

**THE UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY**

**Towards a Caregiving Reading of Women's Memoirs**

**by**

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## Abstract

Women's memoirs call for an ethical, feminist reading practice. A caregiving reading reflects ongoing critical studies that interpret autobiographical texts as both constructed and connected to those who write them, while considering the relationship between the critical reader and memoir writer. Like Women's Ways of Knowing's "connected knower," and Nel Noddings' "one-caring," the reader acknowledges readers and writers' different, shifting positions, which Patrocinio Schweikart terms "intersubjective communication".

A caregiving reading responds to the representations of various forms of caregiving in each of seven memoirs by five writers: Margaret Laurence's Dance on the Earth: A Memoir, Jill Ker Conway's The Road from Coorain and True North: A Memoir, Ellen Prescott's Mondays are Yellow, Sundays are Grey, Eva Brewster's Progeny of Light/Vanished in Darkness, and Elizabeth Brewster's two autobiographical prose/poetry texts Away from Home and The Invention of Truth. Each of the memoir writers foregrounds the importance of form and intention, and implicitly or explicitly theorizes reading, offering the reader a means to attend to the memoirs.

Laurence claims maternal identity to create a form from which she emphasizes the political relevance of and connection between women's, environmental, disarmament, and social justice issues. I read Jill Ker Conway's two memoirs as a representation of a learning process through Women's

Ways of Knowing's concept of constructed knowing, which facilitates an interpretation of her construction of herself as a female student and her difficult relationship with her mother. Identifying a feminist social practice in memoir and in criticism is the focus of reading Ellen Prescott's memoir, while reading Eva Brewster's memoir emphasizes the importance of the idea of the individual in relation, as does the memoir and de Beauvoir's Ethics of Ambiguity. A reading practice that represents a different form of critical interpretation is the goal of the final chapter on Elizabeth Brewster's two memoirs. Read as collage, they suggest the connected, creative potential of writer and readers.

While a caregiving reading offers particular strategies for responding to memoirs, it represents an extension of feminist theories of ethics and criticism, rather than a fixed position or set of rules.



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I found myself dependent on a pause, a rose, something on paper. It is a way of saying I want you, too, to have this experience, so that we are more alike, so that we are closer, bound together, sharing a point of view--so that we are "coming from the same place."

Lyn Hejinian, My Life

## Chapter One:

### Towards a Caregiving Practice of Reading (Memoirs)

#### Feminism 101

Instead of being the doormat  
get up and be the door

---"Feminism 101," Lillian Allen

I have to reenter a kind of Feminism 101 every time I write critically about women's writing. This involves taking into account what and whose purposes the critical texts serve, and what norms of critical authority and practice that citing them establishes, as well as questioning the effects of my own critical practice. Erin Soros' devastating poem, "Sentence," which is in part a response to Foucault's theories of discipline and to some of the assumptions behind composition evaluation, represents the dilemma of citing established critical authorities such as Foucault. She asks, playing on "prose" and "position," and "Father"/"author":

don't they (don't i) want to proposition an Other voice  
in the (F.)author's role? (27)

Soros' poem imagines a feminist voice that moves away from the rigid criterion for evaluation of written work, exemplified by the marking grid that she includes. It imagines "whistburied voices" of "m(others)" that cannot be heard through patriarchal standards and structures, voices that could empower women to "get up and be the door" as Lillian Allen urges. Both poems reminded me that I wanted a feminist critical practice that could not only hear but also

join these voices. My goal became to find a way of reading women's memoirs consistent with practices of criticism that attend to form, history, and ideology but also recognize the contribution of feminist theory and, in particular, the ideal of a practice that is both relational, or connected, and caregiving.

A focus on the critic's relation to writer and text is a focus on ethics. Laurence Buell's essay "In Pursuit of Ethics," in the January 1999 issue of the PMLA, points to a resurgence of interest in ethics as a topic of discussion in literary studies. Arguably, questions of ethics have always been central to feminist literary inquiry as women discussed issues of canonicity, exclusion, voice, and positioning. While feminist criticism only indirectly informs Buell's discussion, I will link two elements that Buell observes in debates about ethics and literary studies--subjectivity as socially constructed and reading as interpersonal--to issues in feminist theory that focusses on women's autobiographical writing in particular.

