lost girls" reinscribes the masculinist world of *Peter Pan*, playing on the multiple associations of "lost" in *Ana Hissong*. The allusion to King *Solomon's Mines* (31) foregrounds and informs the imagistic links between women and the land as colonized, exploited spaces in Annie's story and in the historical texts with which she engages. The most frequent and radically reinscribed allusion, to *Frankenstein*, illuminates the ways in which masculinist definitions of women as "monstrous" in biologically determined nomenclature perpetuate women's interspatial positioning in western culture.

It is in this recurring intertextual engagement with *Frankenstein* and in the reflecting question with which the novel opens, "Who's There?" (9) that the connection between bodies and language comes together most evocatively. These concerns meet in

the multiple manifestations¹⁹ of the image of Frankenstein's monster and splinter outward again, reinscribing the shifting points of access to the novel. The Frankenstein intertext reflects through Ana Historic in a series of anamorphic reconfigurations in which the elements of each appearance inform and are distorted with each shift in its physical placement in the text. The introduction of Frankenstein, then, is not an answer to Annie's opening question but a complex reinscription of Shelley's text and of its later manifestation in contemporary popular culture. Frankenstein becomes a significant image that comments on and illuminates issues of women's writing and its relation to the Master Narrative with which it is connected. It is a work of fiction whose history (in this text of intertextual and extra textual connections) is a carefully constructed and widely disseminated narrative²⁰ which informs the reading of the novel itself: an enactment of Laurence's notion of history and fiction interweaving.

The Frankenstein intertext draws attention to the interplay between an author and a character early in Ana Historic. The monster is the creation of Victor Frankenstein who is, in turn, the creation of Mary Shelley. This layering of creature and creator is echoed and reinscribed on a number of interconnected levels in Ana Historic. It foregrounds Marlett's inscription of Annie as a fictional construct which, in turn, refracts to Annie's

¹⁹ It refers not only to the "monster" but to the novel itself, to Victor Frankenstein and to the images of his creature in contemporary popular culture.

²⁰ The story of Frankenstein's composition has become as much a part of the mythology of "Frankenstein" as the text itself. In her introduction to the "Standard Novels edition" (1831) Shelley tells of Byron's proposition that "[w]e each write a ghost story" (53) to pass the time during a particularly "wet, ungenial summer" (52) in Geneva, 1816. This story appears in most discussions of the novel (for example, Poovey 21) and eventually became the topic of the Ken Russell's 1986 film "Gothic".

creation of Ana Richards. The intertext serves to illuminate not only the Chinese-box layering in both these texts and the contexts from and in which they are positioned, but it also gestures outside of the fictional narrative²¹ to the author and to the particular historical moment in which the fictional text is produced. The monster in Shelley's novel is searching for an identity within a culture that has defined him as monstrous and from which he is ideologically excluded. The definitions within which the monster has to live are externally imposed--indeed, the label of "monster" is applied from the point of view of the Centre which categorizes him as aberrant and monstrous in comparison to its definition of "normal" within European culture.

Naming is a point at which linguistic and political forms of masculine definition and control intersect in all of these texts and in their intertexts. Patronymic systems work to elide women, resulting in a justifiable fear of erasure and a need for the female subject to "write against her absence" (Ana Historic 47)²² Annie's decision to replace her patronymic name with her own choice, "Torrent" (152) is both an act of resistance and an echo and recuperation of her mother's involuntary silence--the reversal of Ina's "torrent of speech" (49), a "torrent repeated over and over" (136) that is symptomatic of her "madness"²³

²¹ Marlatt plays with this sort of multi-layered and multiply signified intertext through her inclusion of historical and scientific documents, personal narratives, self-narration and photographs.

²² As in Janice Morgan's reading of The Handmaid's Tale discussed earlier, this urgent need to "rescue [her] identity" (9) evokes an historical continuum of silenced women and interspatial women's writing.

²³ "Torrent" is also significantly connected with Victor Frankenstein's compulsive search for the origins of life: "Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and pour a torrent of light into our dark world" (97). This passage is

Like the women in The Handmaid's Tale and Ana Historic, Frankenstein's monster is created and controlled within a patronymic system. The monster attempts a form of self-narrative by inscribing his own text against Victor Frankenstein's authoritative voice²⁴. The monster's search for self-identity and community in Shelley's novel is reinscribed in Ana Historic through an exploration of women's "monstrous"²⁵ status in patriarchal systems in the images of Ina's, Annie's and Ana's attempts to define themselves and articulate their experiences within masculinist culture. By connecting Frankenstein's monster with Shelley's textual production, and placing this allusion strategically in Annie's self-narrative with its emphasis on the connections between the body and the texts in/through which it is defined, Ana Historic foregrounds the significance of the connection between body and text in the production of counter-discursive narratives

The influence of this intertext can be pursued a step further. In Frankenstein the monster's body is, in fact, a fragmented text²⁶. It is made up of pieces of other bodies and

connected with other passages that focus on Frankenstein's fantasy that "a new species would bless me as its creator and source" (97) alluded to in Ana Historic, and discussed more fully later in this chapter.

²⁴ The story shifts from Walton's initial point of view to that of Victor Frankenstein, the central voice in the novel. This portion of the narrative, in turn, contains the first-person narrative of the "monster" (144-85).

²⁵ The term "monstrous" relays through Ana Historic (24, 135) and reflects the connections between masculinist definitions of women and nature in Frankenstein: "male culture can project its fear of sexuality and death upon the female and cast her symbolically as monstrous--deformed, dirty" (Hill-Miller 67).

²⁶ Poovey notes that Frankenstein's monster's body defines him, that his "physical form literally embodies its essence" (128).

assembled by an overseeing, controlling masculine consciousness who is intimately connected with the Master Narrative of Science and biological determinism²⁷. The bodies from which he is made can also be read as parts (fragments) of history. This image of a fragmented, artificially constructed and definitive body reflects the formal structure of Ana Historic and its "documentary collage" (M. Jones That Art 141) structure. Ana Historic is, itself, a sort of Frankenstein's monster, made up of fragments of the "body" of history patched together by an ordering consciousness with autobiographical references, autofictional creations and fiction. History and fiction are juxtaposed, "interwoven" and contrasted in this narrative. The result, as Annie suggests, is a "monstrous" text--one that does not conform easily to accepted or recognized generic conventions and that is an exaggerated and distorted image of recognizable forms²⁸. Just as Frankenstein's monster is something other than accepted definitions of human, and Victor Frankenstein is a creator in a way other than the ways in which that role is defined within the Master Narratives of western religions, Marlatt's text positions Annie and her fictional/historical creations in an alternate relation to the Master Narratives in, through and against which she is writing.

The interrogative opening line of the novel--"Who's There?"--reflects the concerns with constructing identity that are illuminated by the Frankenstein intertext. This line

²⁷ Frankenstein was "a student at the university of Ingolstadt" (87) where he studied under "M. Kempe...an uncouth man, but deeply involved in the secrets of his science" (90).

²⁸ The monster's "yellow skin scarcely covered the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous black, and flowing; his teeth of pearly whiteness; but these luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes, that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips" (101).

draws these issues into a dialogue with issues of place that reflect through the rest of Annie's prose narrative. The first appearance of "Who's There?" is a child's question (9) but it quickly becomes a complex interrogation of identity, place and the implications of the connections between the two. In a text in which upper-case letters are used sparingly and strategically (Bowering 100) their appearance at this point suggests something other than a simple adherence to grammatical rules and effectively foregrounds the question as it is reflected through the novel. These connections ultimately position place as a "who"²⁹ and the question "who is there?" takes on other levels of meaning which engage with the distancing strategies inherent in oppositional discourses. Connecting and questioning identity and place in this way creates another point of access³⁰ in/to Marlatt's engagement with systems of colonialism, gender and identity. Annie connects her childhood question with the image of Frankenstein and with questions of the provisionality of identity:

'Who's There?' (knock, knock). who else is there in this disappearing act when you keep leaving yourself behind the next bend. given that 'yourself' is everything you've been. the trail leading backwards and away from you behind your feet...it isn't Frankenstein you're looking for but some elusive sense of who you might be (46).

²⁹ Ina's body is frequently described as a geographical space: "her country she has come into, the country of her body" (127); "wandering around the empty house of your body" (132).

³⁰ Other points of access to this novel include the opening question "Who's There?" and its connections to identity and place; Annie's interrogative reading of both Mrs. Richards's journal (which opens up issues of elision and interspatial voices) and of the archival and medical documents cited throughout her narrative (which foreground her engagement with authoritative Master Narratives which elide and silence women); the resistant inscription of "body language" which is deployed as a strategy for articulating women's alternate narratives and alternate histories; and Ina's life story, which, like the final poem, illuminates Annie's personal history and foregrounds her self-narrative project.

Reading this question askance, then, foregrounds the ways in which women and the land are encoded as colonized spaces. "Who's There?" echoes throughout the novel, taking on new implications at each appearance. It is connected with Ana's fear of the unknown landscape and people in her new home (65), with the E.S.T. treatment that excises Ina's personality (88) and which eventually silences her (148) and, ultimately, with a desire for a dialogue between women (152) as Annie's self-narrative "concludes".

"Who's There?" (9) is not answered, as one might expect, in the dialogue between the two parts of Ana Historic. Rather, it is echoed and addressed within the body of the novel itself. This line and its subsequent connection with the image of Frankenstein's monster are reflected in the first line of the poem, "we give place". The emphasis on mutuality, creation and context in this line connects the pronoun "who" in the novel with the pronoun "we" in the poem and shifts the distancing reference to place ("there") to the mutuality of "give place". The use of "we" in the poem both reverses and incorporates the emphasis on the exploration and construction of distinct and workable identities for Ana, Annie and Ina in Annie's narrative. The notion of "giv[ing] place"³¹ as it appears in the poem articulates Annie's narrative project of recovering, rescuing and inscribing hidden women whose identities had been elided in official histories. This connection between the poem and prose sections reinscribes "place" in both narratives as a sophisticated inscription of a psychic/subjective space as well as a physical location of safety and identification. In the poem, the focus is upon this "place" as something exchanged and

³¹ In an interesting way, this phrase transforms Purdy's evocation of a "place to stand on" that reverberates through The Diviners.

shared. It involves a reciprocal gesture which is reinforced in the non-hierarchical representation of the lovers' exploration of each other's bodies. In this sense, the focus of the poem shifts again, foregrounding the relation between woman and her geographical, feminized "place" in culture.

The play on "place" and exploration here further evokes the colonial text that Annie interrogates and engages in her narrative. "Place" is a complex term in these multiply signified texts¹². Its appearance addresses both post-colonial concerns with cultural/geographical positioning and feminist concerns with (re)claiming a space within cultural systems. Ana's story is intimately connected to the colonial project. Annie's renegotiation of her relationship to the definitions through which she has been identified is connected with the residual effects of colonial appropriation (15, 20, 24, 62). The engagement with colonialism is further reflected in the intertextual allusions which connect women's bodies to exploration in colonialist adventure fiction.

Masculinist control, colonialism, women and the land are linked in a sophisticated, spiralling strategy that simultaneously contrasts each position and thereby illuminates their similarities and ideological connections. Ana Richards arrives in Hastings Mill early in the community's history. As the "English schoolteacher" she is also clearly an agent of colonial control, disseminating the ideology of the rulers to her students, teaching them "proper English" (15) and expanding the reach of the "Imperial mother" (117). The settlement is also a place of control, where men exert "mastery over huge, heavy logs" (25) and

¹² "Place" here significantly connects Marlatt's project of redefining notions of "place" with Laurence's focus on "home" in *The Diviners* which is eventually reconfigured in Pique's "living places" (382).

"stripped [the trees] down to [their] bare flesh" (40). But Ana's position as colonizer within this space is problematized by her position as a woman and an "other" within masculinist culture (24, 72, 83). She is problematically positioned between these systems: simultaneously colonizer and colonized. Marlatt foregrounds this connection by explicitly linking women and the exploited, harvested trees (13, 75) and through her more allusive use of intertext.

Perhaps the most evocative of these connections can be found in the parallel naming of the treasure-filled mountains in King Solomon's Mines in the mountains surrounding Hastings Mill. These mountains are introduced to Ana while on a disconcerting, introductory walk with a prominent man in the settlement. Uncomfortable with his assumption that she is "most eager for [his] company" (31) she finds his introduction of the mountains possibly "insulting" and questions whether her tendency to "wander of my own free will" has elicited this sort of veiled sexual reference (32). Combining Ana's vulnerability as a woman who is "'free' without being sexually free" (32) in a decidedly masculinist setting with the allusion to Haggard's imperialist naming and penetration of the land in his novel, Marlatt explicitly connects the "two peaks beyond the inlet" that are called "Sheba's Paps" (31) with the mountains that contain "the queen's womb, a treasure chamber filled with diamonds" in King Solomon's Mines (Gilbert and Gubar No Man's 39): "Sheba's Breasts" (24) The land through which Haggard's protagonists journey is, as Gilbert and Gubar have noted, "explicitly female" (No Man's 39; Fig. 10). Maintaining this feminized, eroticized¹³ name, but shifting the act of

¹³ "Sheba" has a number of significant associations. The one from which Haggard

projecting the woman's body onto the landscape from the clinical "breasts" in Haggard's text to the colloquial "paps", Marlatt incorporates a critique of the imperialist/masculinist appropriation of women into both the linguistic and the physical landscape of history's Master Narrative. Its inclusion is one of the central moments at which the connections between the exploitation and control of women and of the land meet and refract outward again, filled with multiple associations and illuminating the parallel systems of control and definition in the Master Discourses of imperialism and gender. This allusion acts as a marker in Ana's journal (31, 53). Its appearances effectively foreground the historical and fictional connections between the definition and exploitation of the land (as "resources") and of woman as the "vessel" (118) through which "man" populates these "empty" spaces. Women's bodies are thus associated with this physical appropriation and with the ways in which they are defined and controlled through this discourse. Annie's representation of the "first white birthing" at this place that has "no English geographic name, no transplant label" (127) initiates a reinscription of the oppositional language through which women's bodies have been defined. Jeannie's labour is both linguistic and physical. Her body is "a mouth working its own inarticulate urge" (125) and the baby is "a massive syllable of slippery flesh" (126). Colonialism is here inscribed and interrogated in Annie's text through and within these multiply signified connections between language, text, body and place.

probably drew both the name of his novel and of the mountains is Biblical. The Queen of Sheba, a fertile Arabian land, visits Solomon and brings him lavish gifts (I Kings 10.1-13, II Chronicles 9.1-12). Barbara G. Walker notes that the name is also associated with "Arabic-Aramaean" Great Goddess (931) and is an image of fertility and female power. Marlatt alludes to a popular distortion of this myth in the comic book image of "Sheba, Queen of the Jungle" (12).

Connections with "place" and birth within Annie's recuperative text gesture back toward the poem. "Giv[ing] place", the phrase that appears in the first line of the poem, reinscribes the colonial enterprise that informs Annie's recuperative reading of Ana Richard's life in Hastings Mill. Through the recuperation of her journals and reinscription of her life, Annie gives Ana, who "has no place" (134), a place in history: an act that once again reflects the intimate act of "giv[ing] place" in the poem. Ana has not been written "off" by history, but rather, as Zoe points out, written "in" (134). When she is legitimized by masculinist social conventions through marriage and therefore technically included in history, Ana paradoxically becomes invisible: "she has no place, no place on the street, not if she's a 'good woman'" (134). "Giv[ing] place" focuses on the personal elements of this connection in the poem, foregrounding the mutually constitutive actions of the lovers. Its manifestation/reflection in the poem complicates the traditional, oppositional, distinctions between author and character, creator and creature, fiction and history upon which the Master Narrative of history depends

While control and definition are recuperated in the poem, the constraints and inscription of women's bodies and women's speech come together most powerfully through Annie's exploration of women's "madness". Ina's inability to "shape up" (134) and to conform to constraining definitions, her ability to see

through the conventions that surrounded you. and though you saw through them, you still didn't know what to do with the fear that found you alone on the far side of where you were 'supposed' to be. wrong, therefore (135)

is significantly equated with Annie's movement into the paradoxically controlled and "wild" natural spaces into which she is "guilty of 'going too far.' (in the woods alone.)"

(135). Like Frankenstein's monster, Woman stands outside of both nature and culture. She is linked to both, but significantly does not fully participate in either: "the monster is always someone / something else" (135). Annie characterizes Ina's "treatment" as a punishment for her ability to recognize that the "world [was] full of those who deliberated against you in a struggle for control" (142), and to see "the brutal hand beneath the surgical glove" (135). Ina's body is imagistically equated both with the land³⁴ and, more significantly, with the body of history. Throughout the novel, she is involved with writing herself and her daughters into the "pre-ordained, prescribed" (147) cultural fiction of "Woman". Significantly, it is her attempts to conform and to teach that conformity to her daughters that precipitate her madness (61).

Ina is driven by a "wind",³⁵ unable to move fast enough to accomplish "all the things [she] had to do" (136). Her domestic "place" is encoded as a prison in which the "walls ... closed in on you, picture windows ... never opened" (136) and in which she was ultimately trapped. The connection between Ina's imprisonment and silence and the exploitation of the land are powerfully woven together in the body of the novel. The mutually informing systems of colonial and patriarchal control are drawn into a dialogue here that illuminates the machinations of each of the systems and results in the final, gothic, subjection of Ina to the controlling "treatment" of E. S. T. Like the systemic elision of Ana from the texts of history and the management of trees through the act of "taking

³⁴ Representations of her body are also connected with the definition and harvesting of trees that Griffin explores (56).

³⁵ This "wind" also connects Ina's madness and its causes with the Frankenstein intertext. Again, Frankenstein's obsession drives him "like a hurricane" (97).

out the dead wood. pruning back the unproductive...a matter of husbandry, 'the careful management of resources' [is done] for everybody's good" (146), Ina's psychiatric treatment³⁶ is constructed as a process of pruning, management and excision: "they erased whole parts of you, shocked them out, overloaded the circuits so you couldn't bear to remember. re-member" (148-9).

Ina's "madness" and "treatment" are the gothic mirror-images of Marlatt's positive inscription of the relation between language and women's bodies around and through which the novel's anamorphic strategy is deployed. Encoding women as colonized spaces involves an elaborate discursive strategy that distances them from their bodies. The creation of a "body that defeats the self. the body, not even your body. split off, schizophrenic" (89) creates an artificial and destructive binarism which is at the root of Ina's eventual breakdown. The impossibility of negotiating the contradictory positions

³⁶ Marlatt's novel is not the first to connect the intrusive and destructive psychiatric treatment of women with the imperial project. Janet Frame's Faces in the Water (1961) is perhaps the most significant woman's post-colonial text to illuminate these connections and to draw parallels between this treatment and the exploitation/colonization of the land. Describing her experience of E.S.T. the narrator, Estina, states that "the treatment snatches [time and place] away from you leaves you alone and blind in a nothingness of being" (24). The doctors use the treatments as an "ally in the struggle against overwork" and the "difficulties depressions obsessions manias of a thousand women" (25). E.S.T. is "the new and fashionable means of quieting people and of making them realize that orders are to be obeyed" (24). Elaine Showalter has suggested that the institutions of 1950s and 1960s in which women were treated for mental illness were "confusing places, secretive prisons operated on Wonderland logic. Their female inmates are instructed to regard themselves as 'naughty girls' who have broken a set of mysterious rules that have to do with feminine conduct" (211): a description that evocatively connects the "Red Centre" in The Handmaid's Tale with the transgressions that result in Ina's treatment. This connection between acceptable behaviour and treatment is reinforced by Showalter's earlier revelation that one opponent of E.S.T. "argues that women more often receive this treatment because they 'are judged to have less need of their brains'" (207).

demanded by these oppositional categories results in a "split" (89) in her personality, one side of which is eventually excised in the name of expediency and false unity (88).

The "trees" that appear in the final poem are not the exploited trees of Ana's rain forest, nor the menacing trees of the "second growth" (21) of Annie's childhood. The associations and political implications of the trees reflected in the poem are "out there"--outside of its narrative present. Similarly, the "picture windows that never opened" (136) for Ina are reflected and distorted in the window that admits a "breeze" in the poem, foregrounding a shift from Ina's driven, contained and externally defined identity to Annie's movement toward a self-constructed, workable subject position.

In the poem, the women in the novel are consolidated and "drawn out" into a "luxury" of this sort of self-defined subjectivity. Annie's belief that "it's up to me to pull you [Ina] through" (11) is reflected in the poem's reference to "draw[ing] out". The connection between Annie and her mother, "you who is you or me. she" (11) is reversed in its manifestation in the poem, "she and me. you." Identity, connection and distinction are pinpointed in this phrase, drawing the "lost" women in personal and cultural histories out of their interspatial positions. The poem itself, then, becomes a sort of "lost place" (148) from which and into which each of the women in the novel moves. Their place in texts, in fictional reconstructions and in history is echoed in the framing of the text with images of "Lost Girls" (11) and "lost place[s]" (148).

Annie initiates her search for the missing parts of her own past and her mother's memory through this image of a "Lost Girl" (11). The allusion here to J.M. Barrie's Peter Pan draws this image into a dialogue with other textual representations of masculinist

spaces in the novel. Annie immediately questions the masculine focus of Never-Never Land, "why weren't there Lost Girls in Never-Never Land, only Lost Boys and Wendy who had to mother them all, mother or nurse" (11). Barrie explains the fraternity of Lost Boys by stating that these were "the children who fell out of their prams when the nurse is looking the other way" and that there are no girls because they, it seems, have more sense than to fall out of their prams (35). But Annie identifies the "Lost Girls" in her own story and in the stories of "the city fathers" (28) not with these careful, clever children but with the "missing persons" in the rubble of history. The adventuring spirit which allowed the boys to leave the domesticity of their prams, to "escape the house... free in the woods to run, nameless" (13) is thwarted and contained in the "Lost Girl" for whom Annie searches. Annie's image of these girls is intimately connected with the woods and wild spaces that surrounded her suburban home, a space imperilled by the "boys... from... the Green Wood" and the men who worked there with bulldozers (12). Ana's frequent walks in the forest surrounding Hastings Mill, then, identifies her with these "Lost Girls" and posits Annie's reconstruction of the early colonial emptiness of British Columbia as a historical manifestation of Barrie's "Never-Land", a place that is "half-seen, or even three-quarters, after the night-lights are lit" (Barrie 48). This misprision that renders Never-Land visible links the search for these "Lost Girls" to the anamorphic distortions in Marlatt's text. Annie's search for the "missing" women in the Master Narratives of history is strategically linked to her reconstruction of her mother and to her project of constructing a workable subject position for herself. Marlatt's emphasis on the revelatory potential in misprision reinforces the novel's emphasis on the visual, and the strategic use of gaps, fissures and

"blanks" in Ana Historic. Looking askance at these elided places, Marlatt reveals the paradox inherent in the fissures of the Master Narratives. She reveals a version that "insists on what it disavows" (105), in which the women's stories "begin where nothing is conveyed" (83) in the Never-Land of history. My reading of the intertexts, then, within and outside of Ana Historic opens up a space for reading and illuminating these gaps and fissures, for viewing the elided, unnamed or appropriated spaces beyond the boundaries of masculinist Master Texts. Each of the Master Texts which Marlatt incorporates is refracted in her poem, "translated", finally (but provisionally) into a woman-centred series of recuperated images.

Like The Diviners and Cat's Eye, Ana Historic and The Handmaid's Tale are mirror images of each other. Like The Diviners, Ana Historic and The Handmaid's Tale are made up of two separate and interacting sections. In Ana Historic, Annie's narrative explores the politics of writing history while the reflecting/refracting poem at the end of the novel illuminates its self-narrative, personal stance. In The Handmaid's Tale, Offred's narrative focuses on the construction of a subject position and is, as a result, an intensely personal narrative whose political engagements are illuminated through Pieixoto's "Notes" that follow Offred's story. Both sections of both texts contain the personal and the political, but foreground one of these points of access in different sections. In The Handmaid's Tale, Offred's first-person narrative is deployed as a personal testimony. Throughout her account, she constructs her subject position and her narrative stance as provisional. The narrator is aware of the instability of the linguistic and textual tradition in which she

speaks (62, 91, 238) and of her precarious, elided position within the ideological systems which sustain those traditions. She nonetheless develops a contingent but viable space from which to speak within, through and against these silencing systems. Offred explores and defines her subject position from the inside out, reflecting (on) and enacting the ways in which ideological systems are filtered through and transmuted within an individual consciousness. But while Offred's text leads the reader through the labyrinthine process of articulating an elided subject position, Professor Pieixoto's paper, "Problems of Authentication in Reference to The Handmaid's Tale", reinforces the dominant ideological position that sustained Gilead³⁷. He reads her text through an ideological lens³⁸ which is connected to that of Gilead. This strategy effectively contrasts institutional forms of transmitting history with a silenced, dissident voice from its interspaces.