Buell notes that "the new ethical inquiry tends to favor recuperation of authorial agency in the production of texts, without ceasing to acknowledge that texts are also in some sense socially constructed" (12). Contemporary autobiography studies has often been concerned with agency and construction. In "Performativity, Autobiographical Practice, Resistance," for example, Sidonie Smith emphasizes not only that autobiographical texts are constructed, but

also that the subjects whom they represent are textual constructions. Smith chooses Judith Butler's term "performative" to argue that "the 'self' so often invoked in self-expressive theories of autobiography is not a noun, a thing-in-itself, waiting to be materialized through the text," ("Performativity" 17) but is rather constituted in writing. The reading effect of seemingly "accessing the intimate inner self of the autobiographer" is, according to Smith, an effect of "narrative performativity" which "constitutes interiority" (18). By contrast, Russell Brown challenges an emphasis on construction as performativity. Writing about Margaret Laurence's letters to Al Purdy, he suggests that performativity implies lack of sincerity or wholeness:

While in the past twenty years or so, especially within the critical community we have increasingly discussed "identity" as something constructed rather than essential and have come to emphasize the performative aspects of personality. Laurence's ideas about individual identity seem to emerge out of that widely diffused and fashionable version of mid-century existentialism and existential influenced psychology, which instead emphasized integrity and wholeness. From such a perspective, to think of someone as "performing" much less masking, identity would be to attribute a lack of sincerity to the individual. Worse it would suggest that he [sic] had failed to achieve what was so often the touchstone value of that era, authenticity. (220)

Implicit in Brown's critique of constructivism is an emphasis on attending to the context of the writer. Brown's concern is understandable if performativity is conflated with mask or charade, but wholeness is different from

authenticity and may itself represent an effect of a performative practice. Laurence's memoir Dance on the Earth, for example, which I discuss in chapter two, allows her to perform wholeness, bringing together (constructing) disparate elements of her life as a mother and writer, without revealing all and without relying on the concept of authenticity which frequently follows from, and perpetuates, the concept of a unitary subject. The emphasis on construction allows writers such as Laurence to respond to roles and identities constructed as natural. Smith's reading construction as performative assumes the textual construction of a self that offers agency, rather than representing inauthenticity.<sup>1</sup> Writing an autobiographical text may involve constructing an ideal self, not in order to simply emphasize construction itself, but in order to become the subject performed in the text.

The second area of concern that Buell identifies as part of the development of an ethical criticism is the concept of writing as interpersonal or relational. Buell describes the interpersonal as "the basis of both reading and sociality," (15) defined as social action. "The interpersonal as the basis of both reading and sociality" (Buell 15) has been a major theme in feminist theory and in critical response to autobiography in particular, whether it has focused on the

1 Evelyn J. Hinz, writing about the dramatic lineage of autobiography, describes it as a social ritual that (trans)forms identity (209). The assumption is that healing and social action is enabled by a process of actualization through, and reflected in, writing.

relationship of texts by women to texts by men, on representations of individuals and relationships within women's writing, or on the positions of readers, texts, and writers. Many critics' work could be cited to support this emphasis on the interpersonal, but three illustrate some of the common directions in autobiography studies. Each implicitly considers an ethic of reading and of writing.

Julia Watson's essay "Shadowed Presence" in James Olney's 1988 collection Studies in Autobiography considers that women writing autobiographically construct selves-in-relation. She argues that:

The preeminence of the Other and the quality of sympathy and lack of competitiveness in the intersubjective relationship are characteristics that distinguish women's autobiographies. They transcend the boundaries of the self in recognizing the real existence--as different, not as mirror-image--of the Other to the extent that the self, that which says 'I,' is what must be recuperated; the Other is a firm identity even in its absence or idealization. In women's autobiographies, as a result, voice is generated in dialogue that noncensoriously includes the reader . . . (187)

While Watson's assertions could be expanded or questioned, I wish to highlight here her emphasis on writing and reading as relational as she imagines a female subject of autobiography. She hints that these relations are ethical and caring. In Autobiographics, Leigh Gilmore brings a focus on representation of self through another to her reading of Gertrude Stein's Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas. Gilmore argues that Stein's autobiography makes her lesbian relationship visible and emphasizes identification



with another woman. Gilmore also adds that the female self identified as relational in much feminist criticism "hypostatizes 'otherness'" (223). Gilmore asks her readers to follow the example of memoirists and contest social constructions of gender (xi) rather than insist that "women represent the self by representing others because that is how women know and experience identity," (xiii) a position that may gloss over the particularities of Stein's relationship to Toklas, for example. Her nuancing of the concept of the relational autobiographical subject involves readers as a result. Gilmore invites her reader to "sketch her own figure in the margins of this text," (223) and in doing so, she encourages identification and active response. Francoise Lionnet's earlier Autobiographical Voices questions racist and sexist cultural readings of women and proposes a way of reading that resists reduction and territorializing by accepting the "confusion of tongues" (247) within and between texts. Lionnet names this practice *métissage*, combining *métis*, "not an English word," the Greek word *metis* (connoting power), and Cuban *mestizaje*, which she defines as "an enabling discourse of transculturation encouraging solidarity among different ethnic groups" (15). Lionnet's interpretation of literature is not unlike Watson's dialogue which "non-censoriously includes the reader" (Watson 187). Lionnet argues further in Postcolonial Representations that

literature allows us to enter into the subjective processes of writers and their characters and are thus to understand better the unique perspectives of subjects who are agents of transformation and hybridization in their own narratives--as opposed to being the objects of knowledge, as in the discourse of social science. (8)

Lionnet encourages readers of memoirs to identify, "enter into the subjective processes of writers and their characters" (Postcolonial Representations 8).<sup>2</sup> "Entering into the subjective processes of writers" moves in the direction of a relational, ethical reading if critical readers acknowledge themselves and those whom they study as subjects rather than objects of knowledge. Arguing that all reading is appropriation, Lionnet offers a technique of appropriation, a "noncoercive feminist practice of reading" that honors the text read by drawing "from it the means of theorizing its own process of production" (PR 28). She argues against the prison house model of language in favor of a "conviction that writing matters and that narrative has the power to transform the reader" (PR 23). Appropriation has the sense of "taking into" rather than "taking away from" and involves change, mixture, and transculturation for reader, writer, and text. Lionnet and other feminist theorists of autobiography's emphasis on the relational

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2 Lionnet does not distinguish between the identification with fictional characters and autobiographical representations, but the latter may require greater identification or empathy, especially if written in first-person. Third-person may distance both writer and reader from the character who can then be read "about" instead of with/into.

opens up the possibility of an ethical reading practice that becomes an ethical critical response.

An ethical response is important to reading memoirs because the proximity of the content, or the words to the writer's body is closer for the writer and reader than it is in genres such as the novel in which readers are often expected to distinguish writer from narrators and/or characters. At least, many readers bring that expectation, as Phillipe Lejeune argued when he wrote of the autobiographical pact between reader and writer, a "form of contract between author and reader in which the autobiographer explicitly commits himself or herself to the sincere effort to come to terms with and to understand his or her own life" (Eakin in Lejeune x). The expectation that frequently follows from the "pact," and the assumption of referentiality is that readers will agree to the writer's truth claim. An ethical response is also essential because many memoirs recall painful experiences that the writers openly claim as their own, and these challenge a conventional evaluative approach to criticism.