On one level, Pieixoto's biased reading of Offred's "testimony" underscores the novel's concern with the inherently subjective project of constructing a narrative: a concern that questions the possibility of any objective positioning. On another, textual, level his reading enacts the control that the Gileadean regime exercised over Offred's body. Reading Pieixoto's commentary back into The Handmaid's Tale raises a number of

³⁷ In the Dictionary of the Bible, John L. MacKenzie notes that "Gilead" (linked to Genesis 31.47 and its use of "Galeed") has been "fancifully" but consistently translated to mean "a heap of testimony". In light of this "popular" translation, Atwood's use of this place name in the novel is particularly resonant.

³⁸ I will argue that Pieixoto's culture in 2195 and Gilead are part of a continuum that includes contemporary patriarchal practices. Each of the cultures to which Atwood alludes in her novel participates in similar structures of biological determinism, definition and control, each shifting the focus slightly in each but nonetheless drawing from a similar ideological basis.

unanswerable questions and foregrounds the overlapping issues illuminated by the markers in the text.³⁹

Like the other anamorphic markers discussed here, Pieixoto's commentary reflects and distorts Offred's self-narrative. It contains within it each of the elements that shape and inform her text. Perhaps the most significant of these is that Pieixoto's text is not, in fact, his own, written work, but like The Handmaid's Tale upon which he comments, it is a "partial transcript" (311) of his oral presentation. It is, further, commented upon and contextualized by the chair of the session, Professor Maryann Crescent Moon, and periodically interrupted by the parenthetical and abbreviated responses of his audience. It is clear that Pieixoto's text as it is manifest in The Handmaid's Tale is a single voice out of many at the conference. The other voices are excluded from this text and the reader of Atwood's novel can, like Pieixoto, lament the absence of voices which could have provided further information about Gilead.

Physical positioning is also important here. Just as Offred's and Pieixoto's positions within their fictional contexts are strategically deployed, so the structure of Atwood's text is equally strategic. The physical relation between these texts illuminates much about the ways in which they function in The Handmaid's Tale. Atwood's engagement with historiographic method is strategically deployed after the reader's initial encounter with the

³⁹ Issues of the instability of documentary evidence; the fictive, selective process of writing "history"; the connection between women's bodies and women's texts; the emphasis on perspective; the text's interrogation of biological determinism and the culturally encoded sexual control of women; the significance of these in the deployment of the "text" and upon the machinations of the process of naming; speech and silence in the control of subject populations and the perpetuation of a dominant ideology.

woman's self-narrative text. If the "Notes" had been placed as a preface in this text, the relation between the reader and the woman narrator would have been radically altered. As it is, the "Historical Notes" are structured as a set of "explanatory notes...which ground and explain the tale" (Banerjee "Alice" 89). They "provide the reader with information about Offred's society which Offred, given her limited circumstances, could not have known" (Bouson 156). They act as an intertext which participates in and reflects through the first-person narrative. This sort of relation between the texts encourages a circular, interactive and reflective reading. As Anne Cranny-Francis points out, the "Historical Notes" destabilize the authority of Offred's account by "demand[ing] a response from readers which necessitates a reevaluation of the preceding narrative" (141). As in The Handmaid's Tale, the act of introducing another voice into the text encourages alternate, but related and interdependent readings. Atwood "encourage[s] readers silently to supply its complement--to go backward--two centuries in their minds" (Coward History 108). The alternate voice "forms a reflective third reading, one that refocuses once more on missing items: the voice that isn't heard" (Finnell 208). Garlick suggests that "[t]his encircling movement problematizes historical context and the authenticity of narrative as history, be it written or spoken, and enmeshes us in the evanescence of an oral culture" (165). The act of "loop[ing] back through the text" (Davidson 115) foregrounds the "tension between fiction and history" (Norris 358) that shapes both the content and the form of Offred's narrative and that reveals its anamorphic underpinnings.

Offred's and Pieixoto's narratives are thus mutually informed and mutually informing. Pieixoto's reading functions on a number of levels--as a parodic play on the

distorted reading of documents by academics, as a "self-reflective epilogue" (Hutcheon Canadian 17) to the novel, a "museological exercise" (Garlick 164) which "reveals a deep and multi-faceted irony grounded primarily in the insensitivity and mental blindness of the central speaker" (Foley 45). By foregrounding both the process of reflection⁴⁰ in the "primary" (source) narrative and distinctly separating Pieixoto's commentary from Offred's narrative, Atwood ensures that the two texts are read separately but that they ultimately comment on and reflect each other.

The reciprocal connection/relation between Offred's text and Pieixoto's "Notes" is effectively articulated through Offred's reinscriptive emphasis on gaps in her self-narrative. As she constructs her own subject position, she constantly foregrounds the elements of her story that are left unspoken. Some of these moments are eloquent "blanks" in her narrative--points at which she stops and refuses to write or speak⁴¹. Others are paradoxically created by the abundance of information that she provides--through the multiple versions and revisions of the story that she creates (150, 275, 279). Further, images of gaps refract through Offred's narrative to resonate in Pieixoto's final, authoritative, attempt to fill in the "many gaps" left by the tale's "anonymous author" (322).

⁴⁰ Strategies of reflection occur throughout the text, in the physical images of mirrors, as well as in Offred's contemplations on language.

⁴¹ Examples of this "amputated speech" (211) occur throughout Offred's narrative. By interrupting her story at seemingly random intervals, she foregrounds the process of strategic re-membering that shapes her narrative (49, 60, 138, 144, 237, 285) and illuminates the gaps between past and present through partial re-collections of her past (85, 102, 174, 181, 265, 307).

Following the gaps through Offred's text leads the reader to the most significant gap in The Handmaid's Tale: June⁴² herself (240). Pieixoto's blindness to Offred's identity continues to relegate the handmaid to the "gaps" of history and indeed, constructs her as an absence. In spite of his dependence on this "document" in his study Pieixoto never directly cites Offred's story in his paper. The voice of the author of his primary source is silenced in favour of his authoritative "voice over" (Ana Historic 48). Susanna Finnell has suggested that Offred's journey from Gilead

becomes a lost trace, a lacuna, a negative space. It literally took place in the blank pages that separate the autobiographical rendering...from the historical and academic recapturing and validating of her traces 20 years later (204).

She argues that Pieixoto's failure to authenticate Offred's narrative lies in his inability to read the text in terms other than those which privilege the written, signed, authorized text as "the locus of power and origin" (207). Pieixoto's attempt to definitively establish Offred's identity "fails and falters because her voice is not recuperable in male terms as a subject" (207). Instead of filling in the "background" of the preceding narrative, this commentary "forces the question, and that is why the reader must begin again" (207). This movement back into the text to answer the many "questions" (Handmaid's Tale 324) raised by Pieixoto's reading is, however, not a simple, circular "looping" gesture. Like The

⁴² Constance Rooke has noted that "The Handmaid's name is June" (175). I have chosen to use the name that was assigned to her in Gilead when discussing her self-narrative and to refer to her as "June" only when explicit references are made to "the time before" when she was, indeed, June. I think that the act of hiding/subverting her "shining name" (94) in her own narrative is significant. Just as she is constructing a subject position that will be workable within and outside of Gilead at the time that she is narrating, so she must also be developing a "third" name that will accommodate her altered circumstances outside of Gilead.

Diviners, Cat's Eye, and Ana Historic the re-vision of the woman's self-narrative acts more like a spiral or Möbius strip, gesturing repeatedly back into the text but entering it from a different point of access each time and bringing different associations and allusions with every alternate positioning.

Context, as Offred notes, is all (154, 202) and the context within which the text that we read is ordered and structured by Pieixoto whose "universalizing first-person plural maleness...misses the gendered irony of his own words: 'the matrix out of which we come'--the silenced source of the selfhood of woman in the novel" (Hutcheon Canadian 18). Arwood's "metahistory", then, explores the ways in which "patriarchal imperatives are encoded within the various intellectual methods we bring to bear on history" (Davidson 120). One point of connection between these two sections of the novel is the highly subjective, selective tone of Pieixoto's academic performance. His attempts to "authenticate" Offred's narrative to look beyond/through her text to external evidence--evidence already legitimized and authorized by masculinist/Master Narrative/mainstream historical accounts. Pieixoto attempts to render the officially "invisible" (240) handmaid visible by looking directly at the system by which she was subjected through the documents that have silenced and elided her. His attempt to approach this distorted text from a conventional point of access, rather than looking "askance" at the interspatial woman he hopes to find, results in his confusion about its status as a legitimate historical document (313), and his questions about its authenticity (314, 315).

Context and perspective are thus central images around which Offred's self-narrative is constructed. Context, with its connections to textuality and language, is

intimately connected with its visual counterpart, perspective, in her account⁴³. The recognition and definition of a radical shift in perspective and the parameters of context are institutionalized in Gilead: "Ordinary, said Aunt Lydia, is what you are used to" (43). Later, Offred herself concedes that "Whatever is going on is as usual. Even this is as usual, now" (66). In this sense, Pieixoto's failure to hear, recognize and recover the woman's voice in the narrative that he has so carefully shaped and reconstructed lies precisely in his specific point of access to the text and its context: in his attempts to translate or decode her "coded" (Rooke 180) text.

Repeated references to codes and to secret communication in both sections of The Handmaid's Tale illuminate another important gap in the text: the one between Pieixoto's commentary and the alternate forms through which Offred transmits her narrative. Pieixoto's information about the Commanders, Waterford and Judd, is drawn almost exclusively from a single, encoded, source: a "diary kept in cipher by Wilfred Limpkin" (318). Pieixoto's misreading—or inability to read—Offred's self-narrative is ironically underscored by his reliance on Limpkin's translated, reconstructed accounts. Pieixoto does not address or challenge the reliability of Limpkin's information. Voices from the past, Pieixoto suggests,

⁴³ The Oxford English Dictionary makes a clear distinction between context and perspective. "Context" has to do with discourse and texts and the connection between texts and words. "Perspective" relates specifically to the visual and, by extension, to a "mental point of view". I think that it is important to make this distinction since both context and perspective are concepts around which many of the anamorphic distortions in The Handmaid's Tale are deployed.

may reach us...but what they say to us is imbued with the obscurity of the matrix out of which they come; and, try as we may, we cannot always decipher them precisely in the clearer light of our own day (324).

Here, his arrogant assumption of the validity of his own position is illuminated in his belief that "the light of our own day" is "clearer"—that is, more free of bias and obscuring ideological apparatus—than that of previous historical moments.

The project of de-ciphering Offred's narrative is intimately connected with the project of recuperating her voice and of recognizing the significance of the "echoes" contained within it. Rooke has perhaps approached the project of reading Offred's narrative as a coded text most comprehensively⁴⁴. She argues that the project of reading obscured historical inscriptions in this text is a process of recognizing and reading a series of narrative layers. As Pieixoto reads Offred's testimony, so Offred reads and attempts to "decipher" the world around her, grasping for strategies that will accommodate her own history and her own subject position. Aunt Lydia's reinscription of the history of the world's declining birth rate prompts Offred to embark on her own historical project as she reads the inscriptions carved on a desk top in the Red Centre. These messages, in turn, gesture backwards to other encoded messages and, as Rooke notes, outside of the text to another form of authority:

J.H. loves B.P. 1954. O.R. loves L.T. These seem to me like the inscriptions that I used to read about, carved on the stone walls of caves, or drawn with a mixture of soot and animal fat (123).

⁴⁴ Rooke talks about the "name code" (180) in this novel and the first section of her discussion of The Handmaid's Tale focuses on deciphering this "message from Atwood" (182) and reading the "covert signal[s]" (183) contained in these coded names.

The handmaids themselves engage in forms of coded, subversive or secret communication. They "whisper without sound...learned to lip read...in this way [they] exchanged names" (14). In the community of handmaids the "crimes of others are a secret language" (287) and the subversive act of the whispering of obscenities, about those in power...[is] like a spell, of sorts. It deflates them, reduces them to the common denominator where they can be dealt with. In the paint of the washroom cubicle someone unknown has scratched Aunt Lydia's muck. It is like a flag waved from a hilltop in rebellion (234).

The handmaids speak to each other in "clipped whispers, projected through the funnels of our white wings. It is more like a telegram, a verbal semaphore. Amputated speech" (211) Offred begins to "believe in thought transference...vibrations in the ether" (115). In Offred's self-narrative, the transmission of history and the construction of identity takes place through and in media other than the written word.

This "secret language" (287) prompts Piexoto to lament the limits of Offred's point of view. He suggests that her narrative would have been more "valuable" if she "had a different turn of mind" or "the instincts of a reporter or a spy" (323). This misreading of Offred's report is ironically underscored by the intertextual connections between the two narratives. Offred's position in Gilead is indeed that of a "spy". She is situated both inside and outside of the legitimate centres of power, watching, recording and reporting on what she sees. She is connected with Gilead's "shadowy...underground" (albeit at a remove [322]) and communicates with her "colleagues" in code and in forms of secret language. Her purpose, however, is not connected to state or academic concerns, but to her own survival. Again, Piexoto's reading reflects into Offred's testimony through his attempts to

challenge and diminish her status within her own story. His suggestion that she should have had the instincts of a "reporter" echoes her own insistence on context, on the details of her life and on textual instability. His allusion to the "spy" foregrounds her concern with the visual. The notion of "reporting" is particularly ironic here. Offred is clearly a "reporter" and the "report" that we read is one whose focus is her self-construction within and against dominant cultural systems. Pieixoto's comment, instead of diminishing the status of Offred's narrative, opens up a space for reading it. His focus on the masculine voices that frame her testimony draw attention to the resounding silence in his own text. The "questions" that the reader wants answered are, we find, grounded not in Offred's "report", but rather in Pieixoto's inability to see the significance of the shadows cast by the elided women in the Master Narrative of Gilead by the "clearer light of [his] own day" (324).

For Pieixoto, then, history is not the search for "missing persons" (Ana Historic 134) that Marlatt's Annie practices, nor even an attempt to search for the "truth", but, like Offred's fragmented, provisional self-narrative, history in this case is revealed to be a fiction whose project is to "authenticate" its own ideological position within conflicting and contradictory discourses. Like Brooke (The Diviners), Josef (Cat's Eye) and Richard (Ana Historic), Pieixoto's authoritative voice is intimately connected with notions of legitimacy and narrative authenticity. His careful transcription of Offred's oral narrative "recapitulates the relations between female/colony and male/empire that Atwood's nationalism inscribes throughout the novel" (Tomc 81). Through Pieixoto's paper, the legacy of European imperialist/patriarchal ideology is revealed to have been transmitted

into the future virtually intact. In 2195, Pieixoto's control and interpretation of Offred's text reads history in masculine terms and, as a result, analyses Offred's text in terms of her relationship with Fred.

The concerns of the self-narrative elements of this text are thus drawn into dialogue with the cultural and state apparatus that defines the single woman narrator and the process through and against which she narrates her own position and is ultimately defined and contextualized within history's Master Narrative. Incorporating both the self-narrative and the cultural context in which she speaks into Offred's alternate, interspatial testimony, Atwood draws Pieixoto's paper out of its position of authoritative commentary and into an intertextual relation with Offred's text.

Under Pieixoto's hand Offred's strategically unstable oral account shifts from a questionable "item", "material", "block of speech" (314) and "taped narrative" to a "manuscript" (313) and, later, a "document" (318)--although the latter term is used "for the sake of brevity". Pieixoto and his colleague, Knotly Wade, go on to name this text The Handmaid's Tale

partly in homage to the great Geoffrey Chaucer; but those of you who know Professor Wade informally, as I do, will understand when I say that I am sure all puns [in the title] are intentional, particularly that having to do with the archaic vulgar signification of the word tail (313).

The act of naming Offred's narrative is here connected with Wade's sexist pun and with their appropriation, definition and control of her narrative. The tale/tail punning effectively connects Offred's body with her text. It echoes the institutional control and appropriation of women's bodies and voices that shape Atwood's Gilead. Offred's body is characterized

here as defining her place within culture and in history: it is the characteristic that ultimately supercedes the significance of her voice and her subject position.

The ownership, naming, definition, trivializing, and illicit pleasure that Pieixoto exercises from his position of "authority" over The Handmaid's Tale directly mirrors the Commander's relation to, and ownership of, Offred's body. This connection quickly refracts back into Offred's autobiographical rendering (Finnell 204), foregrounding the ways in which Offred makes these connections explicit by strategically blurring the distinction between body and text. "I'm sorry there is so much pain in this story I'm sorry it's in fragments, like a body caught in the crossfire or pulled apart by force" (279). The connection that Pieixoto makes explicit in his paper illuminates the politics of similar connections in Offred's narrative. She begins to equate her relation to her identity and to her body with specific words, "I feel like the word shatter" (113, see also 54, 120, 124). At this point, Offred begins to construct herself as a text, a "thing I must now compose" (76). The division between identity and body has been erased in Gilead (72, 91, 95, 146) but the result is not the positive reworking of biological determinism that Marlatt proposes, but its gothic opposite: a fun-house exaggeration of its machinations and power (72, 84) in which women can "fulfil their biological destinies in peace" (231). Offred's relation to her body is revised and effectively redefined within the Master Narrative of Gileadean reproductive control: "Now the flesh arranges itself differently. I'm a cloud, congealed around a central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am" (84)⁴⁵. She is acutely conscious of the fact that her body "determines

⁴⁵ Women's bodies and imperialism are imagistically linked to the appearance of the

[her]...completely" (73). The distinction between the self-conscious construction of subjectivity and externally imposed definitions opens up the space for her revised relation to identity: one based upon a paradigm of an alternate form of expression that is provisionally grounded and constantly shifting and which strategically resists oppositional definitions.

Atwood establishes another important connection between the fragmentation of Offred's body and her fragmented, reconstructed text through the Scrabble Game which Offred plays with the Commander. This moment marks a significant shift in her relation to Gilead. These episodes reveal more about the regime that rules Gilead even as they reinforce the complexity of the connections between body and text in Offred's self-narrative. References to the Scrabble Game recur throughout the novel, foregrounding the process of selection, of fragmentation in linguistic systems. Joseph Andriano suggests that Scrabble is "a pervasive controlling metaphor" in the novel that acts as "a trope for the whole text" (89). He points out the parallel construction of Pieixoto's ordering of Offred's text and the ways in which the game is played (95). Later, he notes that "Atwood's Gilead constructs..a horizontal text, [while] June constructs a vertical one across it. She is constantly undercutting the power structure" (90). The exclusivity of this project is reinforced by Pieixoto's attempt to read only the "horizontal" elements of Offred's text without any awareness of its strategic distortions and subversive "vertical" elements.

"picture...called The Sabine Women" in the centre of masculine authority in the text, the Commander's study (197). The appropriation of women's bodies at the point at which the Roman Empire was founded links this "dystopian" story to similar historical/mythological events in western culture.

Pieixoto asserts that "[s]he does not see fit to supply us with her original name" (318), yet reading the text "other-wise" reveals that her name is, in fact, encrypted in her narrative (Rooke 175, Andriano 90). This image of a mutually dependent horizontal (textual) and vertical (subtextual) construction begins, I think, to suggest the ways in which the distortions and fragmentation in the novel work. There are, however, further levels of distortion in this text that move beyond the two-dimensional surface of the Scrabble board with its prescribed positions and its valued markers. Andriano's discussion of the Scrabble Game draws attention to the ways in which Atwood embeds a series of "surreptitious exchanges" (90) between June and the reader within her novel. I would take this a step further and argue that Scrabble is one of a series of such exchanges which foreground the significance of exclusive points of access to texts.

The Scrabble Game marks another significant shift in Offred's narrative positioning

What I need is perspective. The illusion of depth, created by a frame, the arrangements of shapes on a flat surface. Perspective is necessary. Otherwise there are only two dimensions. Otherwise you live with your face squashed against a wall, everything a huge foreground, of details, close-ups..." (153).

The allusion to the "arrangement of shapes on a flat surface" in this passage gestures toward the deliberate, deceptive and strategic arrangement of images in anamorphic art and foregrounds the significance of the strategic use of perspective needed to "read" these images properly. By foregrounding the inadequacy of "two dimensions", she is not only addressing the significance of the visual, but, in a text that is filled with images of doubling (14, 32, 109, 165) this inadequacy gestures outward again to a "third" or alternate

position which is not accessible except through the application of altered "perspective". The result of the division between these two positions is an elusive/allusive "third" positioning⁴⁴ that participates in both of these ostensibly oppositional stances but is fully associated with neither: the position from which Offred narrates her story. The result is a highly provisional narrative stance which is predicated on a shifting point of access and articulated through a combination of visual strategies and oral reconstructions. Offred's thoughts after her clandestine meeting with the Commander lead her to a statement which reverberates through her text: "Context is all" (154).

The Scrabble Game is further reflected in Pieixoto's reconstruction of the randomly scattered "thirty tape cassettes" (313) which contain the "blocks of speech" (314) from which he assembles The Handmaid's Tale. It mirrors Offred's concerns with piecing together her history into a workable but provisional pattern, as well as her reflections on language and its instability. Scrabble is a game about language, about constructing words from randomly distributed pieces of the building blocks of words. The play of the game focuses on the strategic fragmentation of the alphabet and the process of constructing recognizable and valuable patterns from these fragments. The process of playing the game involves the constant re-viewing and reconstruction of the words by different players. The words on the board are always in process, always only provisionally viable. In many ways, it enacts the self-conscious process of feminist self-narrative.

⁴⁴ This is a provocative connection to Lessing's notion of the "Shadow of the Third" that appears in The Golden Notebook (177).

As always, the placement of the marker informs its shifting significance in the text. The Scrabble Game is encoded as an illicit encounter, and the playing of the game is intimately associated with the sexual tension and control that Offred had anticipated when she is called to the Commander's office. The clandestine game-playing is "forbidden...dangerous...indecent...it's something he can't do with his wife" (149). The Commander's study is "an oasis of the forbidden" (147); but here, rather than sexual privilege and exploitation, the encounter is constructed as a parodic representation of illicit sexual liaisons. Texts fill the Commander's study and are the "forbidden" objects, reading, not sexual pleasure, is the forbidden, illicit act. Structured to mirror June's early meetings as "the other woman" (60) with Luke, the sexual text through which these secret encounters appears foregrounds the parallels between sexuality and textuality constructed in this narrative. As in "the time before", Woman is still positioned as the object of masculine desire. But here, the act which she "performs" for the masculine gaze is the forbidden act of reading--itself a kind of gazing.

When I read, the Commander sits and watches me doing it, without speaking but also without taking his eyes off me. This watching is a curiously sexual act, and I feel undressed while he does it (194).

Significantly, the continuum that is developed between the position of women as sexual or reading objects of the masculine gaze is the subject of the texts that Offred initially reads in the Commander's study (194). The images of women in Vogue, "a model on glossy paper, hair blown, neck scarfed, mouth lipsticked...an almost extinct animal" (164) act in the text as a reflection of the time before. The "possibilities" that such magazine images used to represent, "like the reflections in two mirrors facing each other, stretching on...to

the vanishing point" (165) refract through the text, becoming increasingly distorted until they culminate in the grotesque, tattered parody of masculine sexual fantasies in Jezebel's. Here, we get a radically distorted combination of Gilead's institutionalized imprisonment and sexual exploitation of woman and the historical (contemporary) images/representations upon which it is based. The women at Jezebel's are deployed as spectacle, offsetting and focusing the politics of Offred's eroticized reading and "hunger" for these images in the parade of caricatures of popular representations of female sexuality in North American culture:

Some of [the women] have on outfits like mine, feathers and glister, cut high up the thighs, low over the breasts. Some are in olden-days lingerie, shortie nightgowns, baby-doll pyjamas, the occasional see-through negligee. Some are in bathing suits, one-piece or bikini... Some are in jogging shorts and sun halters, some in exercise costumes. There are even a few in cheerleaders' outfits, little pleated skirts with outsized letters across the chest (246-7).

This continuum of textual and visual images in the control and definition of women opens a space in which Offred explores the complexity of these institutional forms of control. The laws in Gilead are based on carefully guarded texts which delineate and sustain this control. The visual codes--the dress, the positioning as object even in this Gileadean interspace--in turn, reinforce and perpetuate it.

While Offred clearly focuses on constructing herself within language, Gilead's emphasis is upon the visual--the external trappings of control. Gileadean rulers have replaced written and oral language with visual images: the signs on the shops, the costumes of women, the highly symbolic clothing of the bodies on "the Wall" (42) and, most evocatively, the emblem of the winged eye that is emblazoned on the apparatus of

the Gilead government. The division between Offred's narrative and the Master Narrative of Gilead is destabilized at a number of levels. Offred's insistence on "reading" beyond the surface of the official images enables her to look for messages and words that have been officially erased. This re-vision foregrounds her version of resistance—a resistance that insists on the validity of its own form of articulation and which looks beyond the surface of dominant forms of signification.