Responding to memoirs that represent relations between mothers and daughters raised particular ethical issues about positioning. As Marianne Hirsch, Shirley Neuman, and Lynn Z. Bloom have observed, daughters' and sons' points of view have historically been guiding readers and silencing maternal voices. In addition, focusing on maternal voices as such potentially idealizes some women and excludes

others, or reifies roles that women may want to expand, as Marni Jackson observes in her memoir of becoming a mother (6). The quick solution to these dilemmas would be to not read memoirs critically, classifying them as personal. But as Wayne Booth argues, "we can no longer escape talk about ethical criticism by elevating one class of narrative into a purified and hence invulnerable kingdom" (153)--a move that would effectively mimic the dangerous idealization of women that has negation as its corollary. Further, as feminist theorists of autobiography have pointed out, women's lives have been unrecognized within an already traditionally marginal genre within literary studies. A way out is to imagine a reading practice that is aware of others. In a critical response that has attended to and been transformed by another('s) text, the "subjects" are not topics of observation or assessment, or merely grammatical functions, or empty, but are acknowledged to be persons having a claim to identification, writing, and life that will always exceed any critic's interpretation.

Derek Attridge, in his essay on "Innovation, Literature, Ethics: Relating to the Other," (also from the January 1999 Ethics issue of PMLA) considers such a practice possible. Like Lionnet, who underlines the importance of entering into and acknowledging the subjective textual process of others, Attridge argues that:

Conventional moral codes require certain kinds of support and succor for other persons, but my responsibility for the other person as other is

more demanding than these. As when I create a new artifact or mode of thought, my obligation is to refashion what I think and what I am in order to take the fullest possible account of, to respect, safeguard its matrix, its etiology and technology. (27-8)

His emphasis on responsibility for an other emphasizes attention to the text as an extension of care for another. Similarly, Attridge's "responsibility for" involves "assuming the other's needs, being willing to be called to account for the other, surrendering one's goals and desires in deference to the other's" (27). Further, he offers that transformation is part of the process. The responsive texts that critics create represent effects of the reading process, according to Attridge, in each case a "between me," that transforms readers/critics so that the "self too can be said to be a creation of the other" (19/20). Until the end of his essay, the other that affects the self is textual, and different from the "personal encounter" with another person (13) that Buell describes in the same collection of essays. However, Attridge's closing comments on responsibility for as critical to an ethic of reading and writing bring in "the other person" (29). His definition of reading as responsibility for, some elements of which may be contested or adjusted, resemble the concepts of caring and connected knowing articulated years earlier by Nel Noddings in Caring and Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger, and Jill Mattuck Tarule in Women's Ways of Knowing. Both of these concepts are later

reconsidered by reader-response theorist Patrocinio Schweikart as a possible reading practice.

"Caring" is an ambivalent term. The word carries the meaning of serious attention, preservation, and protection, looking after, and responsibility for. In Nel Noddings' definition, caring is responsive and receptive (19) as Attridge argues of ethical criticism (21). Unfortunately, care has also been defined pejoratively, as Noddings observes (9). It carries the sense of mourning or grieving, and "a burdened state of mind," (Oxford English Dictionary 893-4) evoking the mater dolorosa, or mother of sorrows, that Sara Ruddick describes in Maternal Thinking as a limiting image of care (137) in her development of a feminist ethics that would enable social action. While the term caretaker connotes taking care of others, "taking care" also resonates with caution.

Noddings retrieves the concept of caring from its history by proposing that it offers a feminist model of ethics. Caring: A Feminist Approach to Ethics and Moral Education informs two of the texts that most influenced my search for a practice of reading memoirs: Women's Ways of Knowing and Patrocinio Schweikart's response to it in "Speech is silver, Silence is Gold: The Asymmetrical Intersubjectivity of Communicative Action." Because of this, I will briefly outline Noddings' concept of the one-caring, which is most relevant to an ethical reading practice. Caring involves a one-caring and a cared-for.

The position of the one-caring has several identifiable features or requirements. It is an inherently receptive position that requires empathy, is committed, and yet ultimately finite. The one-caring is not totally absorbed by caring or the cared-for, and responds to a sense of "I must" with reason, not "blind sentiment" (171). Being the one-caring involves "displacement of interest from [one's] own reality to the reality of the other" (14).<sup>3</sup>

Noddings' exploration of care in Caring influenced the concept of connected knowing proposed by Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule in their study of women as learners in academic and other communities and institutions in Women's Ways of Knowing. There, they defined "five different perspectives from which women view reality and draw conclusions about truth, knowledge, and authority" (3). The five "not necessarily fixed, exhaustive, or universal perspectives" (15) are silence, received knowing, subjective knowing, procedural knowing, and constructed knowing. Silence is defined as an oppressed position while received knowing is characterized by dualism and a belief in the word of authorities. Subjective knowing relies on "gut" knowledge and is mistrustful of language and analysis. Procedural knowing could be more characterized by distance and an emphasis on objectivity, Women's Ways argued, or it could be characterized as connected, in which the learner

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3 Attridge's choice of the term "deference" implies loss of power to the one-caring, which Noddings resists.

takes a position very much like that of Noddings' one-caring by being attentive, receptive, and critical. While constructed knowing integrates all of the possible ways of knowing, and appears to be mostly highly valued, connected knowing is the concept that recurs in Women's Ways.

To consider the relevance of connected knowing to a practice of ethical reading, I turn to the chapter on connected teaching. Women's Ways of Knowing describes teaching as a process of midwifery in which teachers, like readers, act as facilitators and draw out ideas. Uncertainty, the subjective, and diversity of opinion are accepted and consensus means "bridging private and shared experience" (223) rather than primacy of one view over another. It is very similar to the ideal education that Noddings envisions. The learning contexts that Noddings values are those in which attentive caring towards persons and texts characterizes the approach. A caring education, according to Noddings provides a setting in which "values and beliefs can be evaluated critically" (184) while teachers foster growth and show themselves as models of caring (178). That the one-caring's actions are "varied not rule bound," according to Noddings has implications for criticism that seeks caring, connected knowing rather than rigidity or taxonomy.<sup>4</sup> Such a reading practice would be similarly attentive and open.

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<sup>4</sup> Although Noddings cites Sartre, de Beauvoir's Ethics of Ambiguity is closer to her own ethics of care in this emphasis. An ethics of care is an ethics of ambiguity, as



Ideally suited to be the ground of an ethical reading practice because of their attention to relationships, the ethic of caring and connected knowing that Caring and Women's Ways propose seems to favor universality over recognition of the specificities of lived experience. Noddings' ethics, for example, insists on the universality of caring to escape relativism, (5) calling that caring feminine "only if we understand that all of humanity can participate in the feminine" (172). However, throughout the text in concrete examples, the one-caring is female, and the cared-for is male.<sup>5</sup> The most common critique of Women's Ways of Knowing is that it similarly claimed an essential womanhood which insisted, not that caring was a unique property of women, but that women pass through distinct, identifiable stages of knowing. Several critics noted that this potentially overlooked how cultural practices potentially affected the stages outlined. In fact, much of Knowledge Difference and Power, the companion book to Women's Ways, is dedicated to responding to these challenges, so I will not do so here. Rather, I turn to one critic whose response in Knowledge, Difference, and Power develops caring into a reading practice that recognizes the

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defined by de Beavoir because both challenge notions of objectivity while refusing relativism while, de Beauvoir writes, ethics has historically strived to eliminate ambiguity (18).

<sup>5</sup> An exception is the example of the mother who kills her daughter born with effects of Thalidomide. Noddings attempts to illustrate the difficulty of caring for (in this case, for the one-caring) when there is a moral conflict, but the text moves too quickly past this complex point.

importance of specificities and differences. Because memoirs attend to the particulars of women's lives as well as shared experiences and characteristics, a caregiving reading must also recognize these.

Patrocinio Schweikart's exploration of connected knowing as a reading strategy in "Speech is Silver; Silence is Gold" suggests that Women's Ways' assumption of relation, or intersubjectivity, can be brought to critical reading. Schweikart, like Derek Attridge, emphasizes receptivity, but she connects it to reading strategies associated with women, and to Women's Ways of Knowing's connected knowing in particular. Women's Ways of Knowing, according to Schweikart, develops an ethic of care and connection to show that these "are deployed by women toward cognitive ends" (309). Attending to, even accepting, what a text presents are characteristics of connected knowing and "one of the tenets of traditional literary criticism" (310).<sup>6</sup> Unfortunately, she notes, the adversarial method often dominates while others' ways of interpreting are devalued.