Visual images are the points at which Gileadean and contemporary culture intersect most significantly in The Handmaid's Tale. While texts are paraphrased (100, 233), locked away (99), or encountered "voraciously, almost skimm[ed]" (194), visual images are transmitted intact and act as moments of fracture against which the distortions and exaggerations of Gilead are thrown into dramatic and parodic relief. Visual images, and films in particular, are an important part of the indoctrination of the handmaids into the ideology of Gilead. The moment at which the "unwoman documentary" (128) is shown at the Red Centre elicits two distinct and subversive responses from Offred. Initially, she considers engaging in forbidden, surreptitious speech with the woman beside her but her focus quickly shifts from potential speech to an interrogation of the power and manipulation of the visual images with which she is presented. The images of the rebellious women who fill the screen are silenced, "they don't want us to hear what the unwomen are saying" (129). Like the women in Gilead, the women in the film are clearly constructed as objects of the gaze. They are rendered as spectacle, but not as speaking subjects. These women are narrated, defined and spoken off/for by Aunt Lydia's authoritative voice-over (128-9). The images of the "unwomen" nonetheless transmit

subversive messages which ironically distort Gilead's doctrine of "wanted bab[ies]" and which reflect the handmaid's unspoken desires to "recapture our bodies" and to have the "Freedom to choose" (129). The desires of the handmaids are echoed in the demands written on the banners held by the protesting women--images and slogans taken from every "Take Back the Night" march in contemporary western cities, but infused with other meaning when viewed through the distorted and distorting lens of the handmaid's narrative. These distortions effectively connect the enforced silence of the women in the audience with their lack of control over their bodies. Perhaps most significantly, this moment bridges the levels of the text: connecting Offred/June's autobiographical allusions to her mother in "the time before" with her recent past in the Red Centre, to her "present" in the oddly woman-centred birthing ritual in Gilead, to Pieixoto's active control of Offred's text in his own authoritative voice-over and, finally, outward to the process/moment of the text's construction. Further, the "Night" in the novel is, in fact, the point in her narrative in which Offred inevitably engages in acts of recuperation--the points at which she imaginatively reconstructs her past and effectively but contingently "takes it back" (47).

Films are multiply signified images. Their political implications are underscored by Offred's movement between their representations of rebellious women and her earlier indoctrination into imperialist ideology's oppositional notions of "Self" and "Other" which are intimately connected with concepts of "spectacle" and with an intrusive, phallic gaze. The anthropological films screened in June's school showed

women in long skirts or cheap printed cotton dresses, carrying bundles of sticks, or baskets, or plastic buckets of water, from some river or other...looking squint-eyed or afraid out of the screen at us, knowing something was being done to them by a machine with one glass eye but not knowing what (127-8).

This image of a single-eyed, penetrating and mysterious "machine" again reflects throughout the text and is intimately connected with the imperialistic language and systemic control of Gilead (260, 283) and the regime's redefinition of women as "natural resources" (75). During these moments, the camera is linked to acts of western cultural imperialism--to an oppressive, masculinist intrusion that defines the object of the gaze as distanced "Other" This definition isolates the object from its context and silences it: turning it into an object of scrutiny, curiosity and study. The camera and its control is introduced into the "present" narrative in Gilead at two distinct moments. During the "Salvaging", the condemned handmaid aims "an uncoordinated wink" (288) at the camera that records her execution. But just like the defiant words of the "unwomen," this resistant gesture will never be transmitted. As Offred notes, the camera records the event but the images that it records will be carefully edited before they are disseminated to the public.

Visual images are also inherently unstable in this text. Offred questions the images of the "front lines" shown on the televised news, noting that "it could be old clips, it could be faked" (92). As in the Red Centre, the interpretation of the images in the film is defined by the "voice over" (92) and both the images and the authorized interpretation are manipulated to convey a specific ideological position, "They show us victories, never defeats" (93). Nonetheless, Offred strategically attempts to "read beneath" (92) these legitimized images and to question them as they are presented to her. By questioning the

legitimacy of these televised images Offred foregrounds her recognition that the elision and control of the written in Gilead is incomplete: "you can see the place...where the lettering was painted out" (35)⁴⁷. By focusing on the instability of the visual apparatus that sustains and defines Gilead, Atwood again foregrounds the significance of perspective and points of access in her text.

These interrogations of the integrity of visual records inform and are informed by Pieixoto's dependence on videotaped material in his paper. He depends for part of his "authentication" on the satellite transmission of Waterford's trial which is "not good, but...clear enough to establish that his hair was indeed grey" (322). The tape here is revealed to be at a number of removes from the actual events. Its images are hazy and there is no evidence (beyond its internal claims) that the man whose image is recorded is, in fact, Waterford. Nonetheless, like his acceptance of Limpkin's coded diary, Pieixoto accepts the validity of the state's visual text without challenging the authenticity of its claims. Pieixoto's connection and investment in Gilead paradoxically illuminates Offred's resistance within her self-narrative. Pieixoto's conclusion that Waterford is Offred's Commander becomes part of his political positioning. His assertion is based partially on a personal document and authenticated by hazy visual images that have been transmitted by

⁴⁷ This incomplete elision of the written is again constructed as a parallel to the partial elision of women's voices in Gilead. Just as the subtext of the signs remain visible, so Offred's re-remembering of her past gestures simultaneously backward to "the time before" and to her present interspatial positioning. Indeed, this positioning does not only apply to Handmaids, but is evident in the ironic silencing of Serena Joy who "doesn't make speeches any more. She has become speechless" (56). These partial elisions, I would suggest, once again reinforce the connection in the text between institutional control of women's voices/narratives and women's bodies.

the regime. Offred's interrogative reading of the visual texts of Gilead subverts and informs Pieixoto's authoritative voice. Her distrust of these images reveals Pieixoto's naiveté--his faith in the authority of the masculine texts from which he draws his "evidence". The act of reading Pieixoto's authoritative narrative back into Offred's text gestures again to the politics of Pieixoto's project and illuminates the ideological systems that shape his scholarship. The authoritative voice of history in this text is thus effectively destabilized by the skeptical, interrogative readings of the silenced figure at its interstices.

Ideological allegiances between Pieixoto's text and the Gileadean regime are further revealed through a moment of visually coded cultural fracture in Offred's narrative. While images of imperialist appropriation and definition recur throughout the novel, the most significant moment of reversal and interrogation occurs early in Offred's account. Binary strategies of Self and Other, Orient and Occident, Subject and Object that are encoded in the touristic western gaze are strategically challenged and reversed when Offred and Ofglen encounter "a trade delegation" from Japan. These "tourists" represent a complex layering of associations for Offred. Their presence in the text insists on a movement outside of Gilead's ostensibly totalitarian theocracy to a recognizable (to a contemporary reader) world. The women's mouths suggest forbidden and illicit speech. They are outlined in red lipstick "like scrawls on the bathroom wall, of the time before" (38)⁴⁸. Their clothes and posture reflect the carefully encoded images of female beauty that

⁴⁸ Bathrooms are specifically women's spaces in this novel (72). Conversations and communication in bathrooms, in particular, have a distinctly subversive quality: Moira and June meet and have clandestine conversations in these spaces (83, 253), the message on the bathroom wall at the Red Centre, "Aunt Lydia sucks" (234) is a resistant communication between women and Moira's escape is accomplished in a bathroom (140).

appear in the magazines in the Commander's study (165-6). Offred ironically describes the style of the women's dress as "Westernized" (38) but reinforces their distance from the westernized culture in which they live by constantly referring to them as "Japanese tourists".

This image is both comic and subversive. Like the film of the "Take Back the Night" march (128-9), this moment is a fissure in the dystopic setting of the text through which contemporary culture momentarily intrudes. It draws upon contemporary enthusiasm for tourism and stereotypic images of the camera-carrying groups of tourists from Japan. But placed here in Gilead, where the "eye" is the cultural symbol of power and control, these tourists who hold the camera--the symbolic "eye"--are clearly positioned as the dominant gaze. Their view through the lens and touristic/anthropological⁴⁹ curiosity about Offred and Ofglen evokes the later images of the women in the documentary film shown in June's school (128). Not only are there visual signifiers which link the two encounters between cultures, women with "long skirts...carrying...baskets... knowing something was being done to them" (128) but they share the same position in relation to the intrusive gaze of the camera and to the defining "voice over". The handmaids are once again narrated, described by the interpreter, translated through a voice of legitimized authority and effectively defined. The interpreter's response to the tourists' request for a photograph of the women evokes

⁴⁹ This image connects with the institutionalized study of "Caucasian anthropology" in the "Historical Notes" (311).

Pieixoto's apology for Gileadean culture. Calling upon an uninterrogated respect for cultural difference³⁰, in spite of its problematic relation to subject groups within that culture, the "interpreter" tells the tourists that "Women here have different customs, that to stare at them through the lens of a camera is, for them, an experience of violation" (39). This moment resonates further with other Gileadean definitions of women. It echoes Aunt Lydia's pronouncement that "to be seen--to be seen--is to be...penetrated" (39). Visual images are encoded as powerful here: more powerful than the scripted words that the handmaids exchange with the tourists. The gaze is associated with control, with sexuality and with reinforcing the connection between the dominant discourse, the dominant gaze and the ways in which external signifiers are used as strategies for categorizing women within Gilead (through the intrusion of these women in western clothing) and within contemporary North American culture.

Throughout both Offred's narrative and Pieixoto's reading, these moments of fracture and connection are central to illuminating the process through which Offred's self-narrative has been constructed and elided. These moments foreground a fact that is easily lost in reading Atwood's compelling rendering of a nightmarish future time: Offred's narrative is a testimony, the officially unreliable "evidence from a single woman" (43) through which she not only relates her experiences and her reading of the culture in which she lives, but through which she also constructs a narrative and a subject position. The

³⁰ The difficulty in negotiating the space between respect for cultural difference and human rights that extend beyond those differences is evident in a number of debates surrounding women's issues. Alice Walker and Pratibha Parmar, for example, discuss this precise difficulty in relation to "female circumcision" (35). Atwood draws attention to some of these issues in her poem "A Woman's Issue" (Selected 260-261).

cataclysmic transitional moment in Offred's narrative (when she shifts from the "normal" world of North American culture to its distorted counterpart in Gilead) is signalled by a dramatic emphasis on perspective: "the edges go dark and nothing is left but a little window, like the wrong end of a telescope" (85). This moment marks a radical shift not only in her physical positioning within her culture, but also a shift in the ways in which she articulates that position: from an intimate connection with language to a circumscribed visual frame. Altered perspective changes not only the appearance of the image that is being viewed, but its fundamental standing within the dominant systems of signification. Working through the process of "reconstructing" her subject position, Offred is acutely aware of the number of times her account is removed from the event that she describes (144). Her focus, then, moves between the visual signifiers that are the external manifestation of Gilead's power--an institutionalized representation of the defining masculine/male gaze--and the oral structures associated with women's secret speech through which she transmits her story³¹. The visual is thus intimately connected with the dominant male gaze, the spoken with women's interspatial utterings.

ii: The Image: Narrating the Interspaces

While the poem in Ana Historic consolidates and disseminates the personal focus of Annie's narrative, the image of the interspatial woman, and the process through which

³¹ As N. Cooke ("Politics" 216) and Kauffman (226) have suggested, speaking at all is, for Offred, a subversive act. Negotiating the space between subject and object of her own narrative, then, involves an attempt to engage with both narrative positions. The "objective" positioning of the visual informs the "subjective" form of her narrative and further provides a signpost for reading this text.

she is recuperated through Annie's self-conscious re-vision, is another point at which the anamorphic strategy in this novel engages with the politics of women's elision within history's Master Text and allows her to "step inside" its ostensibly seamless narrative and "open it up" (56). Marlatt's use of distortion, fragmentation and alternate points of access to legitimized accounts of British Columbia's history are deployed in Ana Historic through a series of interrelated, mutually informing engagements with the "private world" (31) of the women in its interspaces. Like Laurence and Atwood, Marlatt uses the "ex-centric" (Hutcheon, Canadian 3) position of her self-narrator to view the Master Narrative "askance". Through that alternate positioning, she interrogates the systems which sustain those narratives while simultaneously articulating her protagonist's position within and against them.

Marlatt's use of the visual and her emphasis on illuminating fractures and fissures in Master Narratives makes the novel's connections to, and even signalling of, anamorphic form particularly explicit. The visual, the instability of narratives and the importance of perspective--of the singularity and potential inherent in alternate points of view--are central and consolidating images in Ana Historic. Marlatt's use of a strategic form of distortion that illuminates rather than obscures, opens up rather than restricts the multiple, shifting points of access allows for the articulation of multiple and contingent subject positions. The active, interrogative process of challenging the rigidity of oppositional categorizations in favour of provisional and inclusive forms of expression characterizes Ana Historic's anamorphic engagement with masculinist inscriptions of colonial history in Canada.

Annie's narrative is a complex amalgam of history and fiction. As Annie engages with the documents of authorized history, the authenticity of her reading is shown to be contingent and privileged. Her inscription of life in colonial British Columbia illuminates the problematics of the term "fiction" by foregrounding not its lack of connection to historical, verifiable "fact", but its essential dependence on those accounts. Annie's fictive/recuperative engagement with the documents of history problematizes criticism of women's writing as mimetic (Hite, Other Side 13) (as opposed to truly imaginative) by illuminating the ways in which all "factual" writing is necessarily created, interpreted and fictionalized, and all "fiction" is connected, on some level, to material realities and lived experiences³². By deconstructing the implicit hierarchy between fiction and history, Annie writes another kind of text: an "anahistoric" text which acknowledges and explores the interdependence of both categories. The shifting boundaries between fiction and history is the unstable space--the gap--in which Annie writes her self into history and, on another level, is written into the fiction of Marlatt's explicitly labelled "novel"

Marlatt's interrogative engagement with history's Master Text is an act of anamorphic reconfiguration. It illuminates the ways in which the privileged position of these Master Texts is structured and perpetuated by drawing their component pieces together into an altered (if not "proper") perspective. Through this form of distortion she is illuminating the extent to which the construction of a "coherent" historical narrative is,

³²As I cited earlier, in A Room of One's Own, Woolf notes that "fiction is like a spider's web, attached ever so lightly perhaps, but still attached to life at all four corners", and that it is sometimes only "when the web is pulled askew" (41) that these connections are visible: but they are always there, obvious or not.

at its core, a distorted, fragmented image of the events of the past. For Marlatt, an emphasis on perspective illuminates the ways in which the process of articulating one perspective simultaneously conceals or elides "other" voices in favour of its own. This engagement with the complexities of epistemic perspective is explored through images of visual distortion and fragmentation which both explore the visual implications of perspective and inform similar fragmentations in the narratives that Annie reads, writes and reconstructs.

Annie's (re)inscription of Ana Richards is as archeological as it is epistemic. As her husband's "research assistant" (147), she is digging through the "rubble" of history to find the "missing pieces...missing facts" (134) buried within/beneath its official account. Annie gradually shifts the focus of her search to the subject hidden in the gaps, the "missing persons in all this rubble" (134). The process involved in negotiating between the overwhelming hegemony that is the Master Narrative of history and the individual woman in its interstices is articulated as a shift in Annie's perspective. The act of shifting her focus from foreground to background challenges the relationship between the two in a way that refuses to privilege one over the other, but which acknowledges their mutual existence and their mutually constitutive, interdependent relation. This project spirals outward, connecting with and informing aspects of Annie's construction of her own history. Her self-narrative and the recuperation within that narrative of her own mother, Ina, and Mrs. Richards are projects that are mutually constitutive and whose relation is structured through and around an emphasis on the points at which perspective, point of access and narrative privilege intersect. Marlatt's emphasis on the problematics and liberating

potential of alternate points of view moves beyond epistemic constraints of philosophical/ideological positioning to include the physical (material) position of the object of discourse: a position that radically reinscribes the relation between the subject and the object of representation.

The gaps and misprisions which surround and inform the archival documents that are scattered through the novel illuminate the process through which the Master Narrative perpetuates and performs itself. Looking into these gaps, Annie realizes that history is not a collection of "facts" and "truths", but rather that "history is the historic voice (voice-over), elegiac, epithetic. a diminishing glance as the lid is closed firmly and finally shut" (48). It is this realization that allows Annie to begin to articulate her alternate relation to history:

i don't want history's voice. i want... something is wanting in me. and it all goes blank on a word. want. what does it mean, to be lacking? empty wanton. vanish. vacant, vacuum, evacuate. all these empty words except for wanton (lacking discipline, lewd). a word for the wild. for the gap i keep coming to (48).

Images of gaps reflect through the novel and are intimately connected with the process of rewriting history. These gaps foreground the narrative's engagement with the partial and privileged position of history's Master Texts. It is from the gaps that Annie is placed in an altered relation to the Master Narratives, so that she reads and approaches the documentary evidence that represents these texts in the novel from a different point of access. The authoritative "voice-overs" of the Master Narratives are thus read from a skeptical point of view that is simultaneously conscious of the omissions in those texts and of the multiple voices that it has incorporated "without quotations marks" (81). As in

"Pique's Song" in The Diviners, the voices through which the various histories in Ann Historic are transmitted are multiple, complex, and shifting consolidations of the voices that have preceded them. The project of articulating the gaps in a mother's narrative in both of these texts is the "inheritance" of the daughter. In an on-going project that shifts and changes from generation to generation, Annie inherits a number of scattered, incomplete and distorted memories--both her own and her mother's. Re-membering her mother's mutilated memory shapes both her fictive recuperation of the fractured history of Mrs. Richards and her exploration of the systems through which these women's narratives are elided. Piecing together scattered fragments of her mother's subjectivity is similarly a fundamental part of Annie's construction of her self-narrative. Recovering that history forms both the basis for her own self-narrative stance (defiantly vocal in the interspaces of authorized history) and fills the gaps in the silenced segments of her mother's biography. Like the invisible women in Hastings Mill and Annie's own parenthetical place in the production of Richard's book (79), each of these women are written into, but paradoxically out of the masculine text.

From the beginning of the novel, images of gaps are intimately connected with women. They are "a woman's place. safe. suspended out of the swift race of the world....the lure of absence" (24). Women "are the soothing background their men come home to" (35). The interspaces that these women inhabit are constructed as places of both affirmation and negation in this text--the "other side of history" (152) in which the stories of "bracketed ladies...begin where nothing is conveyed" (83). But Annie resists these images and exposes the "monstrous lie of it" (24) by articulating what the absences

contain and by exposing and naming the "thick being she could feel between things, undisturbed" (41). Writing these gaps and silences is an act of interrogation, resistance and reinscription. Annie questions her own need to contribute to the "voice-overs" that surround the artefacts that she reads, "why write at all? why not leave the place as wordless as she finds it?" She replies by insisting upon the significance of re-viewing historical narratives, by finding the voice of the "missing persons" (134) in the rubble of history and articulating the difference in the process of writing as women: "the unspoken urge of a body insisting itself in the words" (46).

Like the reflecting/refracting mirrors that relay through in The Handmaid's Tale, the gaps in Ana Historic open up a space for exploring alternate versions of history by gaining access to its texts from a number of alternate, resistant points of view. While her narrative opens up the possibility of multiple elisions, it is women's stories in these gaps that particularly interest Marlatt. It is Annie's project to "break the parentheses and let it all surface! falling apart. we are, i am. we have fallen apart. the parts don't fit. not well never whole. never did" (150). Fragmenting her sentences here, punctuating linear thoughts with disrupting but revelatory plays on words and connections (however tenuous and associative) between those words, Marlatt effectively disrupts and reinscribes the rules of linear narrative. Throughout the novel, similar moments of association and strategically fragmented sentences, paragraphs and pages work to destabilize mainstream expectations of narrative form and to insist upon the singularity--and provisionality--of both the story itself and the form through which she is telling that story.

Writing women into and out of the gaps and fissures of history's Master Narrative, Marlatt's anahistoric project evocatively resists linear and oppositional definitions of narrative form and historical practice by distorting and exploding the hierarchies and systems of privilege through which they have been perpetuated. The implications of Marlatt's title, Ana Historic, with its potential for a punning allusion to retrospective gestures from and within history and historiographic fiction³³ have been explored in a number of critical discussions. George Bowering has noted in his interview with Marlatt that "[t]here is no character named Ana Historic [in the novel]; there is no character whose name was probably Ana" (97).³⁴ This observation effectively draws attention to both Annie's provocative naming of her fictional/historical character and to the significance of Marlatt's use of the term in her title. When questioned about its implications, Marlatt notes that

as a prefix, it's very contradictory. It means upwards and forwards as well as backwards. It has a whole cluster of meanings associated with it. there's also that play on ahistoric, which is not the opposite of having history. it's standing outside of history altogether. History becomes an irrelevant concept to someone who has no history, who is outside of it (Bowering 102).³⁵

³³ If one includes, as I think one should, its subtitle, "a novel".

³⁴ Though, indeed, Marlatt uses the phrase to describe Mrs. Richards when she alludes to the "epithetic" voice of history "summ[ing her] up. Ana historic" (48).

³⁵ Manina Jones also discusses this relation between "the significant gaps within the language of history" (That Art 140) and Grisé suggests that the novel engages in a "feminist project of writing women's lives into the 'ongoing cinerama' of official history" (90) further reinforcing both the visual, multi-media images of film and the recurrent images of gaps in Master Narratives.

Standing in the interspaces of official history, and with a different relation to the concept of constructing a text, Marlatt's characters write at the point at which the unstable Master Narratives of history and fiction intersect. The characters' "ana historic" stance also suggests that they approach history "otherwise" or "askance"--affiliated at least in part with a prefix whose definition is anything but stable or linear.³⁶

Marlatt's strategic use of documentary evidence, and the surrounding narrative's relation to the documentary intrusions, radically reworks the Master Narratives' definitive use of commentary, captions and "voice-overs" (48) through which history is transmitted. Initially, Annie attempts to stay on the "right track" as she writes Ana Richards out of the interspaces. But she discovers that the track is "full of holes, or holes of absence" (17). The act of reading and writing history is not a "relentless progress towards some end" (81) but is instead a jumble of incomplete, misunderstood and misquoted voices which form a kaleidoscopic series of connections that are in a constantly shifting relation to each other

Both Marlatt and Annie strategically misuse quotations, "circl[ing] around" them and throwing in "bits and pieces" (81) that reshape the relation between historical documents and the narratives and contexts in which they appear. Like Brooke in The Diviners, Annie's husband, Richard, is an active participant in the Master Narrative which his wife interrogates. Annie's imagined account of Richard's response to her version of the early days of Hastings Mill ("that's not how to use quotations" [81]) illuminates Marlatt's

³⁶ Interestingly, the Concise Oxford Dictionary's definition of "ana" outside of its use as a prefix (and indeed, it is a separate word in Marlatt's title) connects it even more solidly with the issues of identity and narration explored in the novel: "Anecdotes, literary gossip, about a person... Collection of a person's memorable sayings."

own fragmented, mutually constitutive narrative strategy. As Annie notes, if Richard's insistence on a definitive distinction between "other people's words" and those of the narrator were followed to the letter, "nothing [would be] without quotations marks" (81). Placed in parentheses, the quoted voice of the "bracketed lad[y]" (83) through which Annie constructs her narrative is not parenthetical, but central to Marlatt's engagement with the structure of history's Master Narrative. It foregrounds the ways in which historical documents are used in her novel. Annie's self-narrative project is intimately involved with the recuperation and re-vision of these documents. The distorted, fictive result is, for Richard, "unreadable". Fragmented, without the clear signifiers of past and present, it is "cut loose from history. [it] is undefined territory, unaccountable and so on edge" (81). Like the frontier spaces in which Ana Richards attempts to "imagin[e] herself free from history" (14), Annie places her narrative in the precarious discursive space between fiction and history. This is a space in which both categories are mutually informing and where the personal and the public are equally authoritative and equally "historic". But the "edge" that Marlatt discusses here is not the obvious boundary between one space and another. It is rather the elided space within the Master Narrative itself not outside of it, but contained within it, though invisibly and "unreadably" over-written and "voice[d]-over".

Reading and writing as a woman in these in-between spaces necessitates articulating a different relation to both the self-narrative stance and the authoritative discourse of history. Through Annie's interrogative project, Marlatt explores the unique relationship between women's bodies and subjectivities. Women's writing, Annie notes, is

defined differently from the carefully linear and "objective" narratives of men: "our writing, which we all live inside of, is different from men's, and not a tool, not a 'pure instrument for getting a grip on the world.' 'it contains menaces,' traps, pitfalls" (133). Richard's authoritative narrative stance assumes a solid, unfissured "groundwork of fact" (134); a foundation to which Mrs Richards, Ina and Annie do not have access when constructing their narratives. By exploring and legitimizing the elided "bits and pieces" of history that honeycomb that solid foundation, Annie explicitly connects her text with the strategy of anamorphosis. Her interrogative re-vision "chang[es] the shape of the whole picture" (134). That shape is not, Annie discovers, a constant: but rather, it shifts with the position of the viewer, exposing and hiding different pieces depending on what is "found" and what is left un(dis)covered. As she writes Mrs. Richards out of the interspaces of history's Master Narrative and herself into her own history, Annie discovers that oppositional definitions which presume clear distinctions between history and fiction, past and present, or narrator and character⁵⁷ are artificial and limiting. She notes that the messy reality, irreducible to neat and oppositional definitions, is that "we live in history and imagination" (139).

Marlatt's strategic, disruptive and resistant inclusion of documentary evidence in the novel is a fundamental part of the shape and focus of her narrative. These documentary intrusions act like the markers in The Diviners and Cat's Eye and like the hallway mirror in The Handmaid's Tale. They provisionally consolidate the central images in the text and

⁵⁷ Zoe notes that Annie defines her characters "as if they were strangers. who are they if they aren't you?" (140)

refract them strategically outward in a complex series of interconnected associations and allusions. The author of any narrative--fictional or historical--necessarily "rewrite[s] the script, erasing part of it to keep your theme clear. a restricted meaning" (100). By strategically drawing the voices of the interstitial characters together with the accounts that have silenced them, Marlatt simultaneously illuminates the fictions at the heart of the historical "facts" and connects contemporary, self-reflexively fictional accounts with the narrative texts of the past. Each successive account both informs and challenges the others, creating a kaleidoscopic series of connections between documents, voices, perspectives and histories. By foregrounding the speculative aspects of writing history, Marlatt suggests that history and fiction don't so much interweave as break down into each other. In this way, oppositional categories which define and sustain a distinction between the two forms of narrative are challenged, and it is at the point at which the gaps between history and fiction intersect that Ana Historic takes place.

Marlatt opens up this space by framing the documentary evidence with the voices of the elided inhabitants of its interspaces. The narrative "flow" necessarily moves from one of these interspatial positions through the documentary evidence and into another interspatial positioning. The single point of view of the documentary pieces is shattered when the "other voices" are literally read through them. Each of these voices narrates the same event/artefact/historical moment from different points of view. The point at which their accounts intersect fractures their self-contained narrative stance and opens up a contingent space for viewing the official documents "askance". These moments of fissure

and fracture illuminate the artifice that sustains the notion of a coherent, linear and authoritative narrative.

As Annie collects the fragments of her "research" through and around the official documents of authoritative history, the various "histories" begin to act together in increasingly complex ways. The relation between the three recuperative historical narratives of women that make up Ana Historic (Annie's memories, Ina's story and Mrs. Richards' journal) are not articulated as a linear, "relentless progress" (81). Rather, each appearance of archival documents acts like a new "eye" in the text that juxtaposes the personal positioning (the "I") of the women's histories with the legitimized public context of the "official stories" The first distorting, revelatory moment of intersection between fictional and historical narratives foregrounds the novel's concern with the ideological and material connection between encoding women and the land as "natural resources" The puzzles of naming and appropriation that reveal this connection are amplified in the historical documents that inform this section of Annie's self-narrative: "Douglas fir and red cedar are the principal trees. Of these, the former--named after David Douglas, a well-known botanist--is the staple timber of commerce" (13). The authoritative definition and positioning of David Douglas here foregrounds the power of masculine authority in the appropriation and control of colonized space and of its natural "resources". This documentary citation is framed by references to masculine naming of/for girl's activities in Annie's personal history and by the introduction of the alien "eye" (perspective) into the landscape through Mrs. Richards' story. The strategic linking of these three positions spirals out from this moment in the novel. This connection informs later references to Ina's

problematic, imperialist control of language (17), the encoding of the woods as masculine space (18) without the linguistic or mythical paradigms of women adventurers (15) and the parallel elision of women from the history of these "frontier" spaces.

Remembering her search for her "Lost Girl" in the "second growth" (generation) woods behind her home, Annie traces the implications of and associations with the labels that have been applied to her: "tomboy, her mother said. tom, the male of the species plus boy double masculine, as if girl were completely erased" (13). The elision of the girl in these names, the perpetuation of the "double masculine"³⁸--even in terms that are associated exclusively with the feminine--helps Annie to slowly unravel the complex associations between language and identity. She realizes that "it wasn't tom, or boy, it wasn't hoyden, minx, baggage, but what lay below names--barely even touched by them" (13) that shapes relations between individuals within culture.

The forest is a space that both resists and is defined by the oppositional strategies of the Master Narratives. But from the woman's point of view the forest is a place "where names faded to a tiny hubbub" (18) where Annie is

in communion with trees. . . [where she] was native, [she] was the child who grew up with wolves, the original lost girl, elusive, vanished from the world of men... (19).

The woods are a constant in this text. It is a space in which the experiences of Ana, Ina and Annie intersect and in which their relation to the oppositional, definitive demands of

³⁸ This phrase evocatively echoes the grammatical affirmation through apparent negation of the "double negative" and, interestingly, gestures outside of the text to Marlatt's collaboration with (then) lover Betsy Warland in the volume of poetry Double Negative (1988).

masculinist culture is provisionally reworked. The continuity of place that Marlatt creates in these woods acts like Atwood's description of a "series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of the other" (Cat's Eye 3) which foregrounds the ways in which each of these women's histories informs and shapes the others and in which "[n]othing goes away" (Cat's Eye 3). Like Mrs. Richards who "imagin[es] herself free of history" when she arrives in Canada, the girls in the same landscape a generation later maintain that "mythic" (Ana Historic 27) freedom: "without history... [we] imagined we were the first ones there, the first trespassers" (19).

Significantly, the girls' ostensibly liberating moves into the woods do not suggest an uncomplicated parallel between woman and nature. While this connection informs the representation, it is complicated by Annie's adult recognition that the forest is also a colonized, defined space. It is a place in which "men worked... building powerlines and clearing land for subdivision. those woods the boys on the rest of the block had claimed as theirs" (12). The "powerlines" refract beyond this moment to connect with a number of different reinscriptions and moments of resistance in the text. They gesture toward the intertwined levels of power that sustain the imperialist/masculinist control of both women and the land²⁹. These "powerlines" reflect (on) the powerful lines of the poem that follows Annie's narrative. They ironically reflect the connections between the destruction and harnessing of the land (trees, water) in colonial British Columbia with the relay of

²⁹ Annette Kolodny makes a similar connection between masculine control and exploitation of women and the land. Early American colonial texts describe "the land as essentially feminine" (4), to be mastered and transformed from the wild and unfamiliar to the domestic and familiar (7).

electricity to the cities which, ultimately, connects the "pruning" (146) of the trees with the "management" (146) of Ina's illness with E.S.T.⁴⁰

The process of "taming" the wild spaces in the newly colonized land is articulated by some early loggers in a documentary account that echoes and informs Annie's own interrogative reinscription of her adolescence: "In those days good timber was plentiful--good timber, on sea-coast slopes, that could be felled and shot right down to water--hand-loggers' timber. The country bristled with opportunities..." (63). On either side of this citation the "promise" (62, 63) of adolescence is linked to the "opportunities" of the new land. Annie represents her adolescence as a shifting, resonant boundary point that is full of "promise: the budding of some secret future in me, little knowing all the eggs were already there, lined up and waiting...not a vessel waiting for someone to fill, but a small storm, a slow flood subsiding on its own" (62). This image refracts through the logger's memories of trees, similarly lined up, ready to be "felled and shot" and both gesture outward to the "bride ship" (117), the "vessel" that explicitly connects the cultural definition and control of women's reproduction with the land's production of lumber. Annie echoes her memories of adolescence in the present narrative through the repetition of the word "promise" on the other side of the documentary paragraph. She articulates this connection from another in-between space: "stand[ing] on the porch, my hands full of the flyers they keep leaving for no one to read" (63). The image of the flyers, in turn, refracts outward from the specific context of this intersection between the documents of Annie's self-narrative. This

⁴⁰ Frame makes the relationship between electricity and the "treatment of women" explicit and describes electricity as "the peril the wind sings to in the wires on a gray day" (Faces 18) for the recipient of Electric Shock Therapy.

association between the trees and women foregrounds the "waste" ("waist" [117]) involved in the dissemination of these printed materials: material for which the "split"⁴¹ trees were used. Images of "flyers", then, echo both the distribution of "pages and pages of words that slide in our front door and out the back, a trickle of waste" (64) and connects the moments of "promise" to the later distribution of flyers that in turn gestures to the beginning of Annie and Zoe's sexual relationship⁴².

From a different point of access—one drawn from the historical narrative that Annie is writing--this image of Annie standing on her porch is reflected by the moment when Ana Richards is "caught in the doorway in nightclothes" (65) after being drawn from inside her house by a children's game of "Knockie Knockie, Run Awa" Ana is suspended on the threshold without a "proper sense of herself", framed in the doorway between light and dark. She is visible (an object), but unable to see (as defining subject) through the "darkness, obscure as a black pall" (65). This moment of suspension epitomizes her perpetual and strategic in-between position in the novel: between the official and the unofficial versions of history, between accepted women's roles and therefore "without history".

The connections between biological determinism and women in frontier societies discussed in the "Mirrors" section of this chapter are reinforced and worked differently in

⁴¹ The recurring use of "split" is a significant part of Marlatt's engagement with oppositional definitions within masculinist and colonialist discourse and is discussed at greater length later in this chapter.

⁴² The women in Zoe's house are "fold[ing] and apply[ing] stamps to a pile of flyers" (151).

these reflecting engagements with the documents of history's Master Narrative. But the strategic distortion that connects and politicizes them remains the same. The reflecting images appear in quicker succession--in shorter, clipped paragraphs--as the narrative builds momentum through its self-contained systems of signification. The birth of the "first white child in Burrard Inlet" (117) is introduced through and around the documentary intrusion of the manifest of the cargo ship, the "Star of Jamaica". The first item of this list, "TEA--No. 1 Congan, chests" (113) reflects Mrs. Richards' journal and her reference to "Tea at Mrs. A's with S., Mrs. A. very big with child" (113) which immediately precedes the birth scene. Tea, the conversation of women and masculine control over the "vessels" that bring the "goods" that are "evidence of his power" to the colony are all intimately connected in this passage. Indeed, as Jeannie Alexander points out, women were the cargo of one such vessel, "the bride ship" (117). Mrs. Alexander's pregnancy is immediately linked to the cargo of the "Star of Jamaica" and to the ideology that facilitates the acquisition of those goods: "the look of a man who has boarded a ship (to leave the trace, the mark of his being there), who would see evidence everywhere of his power.." (114). This image connects with earlier, proprietary relations between men and the land (25). This sort of control is revealed to be a complex weave of definition and domination. It provides the women with "tea to be sipped" and is therefore "a saving grace. the reward of freight" (115).

Placed between the delivery of the child and within the images of the cargo of the "Star of Jamaica," Ana's observation that Jeannie's body seems to Ana to be a "huge mass of flesh" which was "once an appropriate part of Jeannie" but which is now "taking its

own place as if it superceded her" (116-117) makes the interrogation of biological determinism explicit. Like the ship that transports the cargo of masculine power from one colony to another, woman is a "vessel...(ful)filling her destiny" (118). The ideology that has defined her body "supercede[s]" her subject position.

The birth scene that follows these connections is, paradoxically, a space that is a point between the masculine control of conception and of naming. It is "an ancient place...this crossing over into life" (123) that Marlatt constructs in a sophisticated, continuous series of reflecting images and fractured connections between the documents of the Master Narrative and the fictional (re)construction of Ana Richards. The woman-centred moments of birth in both Ana Historic and The Handmaid's Tale are isolated pockets of exclusively feminine space. They are significant and contradictory interspaces in the nomenclature and culture of patriarchal control over both women and children. Annie constructs this space as an active resistance to masculine oppositional representations and definitions. Women are strategically connected here to the

ships men ride into the pages of history. the winning names. the nameless women who are vessels of their destiny. the ship R.H., H.O. ride into history as stars on board the mute matter of being wife and mother--ahistoric, muddled in the mundane, incessantly repeating, their names 'writ in water' (121).

The on-going chronicle of the "Annie Fraser", one of two ships involved in a race near the settlement, punctuates and informs Marlatt's construction of this section. The newspaper account states that

It is, as a general thing, a rule in these cases that the first boat to pass the Judge wins...Well, [the 'Pearl'] came in second, and was consequently

beaten; while the 'Annie Fraser' came in first, and consequently won. That is really the true solution of the whole matter" (124).

The description of Jeannie while in labour echoes images of ships and their symbiotic relationship with the sea. Jeannie is positioned "knees spread, as if afloat in the white sheet" (123) like a ship in full sail on the bed as she prepares to "deliver her cargo". She is "in touch with her body its tides coming in not first nor last nor lost she circles back on herself repeats herself repeats her breathing out and in two heartbeats here not winning or losing" (125). Set apart from the rest of the page, this moment of "not winning or losing" is augmented by the non-oppositional "out and in. out and in" and is central to the representation of this "other" space that the women in the narrative occupy. The alternate space and alternate form of communication that is so intimately connected with women's bodies is made explicit as Ana's description of the birth continues. The baby is "a massive syllable of slippery flesh" which "slide[s] out the open mouth" (126). Jeannie Alexander's immediate reaction is not verbal, but physical. She "touch[es the baby] to make it tell her present in this other language so difficult to translate" (126). The child, the "syllable of flesh", is charged with the task of "telling" his mother's present. Like Annie's relation to Ina and Ana and to her own narrative, this baby is the physical link between the mother, her past and the baby's own future: a legacy that is both physical and, somehow, narrative. This connection is the mode through which the "real history of women" (131) is transmitted and, like Ina's "endow[ment] of continuance...the female line of inheritance" (57), it is the legacy of generations of women. Zoe's assertion that "the real history of women...is unwritten because it runs through our bodies: we give birth to each other"

(131) draws Annie's on-going reinscription of her own mother out of the gaps in her self-narrative project and effectively orchestrates and introduces Annie's examination of her mother's life.

Annie's recuperation of her personal history is woven around and through a series of visual images. As in The Diviners, one of the most interrogative uses of the visual in this novel is explored through the introduction and critical re-viewing of photographs. Annie foregrounds both the subjective stance of the photographer and the formal composition of the photographs which she includes in her self-narrative. She explicitly connects the process of "composing" a photograph with that of writing a narrative. Her encounter with historical photographs in the archives illuminates the way in which even the ostensibly objective "eye" of the camera is simply another authoritative narrative stance. For Manina Jones, Annie's articulation of the act of being "framed, caught in the act, the (f)stop of act, fact" (Ana Historic 56) in a photographic "exposure" echoes the parenthetical position of women in Mrs. Richards' narrative: "fact'." Jones states, "turns out to be an act that brackets the feminine [(f)], making the latter parenthetical to 'the only important events in the world'" (155). For Annie, the most effective way to destabilize these authoritative masculine images is to "step inside the picture and open [them] up" (56). This supremely anamorphic, transgressive gesture shapes this novel's relation to the visual, strategically playing on a shift in point of access, and reworking the relation between viewer and viewed, subject and object.

Photographs and photographic images form other engagements with the intersection of the visual and the historical. As artefacts that suspend "true" images in a

historical moment, they are indisputable "eye witnesses" which are revealed to be decidedly unstable. Representing a single point of view, the static image in the photograph shimmers and fractures, illuminating the omissions and elisions in its composition. In a literal sense which translates evocatively into the interrogative stance of the novel's engagement with history, the photograph is the view of a single eye—one-dimensional and without perspective. Dimensions are added as this "eye" is drawn into a dialogue with the narrating "I" who both fills in the gaps in the visual image and suggests others in the process of its composition

Marlatt uses visual images both figuratively and literally, subverting the ostensibly stable "testimony" of the visual image by exploring the gaps in the eye/I witness accounts. The "photographic framing" (M. Jones That Art 155) in this novel foregrounds its concerns with the ways in which events and individuals are recorded, collected and interpreted as objects—a process which renders the place/person/event as artefact. Marlatt has suggested that a "still photo is a moment frozen out of context, that context which goes on shifting, acting, changing after the f-stop has closed its recording eye" ("Self" 202). As in The Diviners, "reading" photographic images involves an act of simultaneous recuperation and inscription⁴³ which recognizes the limitations of the narrative itself and looks within and beyond boundaries of the image that is being "read". As Glenn Lowry

⁴³ Photographs also appear in The Handmaid's Tale, though less frequently. The most significant photographic "reading" occurs in this text when Offred/June is shown, under very controlled and circumscribed conditions, a photograph of her "missing" daughter and, from that carefully posed photograph, draws conclusions and poses questions about the child's life, welfare and circumstances. There are similarly a number of provocative interrogations of video images discussed earlier in this chapter.

suggests, "photography is a language which involves both writing and reading; it is the perfect metonym in which to frame the masters of objectivity, the agents that have escaped from the writing of (his)tory or the (f)actual" (86).

Annie's reading of the photographs from her own past foregrounds the discontinuity between "official" images of the "eye" witness and the memories of the self-constructing "I". The process of engaging with her personal and cultural history is one of "re-membering, putting things back together again, the things that have been split off" (51). There is no lack of documentary evidence from Annie's childhood. She notes that

we had endless photographs to remind us...the three of us in swimsuits, different ones each year, different shapes and sizes of our growing bodies you presided over, our father invisible behind the camera imaging moments of this female world...tanned apparitions of ourselves it's not that i want to remember, how we looked or thought we ought to look, learning so fast this other looked-at image of ourselves. but how it felt to be alone unseen in the bushes of the canyon" (51-52).

Her reading of these personal artefacts foregrounds the apparent contradictions inherent in oppositional divisions between being either "looked-at" or "invisible". As in Annie's later re-inscriptions of the history of Hastings Mill, the all-female world of these photographs is ordered, viewed and composed through a masculine "eye": in this case, the eye of the camera which is controlled by Annie's "invisible" father. Here, invisibility--being outside of the range of the masculine gaze--is a form of power rather than a sign of elision or silencing. It demonstrates the ability to move outside of the totalizing "tyranny" of the masculine gaze. Indoctrinated into the position of object of that gaze, Annie re-reads her adolescence as a transformation from the careless invisibility of childhood to the spectacle

(for both Mrs. Richards [102] and Annie) of adolescence and womanhood. As an adult woman, the complexities of her subjectivity are "diminished to the tyranny of eyes" (52).

Later, invisibility and "voice-overs" are complexly connected with erasure and silencing. Layers of labels, captions, possible narratives and the significance of point of view in constructing those captions are explored around and through the process of writing the "endless" family photographs and their "official" historical counterparts into Annie's narrative. The family snapshots are juxtaposed with the archival photographs of Hastings Mill which depict "the buildings, the docks, the men" (47) with only "brief references to women" in either the images themselves or the narratives which surround them. The photographs that Annie reads here are carefully composed and contextualized. The men in one photograph assume "the woodsman look, self-evident, the pose" (56). But this process of composition, Marlatt notes, necessarily excludes elements that made up the lived experience of the events: "as for the oxen?" (56). The focus of the photograph itself seems, often, innocuous: "a woodframe bungalow with glassed-in leanto on one end... you can see the shake roof, the two brick chimneys" (120), but within Annie's interrogative narrative, this image of "the Alexanders' first house" foregrounds the layering of interpretation and exclusion involved in the composition and transmission of this artefact and the official story which it documents. The photograph is composed and "taken" by the photographer, "dated 1890" (120). It is narrated on one level through a definitive caption that is informed by later events:

Hastings Sawmill. First dwelling of R.H. Alexander, afterwards manager.
Later occupied by office men as bachelors hall (120).

These elements of its composition are further commented upon by Annie as she writes the photograph into her narrative. She speculates on the point of view of the photographer who "stood outside the picket fence and shot from the corner where the leanto begins"; on the species of the creeper that climbs the wall of the house, "too tall to be a rose, even a rambling rose" and finally raises the questions of omission that have shaped the photograph. There are "five men wearing business suits and posing on or by the railing in various attitudes for posterity" but she asks, "where is Jeannie Alexander in all this?" She notes that the "caption could have read: 'Hastings Sawmill. House of Jeannie Alexander, first white mother'" or "'Site of first white birthing at Kum-kum-lee,' the point having no English geographic name, no transplant label" (126-7). Annie resists the official accounts of these photographs on a number of levels. She notes that the "photographic portrait" of Mrs. Patterson in the same collection shows a woman who is "every inch a lady and scarcely 'hardboiled'" (47) as the authoritative captions suggest. By "stepping inside" the photograph, Annie effectively opens up the possibility of other elisions in hegemonic processes of naming, of definition and of being "at home" (127).

Writing Mrs. Richards enacts a similar transformation from being "unspoken and real in the world" to her gradual materialization in Annie's narrative "present," to actively "writing against her absence" (47). By writing Ana Richards into existence, Annie is "knocking on paper, not wood, tapping like someone blind along the wall of her solitude" (45). Significantly, the woman's invisibility here includes a form of epistemic blindness to her own position: unable to see her context or herself clearly, she is "looking for a way out of the blank that faced her" (45). The role of generations of women in perpetuating their

interspatial position has blurred the ideological distinction between foreground and background. The process of writing herself out of this space simultaneously involves the project of writing herself into it: of establishing a workable position within that space, of defining it, naming it, and simultaneously deconstructing it.

The problematics of re-presenting a figure who has been only parenthetically depicted in official accounts is articulated here through discussions which foreground the contradictions inherent in a system that "insists on what it disavows" (105): "what was her first name? she must have one--so far she has only the name of a dead man, someone somewhere else" (37). In patronymic systems, the woman is paradoxically both present and absent. The "Mrs." attests to her existence but her identity, her subjectivity, is elided by the emphasis on her husband's name⁴⁴. In Annie's recuperative version, Mrs. Richards is "writing against her absence" by speaking out of the gaps in the official narratives in spite of and against silencing and erasure.

If Annie's reinscription of Ana Richards' narrative attempts to articulate the complexity of biological determinism in masculinist discourses and women's interspatial

⁴⁴ Margaret Atwood makes this point effectively in *The Handmaid's Tale* in her depiction of the difficulty in identifying the "handmaid" beyond and within such patronymic definitions and elisions. Janice Morgan notes that women's concern with "writing against her absence" is a characteristic of women's writing in the seventeenth century. She cites Margaret Cavendish (1623-1674) and her fear that she will disappear from history if "[her] Lord Marry again" (Morgan 9). "In this one phrase," Morgan notes, "one senses the fear underlying the energy of [Margaret Cavendish's] ambition; clearly she is 'writing for her life'--to rescue an identity, already precarious and effaced by the legal practices of a patriarchal culture, from the complete oblivion caused by death" (9). The historical voice of Margaret Cavendish is echoed eerily with the projected, future voice of Offred and in the shadowy representation of "Mrs. Richards"--a disturbing continuum of interspatial feminine writing.

positioning in those Master Texts, her recuperation of Ina's story shifts the focus from the multifaceted essentialism of the body to connected, but differently signified, issues of subjectivity within those spaces. The two significant historical narrations: that of the historical Ana Richards and Annie's more personal, archeological, quest for her lost mother that make up Ana Historic are not, of course, mutually exclusive or even parallel narrative quests. The quest for Ana Richards informs the recuperation of Ina which, in turn, is informed by Annie's exploration of the machinations of patriarchal control in both colonial and contemporary cultures. Annie's self-narrative project is dependent upon the process of engaging with both of these women's narratives and with the narratives through and against which they defined themselves and were defined. Positioning herself at a point which distorts and opens up the "gaps" in some of the Master Narratives which elided these women, Annie effectively writes them into her self-narrative: incorporating their varied and contingent subjectivities into the provisional position from which she writes. In this sense, while Stan Dragland reads the novel as

"MarlattwritingAnnie'swritingAnawriting" (179) I would suggest that the "mildly vertiginous feeling" that this narrative elicits in its readers is a result of the multiple, spiralling connections as

MarlattwritesAnnie'swritingAnawritingAnnie'swritingIna'swritingAnnie. The women's stories are interdependent as each simultaneously narrates the others and the point at which she is narrated.

The figure of Ina is, in a very real way, the point at which fiction and history intersect for Annie. It is through Ina that the notion of "historical novels" (16) is explicitly

introduced and through the re-membering (51) lens of Annie's attempt to make sense of her mother's death that her project of drawing Ana Richards out of the interspaces of history takes shape. Drawing her mother's story out through that of Ana Richards, Annie begins to articulate the common elements that have defined and shaped these historical "foremothers" and which continue to influence her on-going self-narrative. The slippage between the pioneer ancestor and Ina evocatively collapses the historical distinctions between the women. This slippage, in turn, foregrounds the more elemental connections between women's positions in the multiply signified and complexly manifest interspaces of history.