Schweikart initially questions Women's Ways' model of types of knowing. One area of contention represents a common reaction based in her training in adversarial method; the other is grounded in her own lived experience in the Philippines and university engineering. In the first instance, she resists the categories offered by Women's Ways

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<sup>6</sup> Schweikart emphasizes the process of reading. She is not claiming that there is one meaning to be found in the text being read.

of Knowing because of their apparent reduction of women to an overgeneral category, together with which she refuses to be "lumped" (306). Schweikart writes of this initial response to Women's Ways of Knowing as mixed:

My experiential reaction to WWK was complicated. I immediately felt both an aversion to the feminine aura of its findings and a strong reluctance to regard them as applicable to me. Because, like many educated women of my generation, I had learned well to think like a man (or, to think that I think like a man), I was inclined to regard myself as a counterexample to the findings of WWK, and in addition, to feel that the difference was to my credit. At the same time, my experience with the women's movement and with women's studies induced me to be skeptical of this reaction. ("Speech is Silver" 305)

Despite differences in our lived experience, I recognized myself in her response. Margaret Fulton, who taught the women's studies course that I had enrolled in, told us: "Read Women's Ways of Knowing." I had recently discovered structuralism (not recognizing at the time the internalized sexism that designated male European writers as theorists and feminists as critics) and internalized the assumption that Women's Ways of Knowing would not be "real scholarship." Like Jill Ker Conway in True North, I was initially skeptical of caregiving models of learning (a subjective response). At the undergraduate level in the English Department, women's writing (and feminism) was being introduced as a new, liberatory possibility while few critics challenged the conventional analytical approaches that would be brought to it. Later, when post-colonial theorists shifted the emphasis to questioning existing

feminist critical assumptions, I had assumed that a gynocentric approach would erase the differences between experiences and others by assuming that women's shared experience or the concept of a female subject was essential to solidarity. Schweikart's response moves past this impasse. She likens her reading of Women's Ways' epistemology to what Judith Fetterly, in her articulation of feminist reading as resistance, calls immasculation, or "learning to think and argue like a man" (315). The adversarial position that results, not necessarily the unique property of men but of particular traditions, is "problematical for literary criticism in part because of the strong presence of women in the literary tradition (both as characters and as authors) as well as in English classes" and "because the (feminized and hence muted) attitude and competencies of the connected knower," such as suspension of disbelief, "are actually essential constituents of the foundational activity of the discipline--the reading of literature" (315).

Schweikart's second reservation about Women's Ways of Knowing continues to hinge on an implicit claiming of a category of "women" when offering a model of how women learn. While Women's Ways of Knowing's model of connected knowing offers a model that involves relation and communication, or intersubjectivity, it does not develop the importance of the differences of those communicating, according to Schweikart. To illustrate this point, she

challenges Women's Ways of Knowing's equation of silence with passivity or being silenced by others. By writing of the importance of silence as active receptivity valued both in Filipino culture where "Silence is Gold," and in the study of engineering problems, Schweikart questions the universality of particular definitions of knowing. Intersubjectivity or connection, she argues, "involves two different modes of subjective agency--the assertive mode of speaking and writing, and the receptive, silent mode of listening and reading" (307). Both modes are active. Traise Yamamoto, exploring the different forms of silence that she encounters and employs, similarly argues in "Different Silences" that silence "doesn't always signify passivity" (130). Yamamoto notes the stereotype of the silent Asian woman, the silence that is the effect of speaking repeatedly and not being heard, and the silencing demands for speech that is authentic or exotic. I cite Yamamoto because her essay moves toward the connected communication that Schweikart describes. It assumes readers' receptivity, and suspension of both counter-argument and expectations of conclusion. It also positions me so that I recognize that my relationship with silences is different from hers, while her narrative of not being heard encourages me to identify and care. Schweikart chooses Noddings' model of caring to complicate the idea of connected knowing, because it offers an ethical model of an "inherently asymmetrical relation," (320) in which

differences are acknowledged but connection is still possible.