Both Ana Richards and Ina are significant and resonant absences (11) in this novel. Annie (re)inscribes Ana through a fictive elaboration of historical documents Mrs Richards was erased when "history married her to Ben Springer and wrote her off". But, as Zoe points out, Mrs. Richards was not so much excised from history as absorbed into its interspaces. History

wrote her in. listed her as belonging. entered as Mrs., she enters his house as his wife. she has no first name, she has no place, no place on the street, not if she's a 'good woman.' her writing stops (134).

Being simultaneously there and not there is a condition against which each of the women in this text struggles. Ana Richards is effectively elided through her marriage and her name. Jeannie Alexander is effaced from official accounts of her home and her husband's history. Like the handmaids in Gilead, "From the point of view of future history... [the women will] be invisible" (The Handmaid's Tale 240).

The physical point of access for these re-visions of history is in the archives where Annie is doing research for Richard's book. It is here that she meets Zoe, who is an agent for opening up a different and resistant⁶⁵ perspective in Annie's self-narrative process. As Zoe draws the focus of Annie's narrative of the birth at Hastings Mill into the present and toward a contemporary feminist reading of women's history, Annie's exploration of that history similarly shifts from the gaps of the archival history to the fissures in her own life.

For the women in Annie's narratives, subject positions which render them invisible are predicated on oppositional notions of self/other, subject/object, body/self that are encoded in and through a discourse that is "difficult to translate" (126) and alien. The ways in which women can most faithfully (re)present their own experiences and their own histories are articulated in the woman-centred, woman-specific spaces between/within/beyond these oppositions. Annie's narrative opens a space for a unique connection between women's narratives and their bodies. Annie clearly distinguishes between the written narratives of masculinist historical method and the on-going, contingent narratives of women. She writes of menstruation as

a mark of myself, my inscription in blood... writing the period that arrives at no full stop. not the hand manipulating the pen. not the language of definition, of epoch and document, language explaining and justifying, but the words that flow from within, running too quick to catch sometimes, at other times just an agonizingly slow trickle. the words of an interior history doesn't include... (90).

⁶⁵ Zoe consistently challenges (90) Annie's troubled connections to the distinction between "history [and] pure invention" (55) and divisive definitions of the "proper" subject and object of narrative (140). Throughout the novel, Zoe provides an alternate, resistant point of view (107, 132, 150).

Like the description of Jeannie Alexander's labour, each woman embodies her own history, which is "unwritten because it runs through our bodies" (131). The unity between the body and the self "perhaps...explains why our writing, which we also live inside of, is different from men's, and not a tool, not a 'pure instrument for getting a grip on the world'" (133) but a continual, changing narrative presence. The act of writing, then, is not the "objective" stance that distances the teller from the tale, but is instead the highly subjective position of "a body insisting itself in the words" (46).

But while menstruation and birth are reclaimed and reinscribed as points at which the internal, continuing narrative is manifest outside of the body (in terms that are radically different from masculine forms of articulation), these points are also ones that have been seized upon within the Master Discourses as points of indisputable division and "betrayal". It is through her exploration of the systemic division between body and self that Mariatt articulates the connections between the control of women and the "powerlines" of colonialism and history. The erasure of Ana Richards from legitimized history has its material parallel in the medical "excision" of Annie's mother, Ina, when she is treated for "madness". Just as language exerts a form of control over the project of constructing a distinct woman-centred subject position within the Master Narrative of history, so the enforcement of definitions of physical control effectively silences the dissident voice of the female "Other". Ina's "treatment" echoes through the text. Her surgery and the resulting erasure of "whole parts" (148) of her identity and the silencing of her voice reflects the political implications of Mrs. Richards' elision from authorized history.

Ina's "hysteria," with its connections to the physical "wrongness" of women, is informed by the biological determinism in Ana Richards' story. This "hysteria" spirals off into other points of connection between body, identity and definition that illuminate and explore contemporary women's position in the interspaces of history:

hyster. the excision of women (who do not act but are acted upon).
hysterectomy, the excision of wombs and ovaries by repression, by
mechanical compression, by ice, by the knife. because we were "wrong"
from the start, our physiology faulty (88).

Ina's "madness" resonates with the concerns about silencing, vision, perspective, totalizing definitions and biological determinism that have informed and shaped the rest of the novel. While the historical texts are connected to and informed by the process of reinscribing Mrs. Richards, the excerpts from medical texts shape Annie's recuperative re-membering of her mother.

Annie structures her self-narrative through an on-going series of conversations with her recently deceased mother. Ina was diagnosed as "paranoid", suffering from "delusions" (134) and "disturbed" (135) by her doctors who "punish [her] for not shaping up" (134). Beyond the medical diagnosis, she is also culturally defined as a "bad wife, [a] rotten mother" (88). Ina is "infected by her body" and as a result, the "conspiracy of doctors...removed your uterus, they pulled your rotten teeth...put electrodes on your misbehaving brain" (88). The process of defining women expands here from the control of their bodies as the site of reproduction in the pioneering culture to include a more insidious and powerful connection to the source of the psychological, subjective and discursive malformation of the "Other".

The charge that Ina is not "shaping up" is another point at which Marlatt connects definitive cultural codes with the intrusion of women's bodies. Adolescence acts as a shifting boundary point in the articulation of this connection. Annie's memories of the changes in her adolescent body and the corresponding changes in cultural significations are echoed in Ina's "monstrousness": "i was slimming into another shape...i was meant to have as a body marked woman's, as if it were a brand name, as if there were a standard shape" (52). As a child whose body is not clearly marked by culturally encoded distinctions, a girl is "one with her body, not yet riven, not split in two--the self and the body that betrays the self" (89). The child is deployed as the point at which the woman is "without history" (19, 20). But with adolescence comes the divisive definitions of women's identities that insist on a hierarchical "split" between body and self. As an adolescent, Annie feels that she is "walking her body as if it were different from her" (50). Oppositional definitions of identity which are predicated on the division of the body from the mind in these images are resisted in Annie's investigation of their distorted manifestations in women's lives. The division is clearly aligned with the masculine, the "male touch" which "required its polar opposite to right the world--split, split" (63)⁶⁶.

Just as in her inscription of the other fissured texts (Ana, the land, history) through which she narrates herself, Annie's articulation of her "inheritance" from her mother enacts the way in which "one missing piece can change the shape of the whole picture" (134). Annie's reading of her mother's dis-ease and treatment focuses on the ways in which Ina's

⁶⁶ Images of "splitting" (11, 51, 89) relay through the text, connecting the "silence of trees" with "the silence of women" (75).

ability to define herself and her "place" is appropriated and controlled by the (male) doctors who ultimately "took [her] imagination, [her] will to create things differently" (149). The split between body and identity is finally, gothically enacted through Ina's treatment. Significant here is the fact that this point reinforces the essential connection between mind and body that Marlatt has been exploring through each of these women's narratives. The material consequence of "put[ting] electrodes on [Ina's] misbehaving brain" (88) is that her ability to create her own narrative and therefore her own identity⁶⁷ is removed. The narrative that "runs through our bodies", has been erased. Ina "keep[s] leaving [her]self behind the next bend. given that '[her]self is everything [she's] been, the trail leading backwards and away from [her]'" (46). The divisions that were encoded as symptomatic of her "madness" are exaggerated and reinforced through her treatment. The Electric Shock Therapy that Ina undergoes does not create a "whole" person, but rather divides her even further, creating an unsurmountable gap between her body and her identity⁶⁸

⁶⁷ Oliver Sacks notes the fundamental connection between narrative and identity: "We have, each of us, a life-story, an inner narrative--whose continuity, whose sense, is our lives. It might be said that each of us constructs and lives, a 'narrative', and that this narrative is our identities... To be ourselves, we must... possess, if need be, re-possess, our life-stories. We must 'recollect' ourselves" (105).

⁶⁸ Again, Marlatt echoes Frame's articulation of the ways in which E.S.T. exaggerates the fissure between subjectivity and the body. Frame notes that the "fear [of the treatment] leads some patients to more madness" (*Faces* 23) and later, "I can hear someone moaning and weeping; it is someone who has woken up in the wrong time and place, for I know that the treatment snatches these things from you and leaves you alone and blind in a nothingness of being" (*Faces* 25).

The psychiatric literature incorporated into this section blandly cites the loss of history and ability in the post-E.S.T. patient: "In the amnesia caused by all electric shocks, the level of the whole intellect is lowered" (145). This is informed by Annie's personal recollection of her mother as she returns from the hospital "a stranger, a small round person collapsed in on herself" (145). Marlatt once again connects the control of women's self-narratives with the mandate of the foresters to "prun[e] back the unproductive. it was all a matter of husbandry. 'the careful management of resources.' for everybody's good, of course. a matter of course. (by definition.)" (146-7)⁶⁹. Her imagination erased, Ina is definitively disconnected from her body, "curled up like a small animal inside" (148) of it.

Masculinist psychiatric practice in the novel insists that the body is distinct from the Subject. The patient is divided into "the self and the body that betrays the self... the body that defeats the self. the body, not even your body. split off, schizophrenic, suffering hysteric malfunction" (89). This divisive, objective language seeps into Annie's "censored" attempts to write within the Master Narrative of history: "it is herself there though she writes 'the' eye and not 'my'. objective: out there and real (possibly) to others" (46). While Annie writes "against [the] absence" (47) that these divisions dictate, Ina has been absorbed into them, silenced by her treatment and her culturally constructed role: "Mum: mum. wandering around in some lost place" (148).

Her mother's death heightens Annie's awareness of the fragmentation of her own subjectivity. As she writes her self-narrative, Annie re-members her mother's fractured past

⁶⁹ This connects with other images of forest management, which, significantly, is Harald's business (94) and with the earlier images of trees that are "clear of limbs[,] of extras of asides" (14).

and creates a provisional unity for both Ina and herself. While Richard urges her to "pull [her]self together" (17), Annie recognizes that "it is up to me to pull you [Ina] through this crumbling apart of words" (11). These mutually constitutive acts of "pulling" begin to enact the continuity between women: the blurring of distinctions between mother and daughter that Zoe had earlier suggested. Annie "feel[s] [her]self in you, irritated at the edges where we overlap" (17). She begins to enact the "continuance, grandmother to mother to daughter, the female line of inheritance" (57) through which women's histories are transmitted.

Like her reading of local history, Annie's project in this exploration of her mother's life and death has been to "break the parentheses" (150)⁷⁰ in which she was confined and made ancillary to the narrative of her own history. She works to articulate the ways in which "whole parts" (148) of her mother were lost and to hear Ina's silenced self-narrative. For Annie, narrating Ina's story and "pull[ing her] together" (17) is both an act of recuperation and of inscription that effectively connects history and identity. Just as her imagined conversations with Catharine Parr Traill helped to shape Morag's relation to her home and to inform her self-narrative in The Diviners, so Annie's "conversations" with her mother, and her historical "foremother", Ana Richards, help her to define her own past and to narrate her present in her own terms. These conversations enact a type of connection and resistance that epitomizes the relationship between the individual and her personal and cultural histories. On the one hand, the coherence of the "official story" is

⁷⁰ This parenthetical status, set off from but nonetheless included in the Master Narrative, is a frequent image in Ana Historic in Annie's engagement with history, in the "bracketed ladies" (83), and in her articulation of Ina's treatment.

attractive. But, as the re-membered voices of Ana and Ina illustrate, the official stories were/are incomplete. Their coherence is revealed to be constructed at the expense of other, perhaps contradictory voices. Annie's self-narrative project enables her to see "where the real began, under the words that pretend something else" (77).

Annie's self-narrative is, paradoxically, enacted through the narrative reconstruction of two women in the interstices of her own narrative. This blending of voices is often chaotic, "you who is you or me" (11), and never cohesive: "i feel myself in you, irritated at the edges where we overlap" (17). But the often resistant, resolutely exploratory dialogue that the intersection of these voices represents illuminates the mutually constitutive relation between the women's histories. The "other" voices that are embedded in Annie's self-narrative reflect and illuminate a non-oppositional form of history that is transmitted, as Zoe suggests, "through our bodies" (131) and through the strategic blurring of boundaries between self and other, mother and daughter, history and fiction, past and present. The disparate voices and positionings are all simultaneously present in the deceptively "singular" voice of the self-narrator. Reinscribing the voices from "the other side of history" (152), Annie's project suggests that these Master Narratives have to be not only "open[ed] up", but "step[ped] inside" (56) of so that the inhabitants of these interspaces can be seen in their own terms. This challenge, in turn, opens up the possibility of other interstitial stories within this alternate, privileged, if contingent, positioning. As in The Handmaid's Tale, the process of opening up a space for reading and writing the elided women in the Master Narrative of history involves a

distorted, fun-house mirror re-viewing of the relation between official identities and the subjectivities which they contain and elide.

Like Marlatt, Atwood uses a strategically placed marker in The Handmaid's Tale through which the narrator reflects (on) her personal history. This device enables the narrator to explore points of connection and points of resistance between her own narrative position and that of the Master Narrative whose interspaces she inhabits. Marlatt's "documentary collage" strategy (M Jones That Art 7) informs and is informed by Annie's on-going project of drawing the voice of the elided woman out of the interspaces of these ostensibly univocal historical documents. In The Handmaid's Tale, Atwood uses strategically placed mirrors to focus the narrative on the process of refraction, distortion and reflection in order to reveal more than the ostensible, "proper," object of the reflection in the reconfiguring mirror. Connection and resistance can be explored and represented in these mirrors at the same moment but from different points of access. The scenes that frame the markers are reflected and refracted through the distorting, revealing mirrors. They inform each other, foregrounding the process of selection in constructing the narrative, and open up a point of alternate access in which the position of the "invisible" handmaid is made, provisionally, visible.

While Marlatt uses the archeological project of digging the "missing persons" (Ana Historic 134) out of the "rubble" of history's Master Narrative, Atwood uses the mirrors as a way of articulating the problematic position of the handmaid--of simultaneously

revealing and exploring her position at the points at which her personal and cultural pasts, her narrative present and her projected future intersect. Offred is writing history from the inside out. In this sense, the project in The Handmaid's Tale is epistemological rather than archeological. The process of writing a self-narrative is occurring at precisely the same point and at the same moment (rather than parallel to or as a companion piece) as the inscription of the authoritative historical text. The two are deployed as simultaneously constructed, mutually informing narratives in which the narrator is effectively both the subject and the object of the resulting text. As in The Diviners and Cat's Eye, where Morag and Elaine have to negotiate a new position in order to be simultaneously subject and object of their works of art, Offred has to rework the linear narrative traditions of history in order to articulate her troubled, interspatial position in her culture.

Atwood's use of mirrors as markers in the novel foregrounds the instability of visual "evidence" and the process of selection inherent in constructing a narrative. Reflected images in distorted mirrors illuminate the indirect relation between the subject, the viewer and the object of the gaze. What is seen in a mirror is viewed and interpreted without being looked at directly. Rather, it is seen by looking at a reflection/representation of that object. Similarly, Offred's narrative is a self-consciously unstable "reconstruction" (144) that has been "arrang[ed]...based on some guesswork and [is] to be regarded as approximate" (314). Through this strategy, she posits a parallel between the function of the mirror and of the text. The relation between the subject position (the seer) and the position of the object (that which is being seen) is achieved through an act of indirection which exists only at the moment of viewing--only at that specific point of

intersection. Like the self-consciously reconstructed(ing) form of her narrative, the mirrors in Offred's tale foreground the instability and mutability of this reflected, once-removed, representation of the "real".

In Foucault's terms, Offred's self-narrative project in the interstices of Gilead's patriarchal ideology is a manifestation of a mode of the "positive unconscious" of vision which "determines not what is seen, but what can be seen" (Rajchman 92). In the academic invisibility of historiographic practice through which Offred's narrative is transmitted, the act of rendering herself visible both through the construction of her subject position and her own provisional history not only accomplishes Offred's ostensible narrative project--the act of narrating/writing her self into history--but also enacts a larger political project which resists the hegemony of dominant modes of "seeing" and reveals the "other side" (147) of those modes. The novel's focus on the process of self-narration illuminates the fact that "[t]here is much more regularity, much more constraint, in which we can see more than we suppose" (Rajchman 92).

Mirrors are complex and sophisticated symbols in a literary text. Associations with other literary mirrors⁷¹ foreground the complexity of these devices as points of contingent, unstable connection between subject, object and medium inherent in the act of looking in a mirror. In visual art, mirrors open up the constrained space of a framed image, revealing elements beyond the ostensible object of the work. Like Van Eyck's "Arnolfini Marriage"

⁷¹ For example, the reversal of the Looking-Glass world of Louis Carroll, the enchantment of the Lady of Shalott as prisoner and artist and the magical window on the world of "Snow White"'s wicked queen.

(Fig. 11) and Escher's self-portraits⁷², the "eye" of the reflective surface problematically and evocatively includes the ordering and conventionally absent "I" of the artist in a work of literary or visual art.

For Lacan, mirrors are important tools for understanding the construction of human identity. Positioned at a pivotal moment of self-awareness (*Écrits* 2), mirrors help the individual to distinguish between self, other and context and provide a point of comparison between these positions. Relations between "persons and things around" (*Écrits* 2) the developing subject inform the definitions of identity constructed in this encounter with the image of "self" in the mirror. Lacan argues that this moment is an essential part of a continued exploration of the correlation between the image in the mirror and the world that is being reflected: "between the movements assumed in the image and the reflected environment, and between this virtual complex and the reality it reduplicates—the child's own body, and the persons and things, around him" (*Écrits* 1).

Like Lacanian theories which posit a complex connection between the Gaze, reflection, and identity, Atwood's use of mirrors in *The Handmaid's Tale* is intimately connected with notions of self-construction. Within the context of this self-narrative, both the constructing/constructed subject and the narrative in/through which Offred writes herself are reflected and distorted in the text's strategically placed mirrors. The narrative's play on doubles and mirrored images is, as Lacan has suggested, a significant point through which its process of self-construction can be explored. But reflections in this text do not "exactly correspond in appearance or effect" (OED). They are instead consistently

⁷² See Figures 4–6.

distorted—multiplied beyond a single image and thrown back from unconventional media. Rather than a “through the looking glass” reversal, the reflections and mirror images in The Handmaid's Tale belie simple correspondence, just as the text as a whole resists an allegorical reading that would support a direct correspondence between Gilead and contemporary western Christian fundamentalism. The mirrors in this text reflect, reveal and distort: illuminating more than their ostensible focus, but problematically and evocatively distorting those reflections so that they, too, become unstable signifiers to be resisted and interrogated

Michèle Lacombe connects the image of the mirror with Offred's physical imprisonment, official invisibility and enforced alienation from the written word.

in the absence of legitimate speech and writing, the environment provides new reading cues for the language or litany of revolt. New mirrors must be found to replace the outlawed and outmoded ones (6).

The “mirrors” of this text are multifaceted. As Roberta White points out, “though mirrors are forbidden to Offred, her world is itself a mirror in which anyone can see reflected large parts of our history” (60)⁷³. I would take White's use of the image of mirrors a step further and suggest that the narrator herself acts as a mirror in this text which reflects (on) Gilead and contemporary North American culture within her self-constructing (re)vision. In this sense, Offred's self-narrative position acts like a reconfiguring anamorphic mirror. She makes it very clear that the reconstruction of her past and the construction of her present are mutually informing projects. As in Ana Historic, the past and the present are not

⁷³ Dorothy Jones suggests that the novel “describes the patriarchal capitalist society in which most of its readers currently live,” (31) and Hammer notes that Gilead is “not the world as it will be, this is the world—symbolically at least—as it is.” (44)

represented as oppositional spaces but are rather mutually constitutive, overlapping categories. There is an on-going dialogue between these positions, which, like the intersection of fiction and history in Marlatt's novel, forms the basis of the narrator's provisionally authoritative stance within her historical/fictional "reconstruction" (144) of her past. Elements, then, that are ostensibly doubled in this text are, through the distorting mirrors that reflect through it, multiplied, refracted and consolidated. Mainstream, oppositional distinctions between subject and object, authority and powerlessness, voice and voicelessness, visible and invisible, history and fiction, written and oral are shattered in the prismatic⁷⁴ narrative lens which reinforces the multiple and distorting relation that each of these positions has to the others. Offred's self-reflexive narrative voice complicates these oppositional stances by opening up and narrating the multiple contradictions at the core of Gilead's Master Narrative.

Offred's narrative voice is itself often a puzzling intersection of culturally defined roles and resistance. Chinmoy Banerjee notes that Offred's "sophisticated, ironic, and poetic voice is paired with a somewhat naive, marginally informed, and apologetic one" ("Alice" 86). These voices, he says, can be easily distinguished: "one is allusive, elliptical, and dense, while the other is garrulous, cliché-ridden, and filled with redundancy" (87). Sherrill Grace calls this an "active double-voicing" ("Listen" 119) and Amin Malik reads this "double voicing" as a process of growth and maturity:

⁷⁴ I use this term to describe the inside/out relation between the protagonist and the political ideologies in and through which she negotiates her identity. Rather than exploring the effects of politics on the individual, ideologies are narrated through the refracting, distorted and fragmenting consciousness of the self-narrator in these texts. By shifting the point of access, the shape of this relation is radically altered.

the heroine's voice is steadily and imperceptively, yet convincingly, transfigured into a full-roundedness... Thus the victim, manipulated and coerced, is metamorphosed into a determined conniver who daringly violates the perverted canons of Gilead (13-14).

For Glenn Deer, this troubled positioning is evidence of a fundamental problem with the novel's narrative voice. It creates a paradoxical position in which "a voluble narrator speaks confidently and precisely about the silence she endured" (219). Like Barbara Garlick, who suggests that Offred is "not at ease with the assumption of authority implied in the role of storyteller" (161), Deer "contend[s] that Atwood's text compels us to see her narrator in two ways that are not entirely compatible: as an innocent recorder and as "a skilled, if self-conscious rhetorician and storyteller" (226).

Deer's primary objection to the plausibility of the novel's narrator lies not so much in the odd texture of her voice, but rather, in the contrast between her position as narrator and her status within the culture in which she lives, a contrast that, I would argue, Offred herself strategically deploys. Deer suggests that

there is an incompatibility between Offred's narration and the position of subjugation she occupies as Handmaid. One might wonder why and how such a narrative intelligence could be subjugated in this way (219).

He later notes that Atwood's narrator "does not speak entirely in the voice of the victim...rather she speaks in the skilled voice of the rhetorician and the fabulator who is purposefully telling a story" (219). Are the positions of culturally-encoded "victim" and of "rhetorician and fabulator" mutually exclusive? For Offred they seem to be mutually constitutive categories and build on a tradition of oral and written narratives that disclose

exactly the ways in which such intelligences have been, and continue to be, subjugated.

Julia Lesage articulates this position as "women's mental colonization" in which she

see[s] our internalized sense of powerlessness, our articulation into masochistic structures of desire, and our playing out of personae that on the surface seem 'passive', 'self-defeating' 'irrational' 'hesitant' 'receptively feminine' or even 'crazy' (426).

Making this distinction between the "surface" manifestations of feminine behaviour and women's existence within/beyond these "personae", Lesage begins to illuminate the ways in which many critical objections to the doubled, apparently contradictory elements of Offred's narrative voice can be addressed in a feminist reading of the politics of that narrative consciousness. Linda Kauffman places this contradictory position in historical context by provocatively connecting the form and voice of The Handmaid's Tale with feminist subversive texts from the eighteenth century⁷⁹. She argues that the novel's epistolary structure enables Atwood to dismantle some of the myths about epistolarity and its apparent isolation from "social issues or politics" (226). Instead, Atwood reveals that

epistolarity is in fact intrinsically political, whether one thinks of Ovid's exile or Clarissa's rebellion against patriarchal bourgeois ideology... Exiled, imprisoned, cloistered, or 'shut up,' epistolary heroines are deeply subversive because for them writing itself is an act of revolt (226).

Susan Lanser similarly connects the politics of the novel with the strategies of women writing in the eighteenth century. In terms which connect the narrative form of this contemporary text with the material circumstances of eighteenth century English women,

⁷⁹ Lanser illustrates women's subversive textual strategy in her discussion of a "secret correspondence" that appeared in Atkinson's Casket in 1832. This letter, though later than the eighteenth century texts referred to here, is an interesting example of women writing "otherwise" and of the strategic use of text/reader complicity in this sort of subversive narrative (Fictions 9-10).

she notes that "In a universe where waiting, inaction, reception predominate, and action is only minimally possible, the narrative act itself becomes the source of possibility" ("Toward" 624). These readings connect The Handmaid's Tale and its strategies with a distinctly feminine, if not feminist, mode—one whose genealogy can be traced convincingly backward to some of the earliest examples of women's subversive/political reinscriptions of the form of the novel. The intertextual and historical relation that Lanser and Kauffman theorize pulls the fictional patriarchal structure of Gilead and its attendant epistemic and physical violation of its female subjects into a dialogue with the historically grounded positions of women and their writing in the English tradition.

As a "source of possibility" (Lanser "Toward" 624), then, the narrative act supercedes physical definitions that are imposed on the women narrators by the culture in which they live. In Gilead, in particular, this physical constraint is clearly connected not only with the limited possibilities for identity, but are very carefully encoded in the relative worth and externally-imposed limitations on women's bodies. Juliet MacCannell connects the constraints on women's relation to language to the ways in which they are physically circumscribed. The resulting "body language" is a form, she suggests, of feminist resistance, "a primary challenge to 'male' domination of discursive forms" (106). This, of course, accords with Lacanian theory in which language itself is held to oppress women because women's subjectivities are constructed within a phallogocentric symbolic order (Cameron 125)⁷⁶.

⁷⁶ Women's exclusion from the symbolic order in both The Handmaid's Tale and Ana Historic is addressed by a number of critics: Dorothy Jones and Joseph Andriano discuss the Scrabble game and its relation to the ways in which "women are forced to play by

Deer's suggestion that Offred's culturally encoded position is somehow incompatible with her narrative position, then, fails to recognize a fundamental point in this text: while she is ancillary to the power structures of Gilead, Offred is not ancillary to her own story. The contradictory position of silenced/speaking subject has cultural and historical precedent. Her narrative position is that of women within patriarchal systems and her voice is that of women writing in the interspaces of western patriarchal culture. Her conflicted narrative stance embodies the continuing paradox of women's official silence and unofficial/unheard speech (gossip, letters, journals, oral tales)⁷⁷. Deer has, unintentionally perhaps, conflated the narrator's position within her culture (as handmaid) with her central position within her own narrative and has been troubled by the resulting contradiction. But Offred is central to her own story, she is authenticated in her own narrative and rendered authoritative through the act of self-conscious narration. The gap between her self-constructive project and her prescribed position within Gileadean culture that Deer and others conflate is, in fact, where this story takes place⁷⁸.

men's rules" in The Handmaid's Tale. Manina Jones (That Art 40), Cooley, (74) Lowry (83) and Tostevin (37) address the differences between men's and women's relation to the Master Text of language in Ana Historic.

⁷⁷ A number of interesting studies have addressed this portion of women's production and its status in/outside of Master Narratives: Lanser's discussion of "Female Ingenuity,"; Tillie Olsen's Silences; Patricia Meyer Spacks's Gossip; and Carolyn G. Heilbrun's essay "What Was Penelope Unweaving?" in Hamlet's Mother and Other Women are among those most applicable to this discussion.

⁷⁸ This becomes most evident in the "Historical Notes". In this section, Professor Pieixoto concurs with Deer's reading of Offred's unsatisfactory narrative stance and, as a result, fails to read her or her narrative on/through her own terms.

The problematic positioning of the interspatial woman in these gaps is revealed through the reflected images in/of strategically placed mirrors. Mirrors, however, are constructed differently from their appearance in Cat's Eye. They are complicated by the fact that the politics of Offred's narrative dictate that she has to write her self-narrative without exposing her self. The most useful device for accomplishing this is the kaleidoscopic, shifting distortion and re-visionary relation between the image and the mirror that defines anamorphosis. This reciprocity allows for a distinct point of access through which the distorted image can be read in "proper" perspective, but which will never reveal a fully reconstituted image. Offred's self-narrative position, then, is simultaneously that of "missing person" (113) and of provisionally realized subject

The reflecting, refracting mirrors in the text thus illuminate the elided, invisible point at which the "unaccountable" (Ana Historic 81) woman and the oppositional strategies of the Master Narratives intersect. Beyond the physical play on reflection and distortion, the text is a resistant, thoughtful "reflection" of an interspatial woman upon the culture in which she lives. It is a satiric, interrogative act of self-reflection in which the subject/object of the text--the identity and story of a single, elided female subject--is revealed through a series of reflections upon the nature of the complex layers of definition that have elided her.

In order to illuminate and articulate her problematically official/unofficial position, Offred attempts to represent both her own position and the context against and within which she is speaking. Her contingent self-construction is therefore shaped both by her active ideological resistance and by the material realities of her context. The project of

writing herself out of the interspaces is therefore as material as it is epistemic. For Offred, telling her story means writing herself into existence. The act of speaking sustains her identity, and indeed her life, within systems that actively and systematically deny, elide and silence that identity. By distorting contemporary cultural systems that define women within a number of totalizing, but invisible, ideological categories, Atwood reflects (on) the extent to which hierarchy, position and relation inform the process of articulating one's position within these discourses.

Atwood's focus on the self-constructing narrator's process of writing herself out of the gaps in Gilead's Master Narrative opens up a space for reading the construction and perpetuation of these systems other-wise. The novel's emphasis on the contingency of narrative perspective through the unstable and self-consciously constructing stance of the first-person narrator (what Deer, Banerjee and others have argued is the inadequacy of that voice) reworks the relationship between the protagonist and the political ideologies in and through which she is constructing her self-narrative. Gilead is, in a very real sense, "within" (33), rather than distinct from, the narrator. Offred's narrative effectively re-views the "official version" of Gilead's ideologies from the inside out and through that alternate perspective, simultaneously reveals the contradictions that sustain its uniform and coherent exterior and reinscribes its univocal historical script. In a culture in which the individual is "sacrific[ed]" (127) for the common good (222), this self-consciously personal narrative effectively undermines the authoritative stance of its ruling élite by speaking from the spaces that it denies in a voice that it has actively attempted to silence.

Ironically, the narrator's emphasis on the visual as a way of defining and ordering her narrative is not alien to Gilead, but is a fundamental part of its official iconography. Social positions and transgressions are visually signified: purple placards mark the bodies of people executed for "gender treachery", anachronistic cassocks mark priests (53) and white coats and "a placard...[with] a drawing of a human foetus" (42) mark doctors who performed abortions. The government's symbol is a winged eye, its spies are called "Eyes". ritualized references to sight are incorporated into most public events and social interactions, and the government enacts its control of the population through carefully orchestrated spectacles (288). Offred's use of visual images and strategies is therefore a sophisticated reinscription of these cultural modes and an active resistance to its totalizing, authoritative, one-dimensional stance. Mieke Bal has theorized a "bond between vision and patriarchal domination" that is "bound up in power-knowledge...and is still so pervasive that the first move in undermining it is to show that it is not the only possible or reasonable [point of view] and that it has a vested interest in pretending it is" (263) "Showing" a point of view other than this dominant one involves an active, resistant form of re-vision that Bal calls "engaged looking" (285).

Bal has suggested that the relation between the visual and the historical is most fruitfully approached "not [as] an archeology but [as] an epistemology--a different way of getting to know" (285). The mirrors in Atwood's novel open up a similar sort of reconfigured engagement. The story of the elided handmaid in this text is not a project that "digs up" lost elements of a Master Narrative (as in Ana Historic) but rather it negotiates a different way of gaining access to her interspatial text. The process of

negotiating this epistemic relation reveals an altered, indirect and ultimately interdependent relation between author/narrator and reader. The use of mirrors and reflection in the text, then, is a significant element in articulating this resistant form of narration. The distorting mirror of Gilead⁷⁹, and the reconstructing, prismatic mirror of Offred's self-constructing narrative position reveal more than is ostensibly reflected in either representation. While the mirror in Cat's Eye, like Elaine's art, is an active, potentially disruptive "eye" in which the "I" of the narrator, and her problematic relation between her art and her subject position, are explored, the central mirror in The Handmaid's Tale is the vehicle through which the "eye" of the state is distorted and subverted and in which the narrating "I" is introduced into the narrative

It is only through an act of "indirect looking" (Bal 285) that distorted images in anamorphic art become accessible to the viewer. The moment of Offred's narration acts like the distorting mirror or strategic point of access that reconfigures the deliberately distorted, "hidden", object of an anamorphic drawing. In Offred's revealing mirror, however, objects are not restored to their "proper" dimensions, but are further distorted to reveal their inner workings, contradictions and ideological underpinnings. This distortion exposes the potential for the exploration of further revelatory gaps in the same, apparently seamless, Master Text. Through the engagement between official and unofficial positions, the Master Narrative splinters outward, reshaped and re-viewed by its encounter with the elided consciousness at its interstices. Offred's penetrating, unauthorized gaze radically

⁷⁹ Dorota Filipczack (171), Dorothy Jones (31), Shannon Henegan (100) and Stephanie Barbe Hammer (44) discuss the ways in which the culture of Gilead distorts contemporary western patriarchal cultures.

reinscribes the history of Gilead by shifting the focus from the dominant voice of the Master Narratives to the resistant, contradictory voice at its core.

Offred's interrogative, resistant construction of a workable subject position in this transitional (127), frontier, space is shaped by recurring images of gaps, reflections and reconstructions. Her narrative is similarly constructed around and through an active renegotiation between unstable narrative assumptions:

It's impossible to say a thing exactly the way it was, because what you say can never be exact, you always have to leave something out, there are too many parts, sides, crosscurrents, nuances (144).

In Gilead's Master Narrative, Offred/June is one of the elements that has been "left out" Her narrative, which articulates the position of the self-narrator by actively re-membering her past through the process of constructing her present, shifts the singular perspective of univocal, linear versions of history to introduce the possibility of multiple layers of simultaneous and often contradictory histories that have been "left out" Her story, then, creates "an illusion of depth, created by a frame, the arrangement of shapes on a flat surface. Perspective is necessary. Otherwise there are only two dimensions" (153). Simultaneously narrating herself and her relation to her eliding, silencing context, Offred creates "tiny peepholes" (31) through which she can gain access to her position and adds dimensions to the Master Narrative that render her "transparent" (171), "background" position visible within her narrative. The handmaids "have learned to see the world in gasps" (40), "aslant" (83) and "at the sides of [their] eyes" (138). These images of deliberate misprision, shifting focus and perspective actively draw the handmaid out of the "background" (171) and away from her official status as "inanimate" object (171) and into

the foreground as the authoritative subject of her own narrative. Placing herself in the paradoxical position of being both subject and object of her own narrative, Offred uses mirrors and images of reflection to mark the intersection of her self-constructive project and the parallel project of re-viewing her oppressive, defining context.

This emphasis on altered vision is evocatively articulated at the moment when Offred and Ofglen see each other fully for the first time in front of "Soul Scrolls"

Now I shift my gaze. What I see is not the machines, but Ofglen, reflected in the glass of the window. She's looking straight at me.

We can see into each other's eyes. This is the first time I've ever seen Ofglen's eyes, directly, steadily, not aslant....

She holds my stare in the glass, level, unwavering. Now it's hard to look away. There's a shock in this seeing (176).

This scene contains many of The Handmaid's Tale's central imagistic strategies: the paradoxical direct/indirect vision that establishes communication and affirmation between the interspatial women, the deliberate, strategic act of shifting focus in order to see these "invisible" subjects clearly, the mechanistic production of Gilead's empty, orthodox, texts and the creation of a conduit for subversive communication in the "heart of Gilead" (33). By articulating her disbelief in Gilead's machine-generated texts at the point at which she first sees her "double", Offred strategically shifts her focus from the Master Narrative that Pieixoto eventually privileges in his reading of "the Handmaid's Tale" to her own resistant, indirect self-narrative project. While Pieixoto has tried to deploy Offred as a window through which Gilead can be explored, Offred enjoins her readers (279) to shift their focus to the reflection in the glass: to see the woman in the narrative not as a transparent medium, but as a fully realized subject.

The moment of connection at "Soul Scrolls" consolidates strategies of visual and narrative indirection in the text and marks other moments of strategic and temporary revision. This "meeting of eyes" (176) shifts Offred and Ofglen from defined objects to acting, speaking individuals. This revelatory moment shatters Offred's isolation and establishes the possibility of a connection between her personal narrative resistance and a larger, organized, movement. During this exchange, the orthodox image of the handmaids "doubled" (33) as they walk down the street refracts to their resistant act of "engaged looking" The "doubling" itself becomes doubled in the reflected images and splintered outward again through the women's "subver{sive}, sedit{iou}s], blasphem{ous}, here{tical}" (177) exchange. As with the other multiply-refracted mirrors in the text, this point of connection opens up the possibility of more disruptive refractions. The handmaids "have made an opening" (178) in the apparently impenetrable façade of Gileadean orthodoxy. The use of these reflective surfaces establishes Offred's paradoxically multiple narrative stance. She is the definitively categorized object of the dominant, ordering Gaze, yet the authoritative subject of her own narrative: simultaneously an opaque medium and fully realized reflection.

Offred's active, engaged and strategically distorting reflection on her personal history and the present narrative refracts beyond her self-narrative. She opens up a space in which the interdependence of the construction of her self-narrative and her interrogation and re-vision of her context can be articulated and explored. Each of the mirrors in the text makes a significant point of connection between the interrogative strategies that shape Offred's narrative and the ideological systems that have silenced her. Her description of

the living room in the Commander's house focuses on "two paintings, both of women" in puritan dress which hang on either side of the fireplace. Offred suggests that the paintings "are possibly authentic" and that Serena Joy "acquired them... [with] the intention of passing them off as ancestors" (89-90). The historical continuity and contemporary legitimacy that Serena Joy seeks through the presence and conspicuous display of the representations of these "appropriated" foremothers is connected here with the Gileadean appropriation of "invisible" mothers through the strategic placement of the "oval mirror" (90) which hangs between the portraits. Serena Joy's deliberate construction here of a personal/ancestral history informs and is informed by the iconography of the narrator's resisting voice. Like Morag, who longs for clearly defined ancestors connected to place, Serena Joy's appropriation of the puritan women works on two mutually informing levels: by foregrounding the appropriation of another, elided and nameless woman's body (a body which is implied, but silent, in the mirror between these paintings); and by mirroring Offred's own project of creating a history from bits and "possibly authentic" pieces from her personal and cultural past.

The resistant act of using the window at Soul Scrolls "other-wise" and the image of the interstitial living room mirror inform the later appearances of authoritative texts, reinscriptive resistance and images of infinitely regressing reflections in Offred's narrative. Perhaps the most significant moment at which these images meet is in the pages of a Vogue from "the time before" (165). Placed almost precisely at the centre of the novel, this transgressive and revelatory moment acts as one of the central anamorphic markers in Offred's narrative. It strategically connects issues of identity, reflection and distortion both

in the definition of historical texts and in Offred's personal history by linking the multiple layers of her self-narrative engagement with the interconnected ideological systems through which she is and has been defined. The magazines in this passage "dealt in transformations; they suggested an endless series of possibilities, extending like the reflections in two mirrors set facing each other, stretching on, replica after replica, to the vanishing point" (165, emphasis mine) This forbidden contact with an historical document becomes even more disruptive when it is reinscribed and incorporated into the handmaid's "other" account of history. Offred juxtaposes the subtextual "promise [of] immortality" (165) encoded in the "endless series of possibilities... one wardrobe after another, one improvement after another, one man after another" (165) with the regimentation and stasis of her own position. This image simultaneously distorts and reflects the "past history of women" (R. White 60) in western culture and in the "present" narrative of Gilead, illuminating the continuity within and between these masculinist systems. Like the carefully deployed ideal in the magazine, the handmaids are assigned to "one man after another" and women's social and sexual positions within both cultures are signified by the clothes that they wear. Juxtaposed with the magazine's representation of exemplary femininity at the end of the twentieth century, the slippage between past and present systems of control strategically reflects and informs the points of connection between the cultures. The uniform images of the fashion models with their "candid eyes, shadowed with makeup... [and] horsy, acquisitive teeth" (165) reflect on the uniformity of women in Gilead and its strictly coded forms of sartorial definition. The colour coding that defines women in Gilead, like the stylized images of feminine independence in Yogue are

manifestations of a masculine, rather than a feminine, articulation of women's cultural positions and sexuality (165)⁸⁰. In the context of The Handmaid's Tale, the act of reading the magazine is central to the novel's spiralling exploration of the connections between authorized history, personal history, self-narration and alternate narrative forms. The intrusion of the magazine into Offred's narrative is a point at which she problematizes the authoritative "truth" of her own self-constructive project. Dizzying in its potential for refractions, this moment splinters outward to problematize the other distorted mirror images in the text and encourages mutually informing acts of "engaged looking" as Offred's self-narrative continues.

Another such moment of continuity and distortion takes place in the unofficial "club" of the Commanders. The visit to "Jezebel's" illuminates the accepted but unacknowledged fissures in the official doctrine of Gilead on a number of interconnected levels. The ordered, puritan home life and the eroticized, harem-like confines of the hotel are mirror images of each other: one enacting the appropriation of women's bodies for reproductive purposes, the other encoding and confining women for masculine sexual pleasure. Offred's movement "through the looking glass" here is signified through her gradual sartorial transformation from handmaid to wife to prostitute as she moves between

⁸⁰ Mirrors and mirroring are fundamental elements in the construction of these magazine images. Ellen McCracken notes that women's magazines "usually present the reader with a symbolic mirror image of herself...the eyes of the many models in ads are level with our own and stare back at us as if they were our reflection in a mirror". The magazines, she argues, connect these "unattainable" images with the larger ideological project of creating and sustaining "ideals" of feminine behaviour (129). The inclusion of this sort of defining and distorting image in this text foregrounds the points of connection between Gilead's construction of ideal femininity and similar exaggerated constructions in contemporary culture.

her assigned room and the ambiguously defined space at the club. It is significant that, while Offred connects mirrors with her self-narrative stance, and indeed she is the only character in the text who is explicitly reflected in a mirror¹¹, the only place in which she looks directly at a reflection of herself is in Jezebel's. If "context is all" (154, 202), then this space where the boundary between "sacred vessel" (146) and sexual slave is blurred reveals the instability of the ideology that has deployed definitions of women in these artificial, oppositional terms. By placing herself squarely in the gap between these terms, Offred is able to illuminate the other, and for her, more significant gap in the same ideology: her subjectivity within these totalizing and unstable systems. This moment of radical instability in Gilead's Master Text is another point at which Offred's cultural past and present momentarily and significantly intersect: illuminating the distortions of patriarchal systems in the "heart of Gilead"

Dressed in clothes that have been "scroung[ed] or salvag[ed]" (247) the women in Jezebel's

are tropical, they are dressed in all kinds of bright festive gear. Some of them have on outfits like mine, feathers and glister, cut high up on the thighs, low over the breasts. Some are in olden-days lingerie, shortie nightgowns, baby-doll pyjamas, the occasional see-through negligee. Some are in bathing suits...some are jogging shorts and sun halters...[t]here are even a few in cheerleaders' outfits (246-7).

The Commander justifies the existence of this breach of orthodoxy by outlining a form of biological determinism that defines women's roles according to masculine sexual "needs".

¹¹ Serena Joy appears only as a "blue figure", Offred's "obverse" (271), and while it can be assumed that Moira is also reflected in the mirrors "backstage" as "Jezebel's", it is only Offred's reflection that is represented in this part of the narrative (254, 264).

He explicitly connects the "tropical" variety of the women's "disguises" (248) with the images in the fashion magazines in his study:

Nature demands variety, for men. It stands to reason, it's part of the procreational strategy... Women know that instinctively. Why did they buy so many different clothes, in the old days? To trick the men into thinking they were several different women. A new one each day (249).

The variety of women that the Commanders provide for their "natural" desire for "different women" nonetheless contradicts their code of strictly controlled polygamy. Jezebel's is "officially" (248) forbidden, but the "senior officials" from "all branches" (249) of Gilead's power élite are nonetheless present. The existence of the women at Jezebel's, like that of the handmaids, is fundamentally interspatial.

Jezebel's is in the unauthorized space, where the Commander is flagrantly "breaking the rules" (248), that Offred and Moira meet for the last time. Like her other visual explorations in the text (40), Offred explores the lobby of the hotel in similarly disrupted "pulses, quick flickers of the eyes" (250). Offred and Moira exchange a subversive signal that originated in the Red Centre and arrange to meet, as before, in the washroom. The reflected images of Moira as sexual slave and Offred as reproductive slave come together at the moment at which they are standing side by side reflected in the washroom mirror. Moira has figured prominently in Offred's personal history to this point and her absence, like the loss of June's mother, has been a troubling gap in this story. Her presence provisionally fills a significant fissure in Offred's narrative. Like Zoe in Marlatt's text, Moira provides moments of active resistance that contrast sharply with Offred's less overtly political form of strategic reinscription. Moira was "like an elevator with open

sides. She made us dizzy...Moira was our fantasy" (143)⁸². Moira's story, told in the first person in the interspatial, woman-centred "backstage" (254) area of an unofficial space, simultaneously fills in a gap in Offred's narrative, opens up the possibility of more such resistant episodes and introduces another interstitial voice into Offred's ostensibly univocal narrative. Like Offred, Moira "knows there is a point" (255) to telling her story. The act of narrating her elided personal history will, however temporarily, prove that she "still exist[s]" (295) and continue the exchange of "unofficial news" (21) that runs beneath and between the words and pages of Gilead's authoritative texts.

For Atwood's readers, Moira's account opens up other gaps in Offred's narrative. Her story illuminates the strategies that the Gileadean government uses to enforce its orthodoxy and discovers the fate of Offred's mother (264). It confirms the existence of the "Underground Femaleroad" to which Pieixoto alludes (313) and talks about its structure and organization. By extending the boundaries of Offred's narrative beyond her first person text, Moira's tale fills in gaps in both of the official and unofficial histories of Gilead. Her story reveals the machinations of the systems that have elided and silenced Gilead's "lost" women. In this way Moira's story reveals that every narrative in The Handmaid's Tale, however interstitial and revised, is dependent upon the gaps that it contains for its shape. Each of these gaps is itself a narrative that is riddled with further fissures and omissions. The infinitely regressive, layered mutuality evoked by the "reflections in two mirrors" (165) become an inherent part of the strategic, refracting narrative stance that forms and shapes Atwood's text. The Quakers, for example, who

⁸² And, like Zoe, this resistant figure is explicitly described as a lesbian (180).

form a link in the chain of Moira's escape through the "Underground Femaleroad" (258), reflect back to the television report of an "underground espionage ring" that had been "smuggling precious national resources over the border to Canada" (93). Moira describes her capture and her separation from her would-be rescuers: "[The Eyes] picked us up just as we were coming out the back door to go down to the dock. Me and the guy, and his wife too. They were an older couple, in their fifties...I don't know what became of them" (260). The gap that is opened up through the introduction of this nameless couple refracts backward, briefly, to the televised images of the arrest of "two...Quakers...a man and a woman...both of them are about fifty" (93) who Offred watches on the newscast in the Commander's living room. They disappear from the narrative at this point, like Offred's mother herself: brief images reflected through the eye of a camera. But the refracting intrusion of these other stories in Offred's narrative provides a glimpse through strategically placed "peepholes" (31) which reveal other disruptive, resistant "tales" beyond and within the surface narrative that she is constructing. They are some of the "many parts, sides, crosscurrents [and] nuances" that are left out of any narrative "reconstruction" (144).

Perhaps the most significant of the reflecting, revelatory images in the text is the interstitial, distorting hallway mirror in the Commander's house. Roberta White argues that this is the central mirror in the narrative. It "is a reminder of the constant watchfulness of the state" (159). Like its counterpart in *Cat's Eye*⁴³, the pier glass in *The Handmaid's*

⁴³ Rooke reads the inclusion of Van Eyck's "The Arnolfini Marriage" as a subtextual presence linked to the convex mirror in both the Commander's house and that of Giovanni Arnolfini in the painting. The novel and painting are further connected by the latin

Tale reflects more than is contained in the frame of the text that we are reading.

Positioned physically in a decidedly in-between space, it is associated both with the handmaid's interspatial positioning and with the strategic distortions in her self-narrative. It is "round, convex, a pier-glass" (19) designed "to fill up the masonry between windows" (OED). Hung in the hallway, near the stairs, it is connected with the interspaces of the house, spaces which are in, but not of the main sections of the building but which are, nonetheless, essential to maintaining the connections between those sections. The pier-glass is "like the eye of a fish" in which Offred sees herself "like a distorted shadow, a parody of something" (19) as she descends the stairs. An ironic play on the blind "eyes" that are Gilead's symbol, this reflecting "eye" reveals the "I" that has been rendered invisible through/to the dominant "eye". This mirror appears throughout Offred's self-narrative, marking moments of fracture and illuminating both the strategic distortions in her own account and the resonant gaps in Gilead's authoritative Master Narrative.

The reflecting appearances of the "pier glass" foreground its essential investment as a marker for moments of "directed looking" and of radical and disruptive fragmentation in Offred's text. The act of directing the gaze strategically away from the ostensible object of the work of art and instead toward another, reflective, surface within which the object is viewed askance and approached "other-wise" is incorporated into Offred's narrative through the introduction of her image in the interspatial mirror: "I turn my head so that the white wings framing my face direct my vision towards [the mirror]... I can see it as I go

"scribbling" on the frame (margins) of the mirror that evokes the distorted Latin message in Offred's cupboard.

down the stairs" (19). This introduction foregrounds not only its exclusive connection with the handmaid, but the process through which the reflection becomes, momentarily and fleetingly, visible. Glimpses of the interstitial woman in this mirror mark moments of illuminating disruption throughout Offred's narrative.

Like the reflecting images and phrases on either side of the documentary evidence in Ana Historic, the subsequent appearances of the hallway mirror in The Handmaid's Tale "frames" Offred's self-narrative. Her story is refracted through the mirror's distorting, fragmenting surface, reflecting and illuminating the interdependence of the authorized and unauthorized spaces that make up Gileadean culture. As in Ana Historic, the self-narrative is written through and around these reflecting, refracting markers. In The Handmaid's Tale, Offred's narrative frames the fragmenting, reflecting hallway mirror and splinters outward through its reconfiguring surface. By refracting through the self-constructing voice of the first person narrator, the stability of Gilead's Master Text is further destabilized as the "I" of the self-narrator is momentarily conflated--through her relation with the mirror--with the watchful, ordering, representing "eye" of the text that we are reading. With each appearance of the mirror, its relation to the objects which it reflects become increasingly complex. Moments on either side of its distorting "eye" inform each other and refract further outward, including and revealing more about the contradictions that are at the core of Gilead's Master Narrative.

The mirror's second appearance, when Offred is reflected "distant and white and distorted, framed in the hall mirror, which bulges outward like an eye under pressure" (58-9) reinforces its connection with distortion and point of view and introduces the strategic

use of framing that will inform its appearances in the rest of the text. Offred's subversive emphasis on constructing identity and a more material subversion of Gilead's political structure frame and reflect through this appearance of the distorting glass. Immediately before this second appearance of the hallway mirror, Ofglen sends her first, tentative signal to Offred. She "gives a little nod. She hesitates, as if to say something more, but then she turns away and walks down the street...[s]he's like my own reflection, in a mirror from which I am moving away" (54). On the other side of the mirror, the Commander is standing in the hallway when Offred returns, "his back to me, ...dark against [the room's] light". He "turns, hesitates, walks forward. Towards me...he pauses, I can't see his face, he's looking at me...but then he...steps to one side to avoid touching me, inclines his head, is gone" (59). Both of these moments "bulge" out of the narrative, intimating, but not revealing, the later fissures in Gileadean orthodoxy with which they are associated. Each is, like Offred's own self-narrative position at this point, "distant...and distorted". These transgressive moments are mirror images of each other, each reflecting (on) the other in the mirror of Offred's reconfiguring narrative, sending disruptive messages which "violate custom" (59)

Both of these moments refract beyond the immediacy of their appearance in the narrative toward larger, institutional fissures in Gilead's seamless façade⁸⁴ and reflect inward to open a discursive space in which Offred can continue to construct her own resistant subject position. Offred describes the Commander's presence in the hallway

⁸⁴ Specifically, the organized resistance of the Mayday Underground and the unofficial "institution" of Jezebel's.

through images of boundaries transcended, non-verbal communication and disconcerting revelation that reflect the self-narrative representation of her "distorted, framed" image in the "pressured" eye of Gilead: "Something has been shown to me, but what is it? Like the flag of an unknown country, seen for an instant above a curve of hill, it could mean attack, it could mean parley, it could mean the edge of something, a territory. The signals animals give one another" (59). Couched in militaristic images, this moment refracts outward to the propagandistic accounts of Gilead's military on the television in the living room (93), through the glass to Ofglen's unexpected, disruptive signal "from the edge of something" (59), further, to the soldierly simplicity of Nick's room (272) and even to Pieixoto's use of militaristic language in his paper (316)⁸⁵.

Offred's engagement with issues of biological determinism and definition are similarly refracted and connected through and around the next intrusion of the hallway mirror. On one side her reflection as "a brief waif in the eye of glass" (89), Offred becomes acutely aware of her body and the profound significance that its appropriation has had on the ways in which she has come to define herself: "I cannot avoid seeing, now, the small tattoo on my ankle: Four digits and an eye, a passport in reverse... I am a natural resource" (75). Indelibly inscribed on her body, this official categorization reinforces the institutional connection between personal and state control of women. Offred's description of a "passport in reverse" foregrounds the distorted, inverted strategies of Gilead's cultural control. The "eye" in the tattoo refracts through the description of the hall mirror as an

⁸⁵ As he attempts to "authenticate" the identity of the Handmaid, he and Wade "pursued a second line of attack" and talk about the women "recruited for reproductive purposes".

"eye of glass" (89) and connects with the propagandistic and unreliable "eye" of/on the television in the living room (92-3). Offred's reference to herself as a "natural resource" similarly refracts beyond and through this moment to images on the television (93) and, ultimately, to Pieixoto's narrative (322-3).

In this section, the "brief" glimpse of the "waif" in the mirror reflects outward to the static, deracinated, invisible position of the handmaid in Gileadean culture. Offred strategically connects her own position in Gilead's interspaces to the relationship between her narrative and the state's authoritative texts. The strategic juxtaposition of these disparate accounts refracts the image of the interstitial woman further, connecting the story of Offred's position in Gilead with its historical antecedents in western, masculinist, imperial ideologies:

[O]ne of the things I wasn't prepared for [was] the amount of unfilled time, the long parentheses of nothing...I remember walking in art galleries, through the nineteenth century: the obsession they had then with harems. Dozens of paintings of harems...Studies of sedentary flesh, painted by men who'd never been there. These pictures were supposed to be erotic, and I thought they were, at the time; but I see now what they were really about. They were paintings about suspended animation; about waiting, about objects not in use (79).

By making the connection between the orientalist construction of the harem and Offred's position explicit, Atwood splinters the narrative yet again, connecting Offred's perception of her own position as sexual/reproductive slave with its historical roots, and addressing the nature of the construction of its representation. The ideological and narrative positions evoked in this passage are complex and multi-layered. Beyond the historical/cultural fact of harems, Offred specifically foregrounds the voyeuristic male gaze in this allusion and draws attention to the artistic, constructed fictive ("never seen") representation of these

spaces. She notes that in dominant narratives, the harems are definitive interspaces; imaginary places in masculinist and orientalist discourses because, of course, no western man could enter a harem. By evoking this myth of masculinist, imperialist appropriation of women's bodies as coded sites of cultural/racial control in which the women are fictionalized, "parenthe[tical]...objects" (79) of the masculine gaze, Offred destabilizes Gilead's claim to narrative authority and shifts the focus of Gilead's history from the official text to the process through which that Narrative was constructed.

This multi-faceted passage refracts through the mirror of the handmaid's narrative position to her own moment of suspended animation; defined, as the women in the paintings of the harem are defined, by her body. On the other side of the mirror, "I wait, for the household to assemble...It's my fault, this waste of...time. Not mine, but my body's, if there is a difference" (91). Again, the images on either side of the mirror are connected through Offred's emerging ability to name the politics of her position. Offred's description of her body here illuminates the extent to which it is paradoxically divided from her "Self" Like Annie's description of her adolescent self in Ana Historic, the material reality of biological determinism reinforces this sort of division in which the body "supercedes" (Ana Historic 117) identity. On one side of the mirror, Offred's body has "arrange[d] itself differently" around a "central object, the shape of a pear, which is hard and more real than I am...inside it is a space, huge as the sky at night and dark and curved like that, though black-red rather than black" (The Handmaid's Tale 84). On the other side, her body is the central object around which the household is arranged. Through the image in the distorting, revelatory mirror, this process that has redefined the "centre" of her body is

mirrored in the artificial arrangement of the household around the handmaid. The images of infinite regression, and of spaces within spaces, allow Offred to construct her subject position in opposition to, yet paradoxically also in allegiance with, this totalizing official definition which is "more real" in the "eye" of Gilead's power structures than the "I" of her elided subject position. Her subject position is accessible "brief[ly]" through her refracting mirror images, but remains strategically elusive and provisional—coded and undecipherable in the terms of the Master Narrative.

It is through the destabilized television "news" that the connection between Offred's interrogation of biological determinism and Gilead's political structure is made explicit. Offred's reading of the televised images that she encounters in the living room before the Ceremony, similarly destabilizes the authority of Gilead's official texts. Her reading refracts outward to the other authoritative texts which are reflected in/through this section. The moment when Offred watches the television reflects the later officially forbidden encounter with written texts in the Commander's study. The engagement with this visual text is connected further with the Commander's control and interpretation of the written text during the "public" part of the Ceremony. Offred challenges the authority of the propagandistic use of these visual narratives. The act of viewing the televised news "askance" informs her interrogative reading of the other authoritative narratives that follow: the Commander's interpreted reading of the "Rachel and Leah stuff" (99) and the allusion to the reading of the beatitudes at the Red Centre that "there was no way of checking" (100). The act of "reading" these televised images, of asking "who knows if it is true? It could be old clips, it could be faked" (93) similarly illuminates her deliberately

"fake" reinscription of her personal history and fragmenting intrusion of "old clips" in her self-narrative.

The television, like the mirror, is a significant marker at this point in the novel. It consolidates the images of interspaces, vision, resistance and biological determinism (33, 211, 287-8). It informs and reflects them through the rest of Offred's narrative. The television anchorman connects Offred's earlier allusions to the existence of a subversive underground movement with the images of "Eyes" and with Offred's gradually emerging articulation of her position within Gilead: "Now [the anchorman is] telling us that an underground espionage ring has been cracked, by a team of Eyes, working with an inside informant. The ring has been smuggling precious natural resources over the border to Canada" (93). This moment echoes backward and forward in the text: connecting June and Luke's own attempted escape to Canada (95) with her description of herself as a "natural resource" in the passage preceding this mirrored section. Unstable references to resistance and escape retract beyond the immediacy of these accounts to inform (as I discussed earlier) the later inclusion of Moira's attempted escape and to Piexoto's discussion of the "Underground Femaleroad" (313).

The mirror appears again shortly after the sections constructed around the rituals of the Ceremony. The sexual/reproductive moment of the ritual is framed by Offred's transgressive desires ("I want to steal something" [108]) and reinscriptive thoughts (114-116). Reflecting back to the Commander's earlier appearance in the hallway, Offred moves "out of place" and "past the fishy on the hall wall". She sees "my white shape, of tented body, hair down my back like a mane, my eyes gleaming" (108). When Nick appears in the

living room, he and Offred are "mirrors" (109): an evocative refraction of the earlier image of mirrors reflecting mirrors (if Offred and Nick are, as the text states, "mirrors" rather than mirror images) that sets them up in an image of infinite, reflecting regression which, in turn, opens up the possibility of an endless series of revelatory moments through the shattering intrusion of this one unorthodox episode.

This transgressive meeting indeed introduces a space for viewing the other unauthorized, disruptive meetings in the gaps of Offred's narrative. It reflects through the anamorphic mirror to their later, arranged meeting which, in turn, is the mirror image of the Ceremony and further to their clandestine meetings in similarly interstitial spaces (280). Each of these moments informs and shapes the orthodox pairings as it relays through the narrative. The image of the hallway mirror between these meetings marks the connections between Offred's first nocturnal encounter with Nick as the Commander's messenger and Serena Joy's later "heretical" (215) sexual appropriation of these two "low status" (27) members of the household. These "other" pairings in "other" spaces set up further mirrored layers of relation in the house--affiliations and allegiances beyond those which have been officially prescribed.

Offred next appears in the hallway mirror as "a red shape in the edge of my own field of vision" (219). This "sidelong" view is the image through which Serena Joy's "heresy" (215) reflects the Commander's explanation of the rationale that has shaped Gilead's biologically determined practice (222). Contrasted with the Commander's delineation of Gilead's ideology is the material reality of the practice that is articulated through the experiences of the handmaid. These official doctrines are turned inside out

when Serena Joy plots to "try it [conception] another way" (215). While reproduction has its most material impact on the women in Gilead, "Give me children, or else I die" (99), it is also symbolically significant to the ruling men. The status of the Commander's household depends on Offred's ability to conceive and bear a healthy child as the collection of the household around her before the Ceremony suggests. The orthodox interpretation of that child's conception is that the Commander, the patriarch, is its biological father. The Commander's status is partially defined and greatly enhanced by his ability to reproduce. Fatherhood, Pieixoto notes, is "redolent of status [and] highly prized" (323). The Commander's fertility, like his privileged position in Gilead's hierarchy, is therefore never overtly in question. His status as patriarch--both culturally and biologically--is absolute and inviolable. A woman's voice introduces an alternate version of this orthodox stance: a women-centred, mirror-image of the official pairing that proposes Nick as a surrogate father. Serena Joy's plot supports the letter of Gilead's hierarchical codes while simultaneously undermining its spirit by assigning the transmission of the masculine line to the "other man" of the house, Nick. This reworking of surrogacy, infidelity, and alternate pairings for reproductive purposes is a distorted image of the official construction of the handmaid as surrogate mother. Serena Joy takes over the authoritative position of "leader" of this "other" ceremony in which Nick becomes the household's "other" surrogate in the quest for children, authority and official status.

The exchange between Serena Joy and Offred as they plan this transgression reflects and is informed by the earlier unauthorized and unorthodox conversation between Offred and Ofglen outside of "Soul Scrolls" (175). The moments of exchange, of

"involved looking" (Bal 264), between these women signifies differently in each instance. But the significance of the moments themselves continue to inform each other-- foregrounding strategic interrogations, re-visions and subversions of Master Narratives from the woman's point of view. Serena Joy acknowledges that while "you can't officially...it's done. Women do it all the time" (215). The handmaid and the wife are transformed into "cronies" parodically evoking images of "some girlish stratagem of plays and flirtation" (215). On the other side of the distorting/revelatory mirror are the Commander's attempts to "explain things, justify himself" (221) and the culture which he helped to create, to Offred. The problem with "the time before", he explains, "wasn't only with the women. The main problem was with the men". This statement is an ironic reflection of Serena Joy's heretical suggestion that their immediate problem (childlessness) is, in this case, with the Commander (215). Offred's position in both of these conversations is marginal and reflective. In each, she sits opposite the "central" speaker, outwardly deferring to their opinions. She appears to be a passive, sympathetic recipient of their confidences and strategies but is simultaneously, inwardly narrating an interrogative, alternate commentary on their accounts. She is both speaking, active narrator and passive object. Both conversations reveal significant gaps in the official codes of reproduction, control and relationships. Both foreground the relation between power and definition-- between the Commander's play on physical positions of power with Offred (221) and Serena Joy's manipulation of a more subversive sort of power which is "a collusion of a sort, a betrayal of a sort" (216). Perhaps most significantly in this exploration of

interspaces, both conversations definitively and subversively inscribe the resonant, reverberating gap between ideology and practice.

The material reality of the women's unauthorized collusion in this section is once again made explicit in the distorting hallway mirror. Descending the stairs, the mirror reflects "a blue shape, a red shape...Myself, my obverse" (271). Just as the Commander and Nick are confederates in the illicit visit to Jezebel's, Serena Joy and Offred are "cronies" in their nocturnal movement "out of place". Nick and the Commander are similarly reflected as mirror images in their relations with Offred: one relationship deliberately hidden from Serena Joy, the other orchestrated by her. The reflected image in the glass connects the two nocturnal meetings and the earlier sartorial deception when Offred was transformed from handmaid to wife to prostitute and back. Because the reflections are slightly distorted, each provides an ironic commentary on the others. They foreground official strategies of control and definition (266) that have shaped these spaces and ironically illuminate the deliberate revisions that each of the characters constructs. This penultimate appearance of the mirror gestures backward to Offred's reinscription of her own past and outward to the collective past of western culture as she echoes the words of the Nazi's mistress (155): "[the Commander is] not a monster" (267). Offred's unofficial meetings, then, reflect outward. Each is constructed as a fissure—a contradiction that destabilizes the core of Gilead's official appropriation of the patriarchal script and positions it at the point at which personal history, cultural history and Offred's fictive reinscriptions intersect.

As the image of the hallway mirror has reflected through the text to this point, its association with Offred's self-narrative project and with the interrogation of Gilead's authoritative text(s) has become increasingly complex. The mirror reflects both within the narrative itself—through its reflected series of images—and outside of the text to images within contemporary western culture.

The mirror's final appearance in the text reflects and explodes the fractured, inconclusive end of the self-narrative and splinters it outward to both Atwood's fictive project and Piexoto's historical reconstruction. The final appearance of the mirror is preceded by the shattering of Offred's provisional relationships with her female "reflections": the revelation of Ofglen's ("my own reflection" [54]) suicide and of Serena Joy's ("my obverse" [271]) discovery of the trip to Jezebel's. The removal of these two female reflections leaves the mirror blank. It has become an unseeing eye. It marks, but does not reflect, the dramatic episode that shifts the hallway from an in-between space to a central one as the handmaid's testimony concludes. The relative positioning of Serena and Offred is marked by the mirror, "Serena Joy stands in the hallway, under the mirror, looking up" (306) and reflects back to its earlier connection with distortion (19) and distance (58) in the Commander's attempts to "distan[ce] himself" from the transgressive woman and his "shrinking" stature. Like the scenes that frame the mirror's appearance here, this final scene informs the representation of the mirror itself. Ofglen's suicide when "she saw the van coming for her" (297) is the mirror image of Offred's own reflections as she sits in her room (304) and of the parallel arrival of an ominous black van. But the refusal here to describe the image in the hall mirror is a visual parallel to the blankness of

the narrative's non-oppositional ending. Like The Diviners, The Handmaid's Tale ends with an ambiguous construction of an ostensibly oppositional image: "I step up, into the darkness within; or else the light" (307). Offred moves here from the interspaces of Gilead's authoritative text to the gap that is her own narrative. Her movement, flanked by two ambiguously signified "eyes" is related in contradictory, but evocative terms: "Whether this is my end or a new beginning I have no way of knowing" (307). She steps out of the narrative, and out of the mirror, into either "darkness...or...light" (307). Even before the "Historical Notes" confirm Offred's (even temporary) escape from Gilead (313, 323), the "reflective quality" (315) of her narrative and the reflecting, retracting markers in her text alert the reader to the interspatial self-narrative project and to the narrator's consistent resistance to linear textual strategies. The ambiguity of the concluding images, then, gesture (forward) back to the narrative's beginning--the point at which the narrator decides that she "is tired of keeping silent" (305)--and reflect back to the moment at which she begins to speak.

Conclusion

In this study, I argue that contemporary Canadian women use visual strategies in their novels as a device through which they can articulate their positions within dominant cultural systems. My reading of *The Diviners*, *Cat's Eye*, *The Handmaid's Tale* and *Ana Historic* examines these novels in the same interrogative, contingent and resistant terms in which they were written. Articulating the position of the interspatial woman, who is *in* but not *of* her cultural context, requires a critical and narrative strategy that illuminates the gaps in the Master Narratives to which these figures have been relegated. If women are traditionally encoded as parenthetical, "background" (*Ana Historic* 35) figures, as these texts suggest, then it requires a strategic shift in focus to foreground that "background" space. Such a revision resists oppositional definitions and engages the politics of dominant ideological structures from within the intensely personal point of view of a self-constructing woman narrator. Literary anamorphosis is thus an act of "engaged looking" (Bal 285) on the part of the narrator and the critic.

My readings of these novels have challenged critics who discuss the ostensibly circular shape of these texts (Greene *Changing* 15). Reading these novels through the anamorphic paradigm reads their ostensibly circular structure as a series of complex, reflective images and associations which refract through the texts. These "markers" are mutually constitutive and are dependent on both the other markers in the text and on the context in which they appear for their role within the narrative. Their relation is similar to

the mutually constitutive relation between an anamorphic painting and the reconfiguring mirror in which it is viewed. They reflect (on) the body of the narrative and (on) each other. In this way they create a coherent set of mutually informing images which move throughout the text: images whose interpretation shifts and intensifies at each encounter with another marker.

The novels' active, engaged distortion of generic categories and narrative politics explodes images within the Master Narratives and reveals the apparatus around which they have been constructed. Like an anamorphic mirror, they are not two-dimensional. These reflections are more prismatic and kaleidoscopic than simply reflective. They refract the images which they contain both back into the text itself and outward to inform the reader about the context within which it is produced. By pairing image and mirror, the anamorphic form accounts for (a) the series of distorted and unmediated authorial intrusions and (b) the spiralling, self-reflexive nature of the texts. It accounts for the shape of these works: for their strategic use of fragmentation and the disruptive inclusion of documentary evidence and visual references.

Specifically, the fragmented shape of these novels is a narrative echo of the way in which a kaleidoscope works. By fragmenting their texts, and foregrounding the provisional nature of the relation between the sections, Laurence, Atwood and Marlatt have created strategically unstable narratives through which the unstable positionings of their protagonists can be articulated. This fragmentation opens a space for articulating the relation between the political and the personal in a way that moves beyond and through the opposition terms in which this relation has traditionally been encoded. It accounts for

the different ways in which a single story can be told: not only by the different voices in the tale itself, but also by the same narrator from a number of different points of access. Different versions of these stories do not appear in a linear series, but are, instead, represented as existing simultaneously. It is therefore not the events of "history" itself that are the focal point of these narratives, but the ordering, constructing consciousness which actively and selectively sorts through the "rubble" of historical documents and accounts and produces a workable version of events and a provisional subject position.

All four novels allow for an intimate examination of both the process of constructing a narrative and a glimpse into the relation between the individual consciousness and the politics that it shapes. These texts focus on the person in the political (inter)space. As Pieixoto's "Historical Notes" illuminate, Offred's testimony does not, it seems, reveal much about the inner "workings of Gileadean empire" (322). But, as I have argued, Pieixoto's testimony, together with the tale he transcribes, does. What Pieixoto pieces together is about the inner workings of Gilead. It is about the disruptive, contradictory interspaces of that carefully defined space. It is about the ideology of Gilead as it is filtered through and altered by the consciousness of the resistant voice at its interstices. Such is the case in each of the novels discussed here: the self-narrative stance is an inherently political one. It enacts a process of interrogation, resistance and reinscription that engages Master Narratives from the inside out. As these authors (both the authors in and of the texts) have constructed themselves, they have done so through and against the texts that have defined them. For Morag and Elaine, the process of creating art as a woman involves reworking the relationship between women and the Master Narrative of

artistic practice. This process is a complex one for, as both women reveal, the process of constructing art is intimately connected at every level with the culture in which they live. For Annie and Offred, their resistance is enacted against forms of historically/culturally enforced norms of biological determinism. Both narrators are aware of the ways in which control is manifest in the shifting definitions of legitimacy and authority. They are conscious of the ways in which women are defined through their bodies and the ways in which those definitions are used to exclude them from the body of history. And it is at this point that they locate the body of their text.

I have argued here that the incomplete participation in generic categories and the troubling narrative voices in these novels are not failings but are, rather, deliberately deployed and provisional narrative stances that focus on the process of constructing a narrative. Like the Master Narratives which they interrogate and explode, these "other" texts contain within them elements which contradict their positions and which both conform to and resist the terms upon which the Master Narratives have been inscribed. These contradictory positions are not elided or silenced, but are accommodated and foregrounded. With each reading, the relations between the fragmented sections of these novels shift to reveal alternate relations. It is by incorporating this shifting, provisional relation into a critical reading that the politics and the radical reworking of contemporary narrative forms which these texts embody becomes, temporarily, visible.

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Illustrations



● **Figure 1: Erhard Schon, "Vexierbild." Anamorphic image of Charles V, Ferdinand I, Pope Paul III and Francis I.**

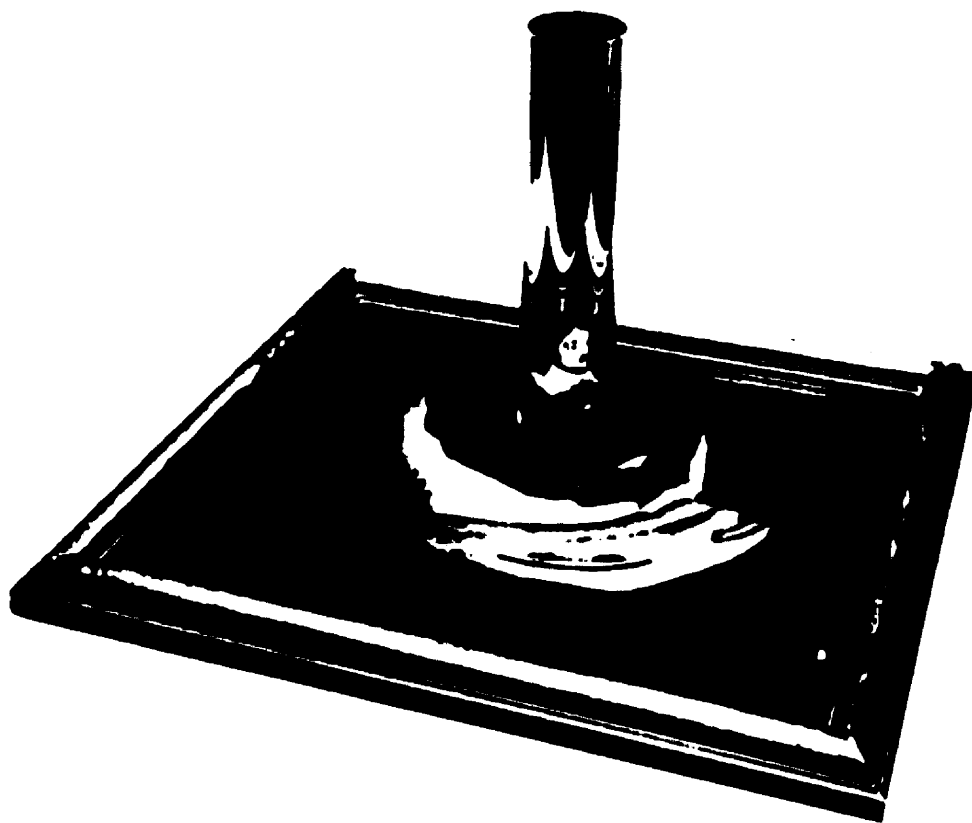


Figure 2: Artist Unknown. Anamorphic Portrait of Charles I with illustration of image reconfigured in cylindrical mirror

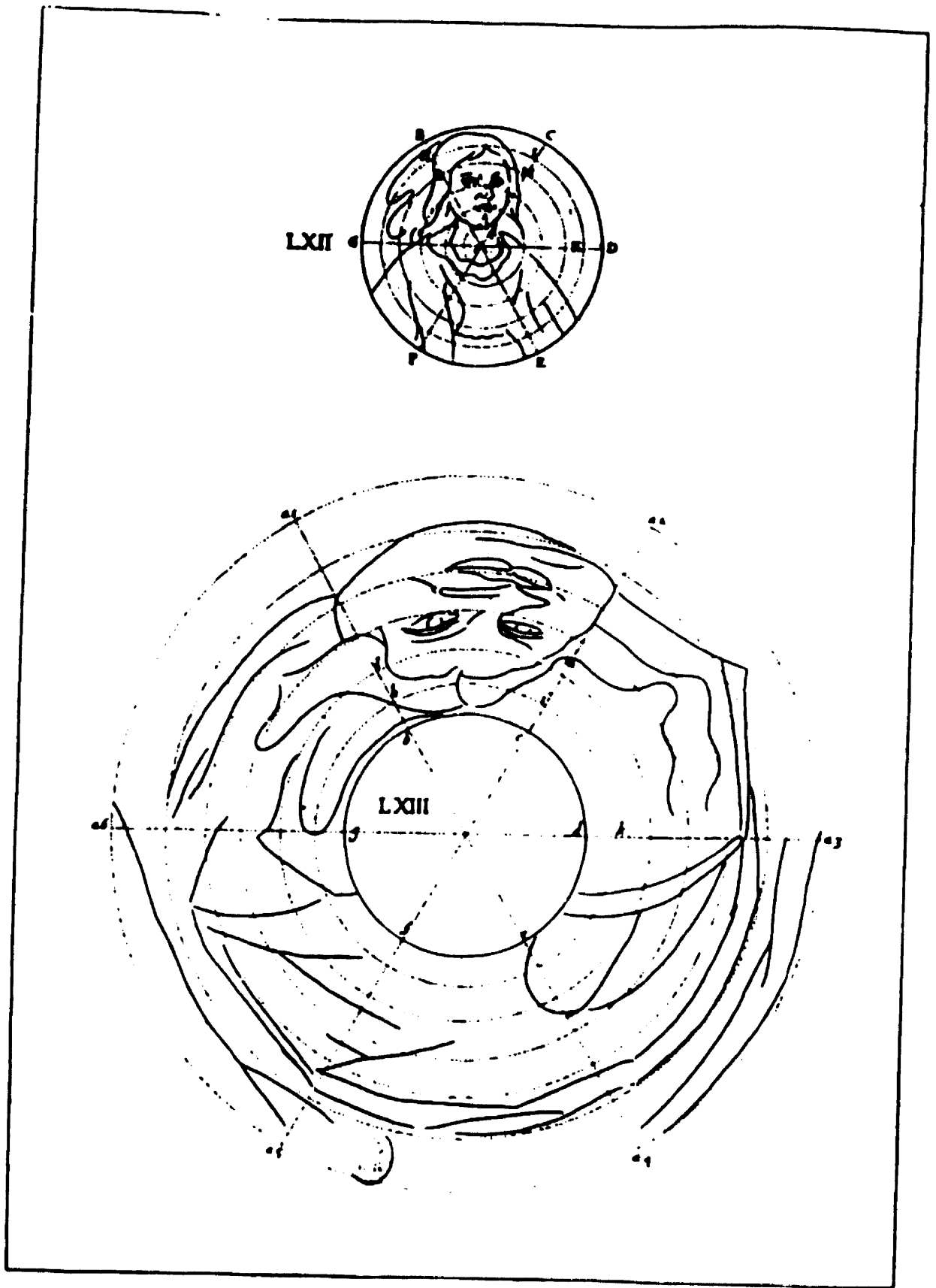
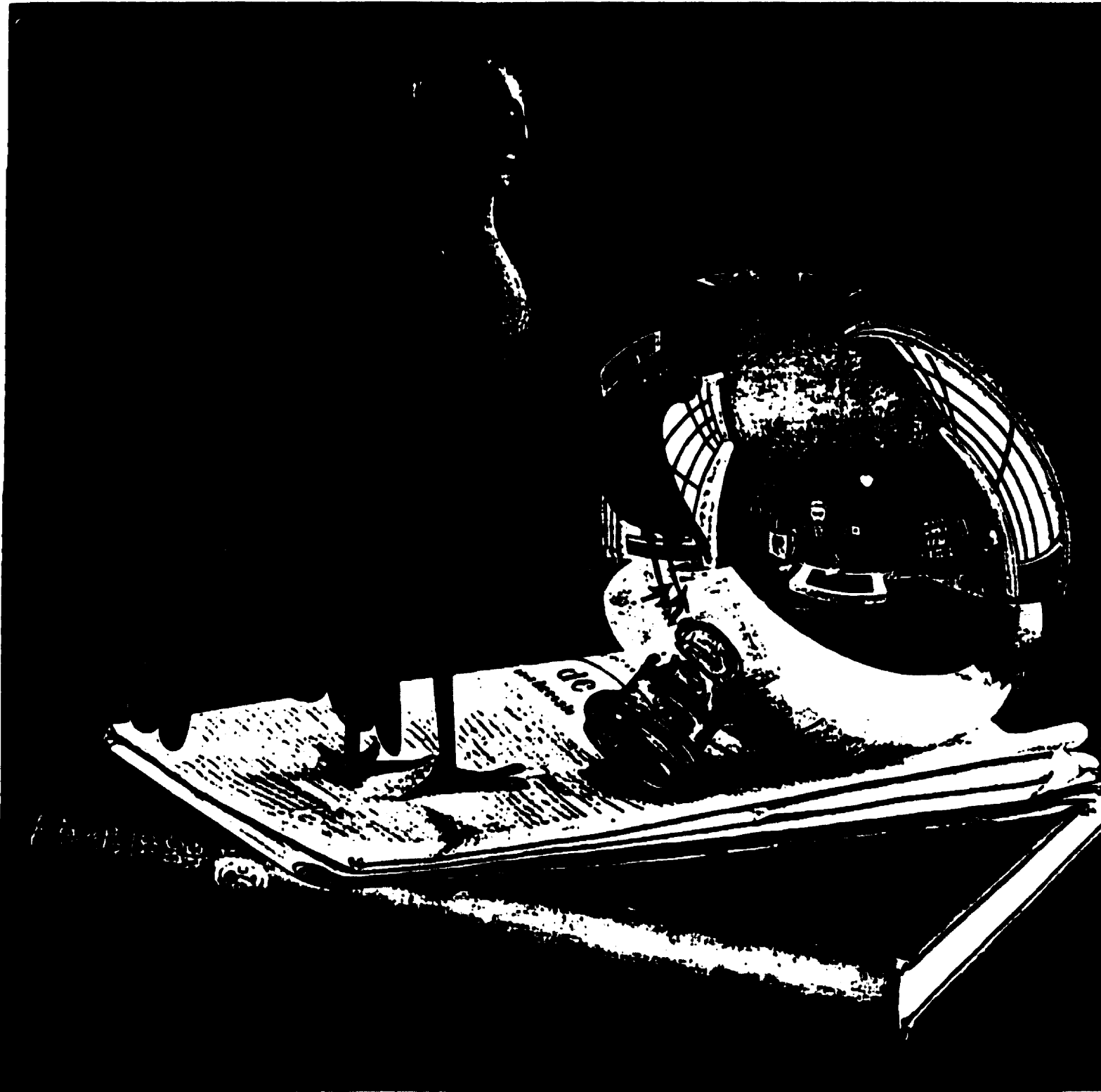


Figure 3. J-F Nicéron. Geometrical diagram of a conical anamorphosis



● **Figure 4: M.C Escher, "Still Life with Reflecting Sphere".**



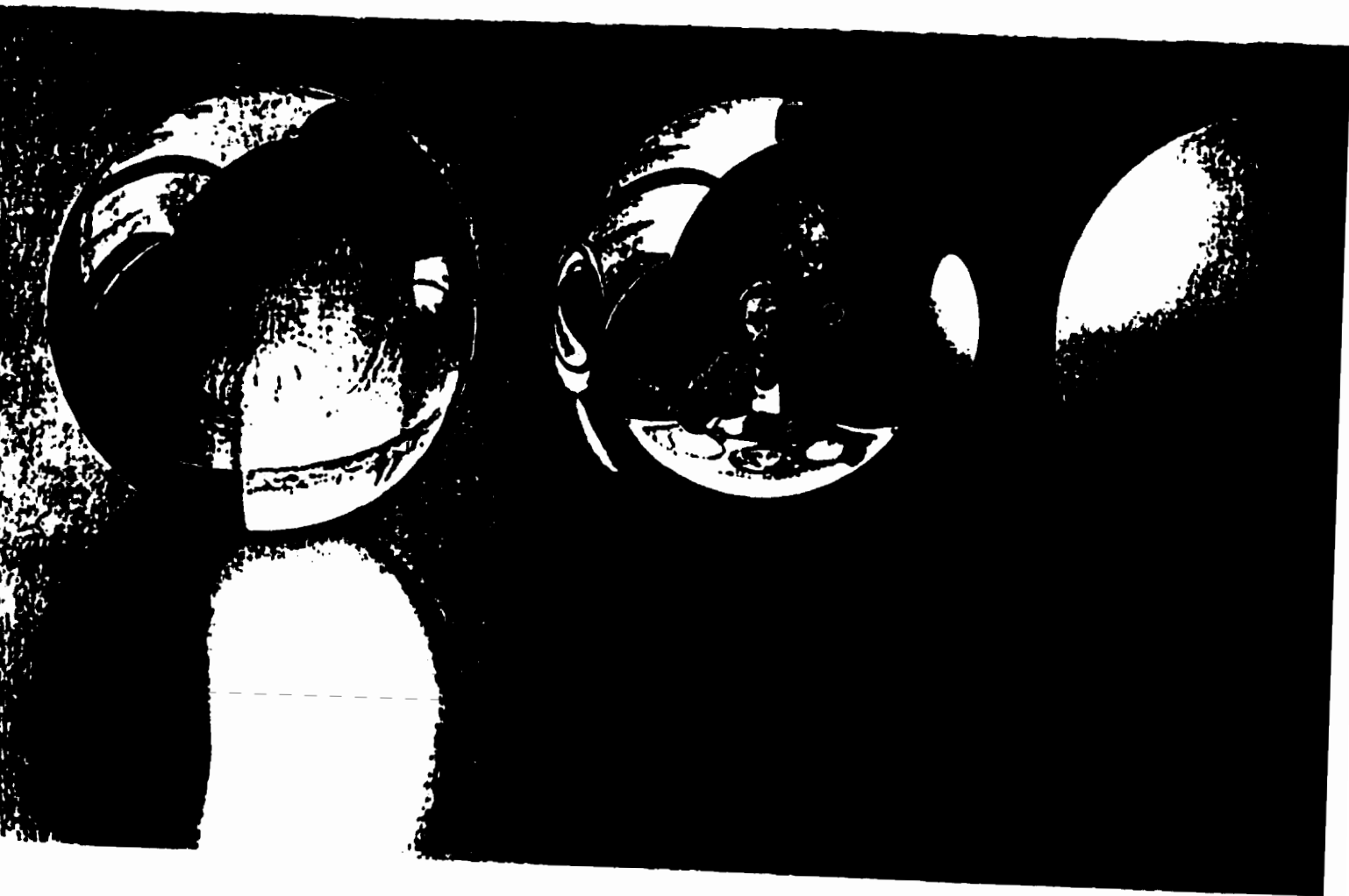


Figure 6: M.C. Escher, "Three Spheres".



Figure 7: M C Escher, "Drawing Hands"

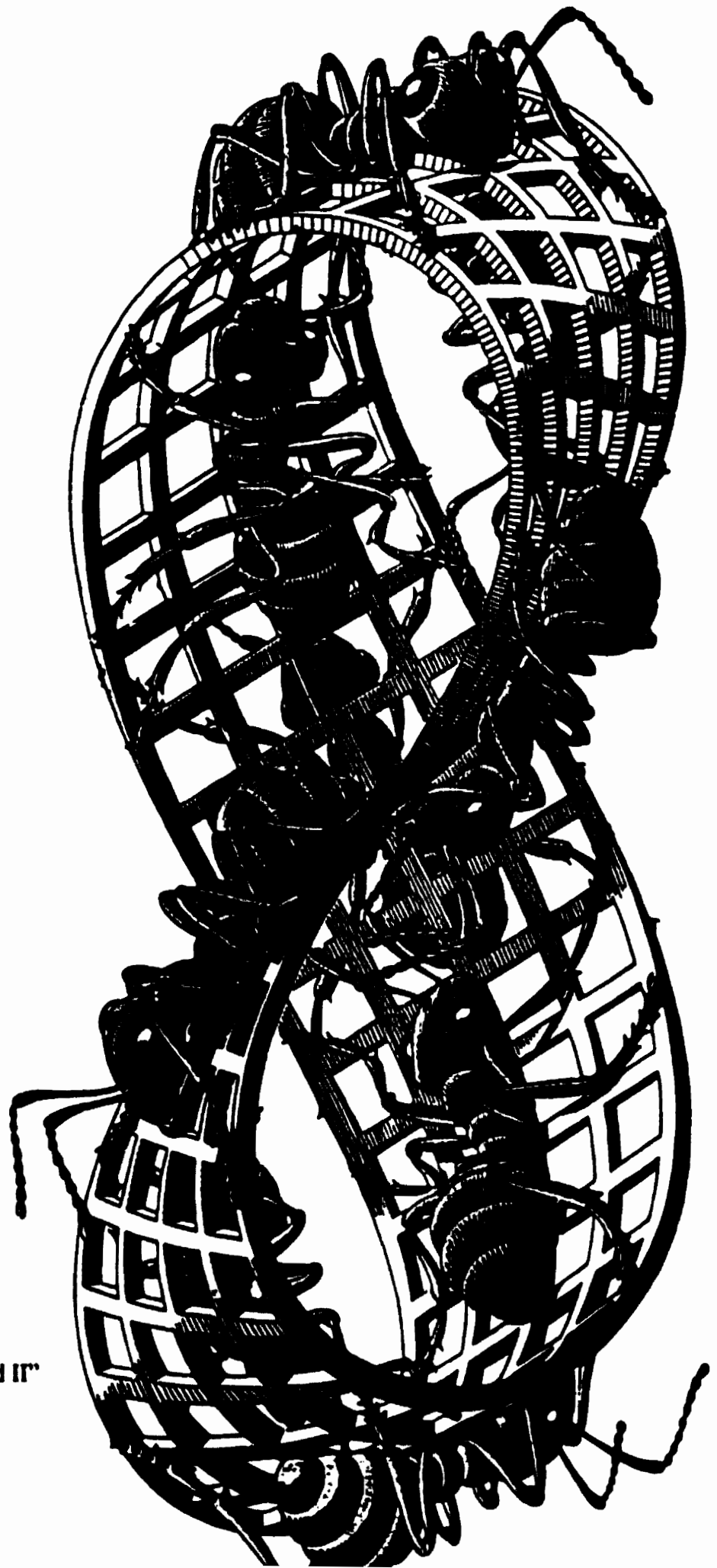


Figure 8: M.C. Escher, "Möbius Band II"



Old woman or young lady?

Figure 9: E. G. Boring, "Young Woman or Old?"

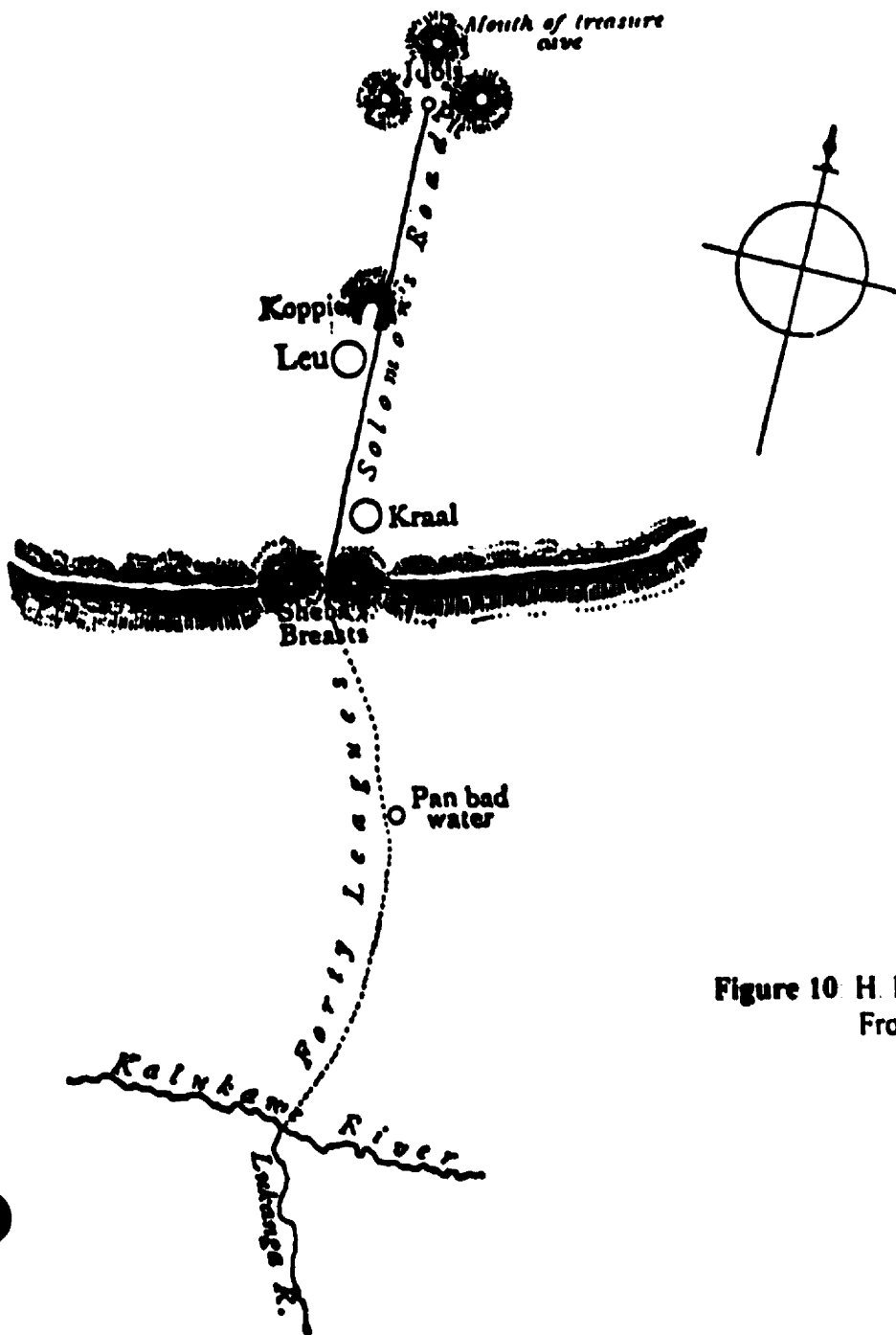


Figure 10 H. Rider Haggard,
From *King Solomon's Mines*

SKETCH MAP OF THE ROUTE TO KING SOLOMON'S MINES.

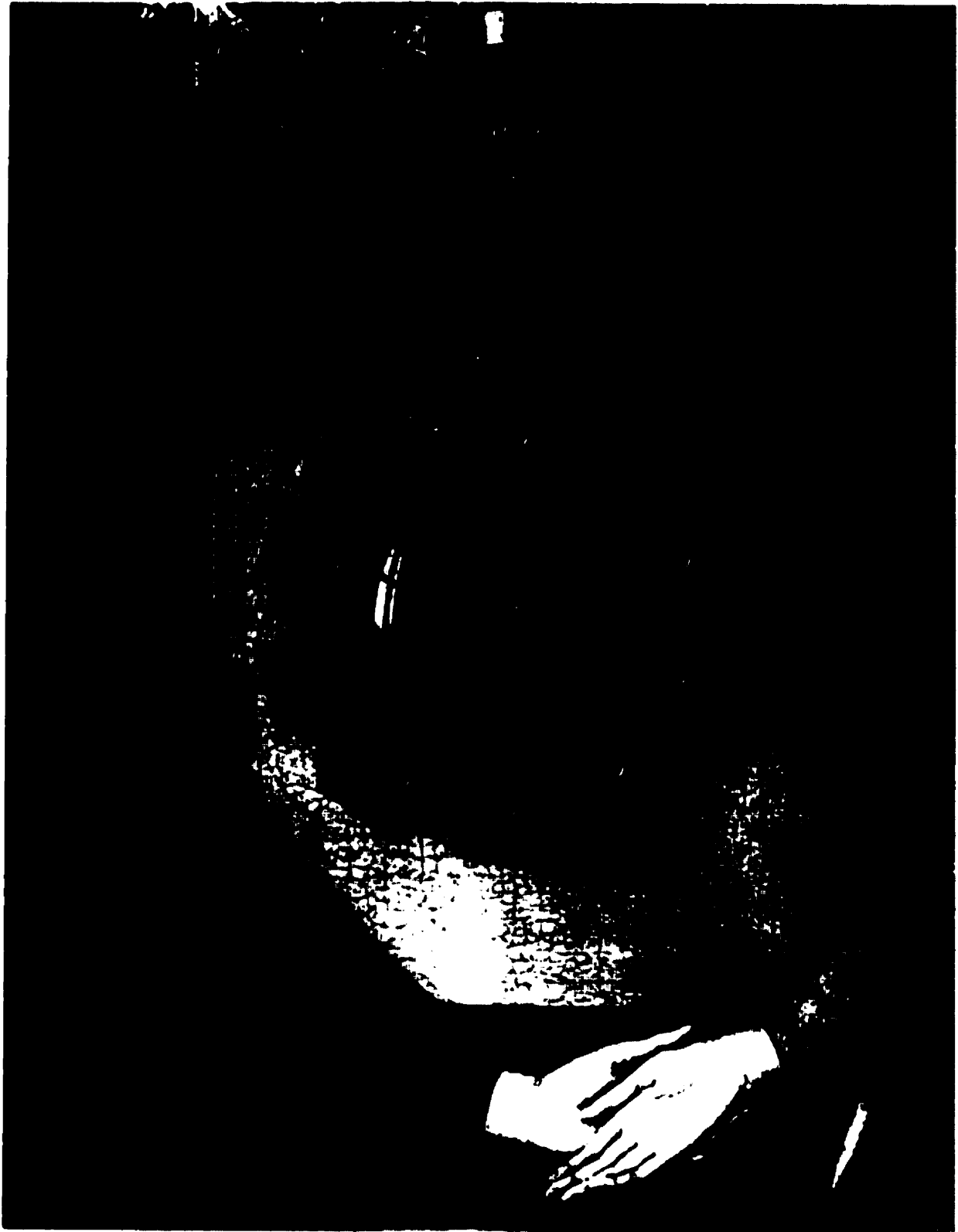


Figure 11 Jan van Eyck "Giovanni Arnolfini and Jeanne Cenami" (detail)