Following Schweikart's example of complicating connected knowing and silence, I wish to nuance an ethics of care by suggesting that it also take into account differences in positions, or shifting asymmetries. An ethics of care is valuable because it assumes that differences can be bridged or transcended long enough to attempt understanding. This is applicable to reading memoirs in which readers do not immediately share the writers' characteristics or experiences. However, when universalizing, such as claiming a category of women, fails to attend to the particulars, its status as caring becomes questionable. Sau-ling C. Wong's work on ideological caregiving offers one example of what Schweikart observes as asymmetrical relations within intersubjectivity. Caregiving implies active work and is more specific than a generalized caring. Wong questions oversimplified images of mothers in Hollywood films that depict paid domestic workers as "modern day mammies, unfazed by exploitation, devoted to their bosses' well being" (Wong 82). The effect of these representations, she argues, is that outside of the theatre, "the care-receiver preserves the illusion of equality and reciprocity with the caregiver . . . without ceding actual structural privilege" (Wong 69). Wong's attention to the glossing over of asymmetrical relations within caring insists on attention to the particular situations of those

involved. Bringing Wong's term "caregiving" to a reading of women's memoirs acts as a reminder of differences that may exist between women as caregivers and receivers that other terms such as caring may not. Caregiving as a concept includes traditional relations such as "mother-daughter," and it expands these, allowing the care within them to be read as social acts rather than simply biological or inherent. Significantly, it allows for attention to differences and listening to challenges that Wong and other writers call for.

The concept of a connected approach positions critics as connected rather than opposed. It enabled a reading of women's memoirs that allowed me to integrate women's theories of writing and reading such as Women's Ways of Knowing. The shift to a reading of women's memoirs imagined as caregiving permitted attention to the writers' aesthetic and political goals, as well as their memoirs' relationship to their other works and social contexts. A caregiving reading allowed for discussion of possible asymmetries or differences while enabling a critique of particular arguments or representations in the memoirs. I imagine caregiving critical writing and reading as a communal and ongoing process (like connected knowing) instead of one that relies on opposition or insists on certainty. The strategies of critical response that I found most consistent with the ethic of reading that I am proposing are those which aim to avoid evaluative comparison of memoirs by

different women. These strategies find, as Lionnet argues of *métissage*, the means to critically read texts through theories and structures particular to and consistent with each text; to employ theory to highlight elements of texts and to create or illustrate intertextuality and hybridity; and to consider positions of writers and the historical particularities of what they write about while not "hypostatiz[ing] otherness" (Gilmore 223).

I will read seven memoirs: Margaret Laurence's Dance on the Earth: A Memoir, Jill Ker Conway's The Road from Coorain and True North: A Memoir, Ellen Prescott's Mondays are Yellow, Sundays are Grey, Eva Brewster's Progeny of Light/Vanished in Darkness, and Elizabeth Brewster's two autobiographical prose/poetry texts Away from Home and The Invention of Truth. Each of the seven memoirs has received public response in book reviews and interviews but (except Laurence's) little extended critical response. Mother-daughter relationships and caregiving are themes in all, and all of the women write about confronting significant conflicts or struggles, whether they be to find a vocation, or to fight prejudice, poverty, gender discrimination and imposed silencing. In my reading, each writer provides an example of caregiving as a community activity while writing agency for, or power to, daughters and mothers. Margaret Laurence, Eva Brewster and Ellen Prescott write about their experiences as mothers and daughters while Jill Ker Conway and Elizabeth Brewster write as daughters.



Margaret Laurence's memoir, which I had set aside in the earlier version of this dissertation, had been present all along, subversively informing a move towards a caregiving approach and encouraging a reading of the memoir itself. In Dance on the Earth, Laurence writes about her three mothers and herself as mother in order to connect caregiving as child-rearing, the value of her own experiences of childbirth, and her struggles with culturally-defined femininity, to caregiving in a broader social context. I argue that Laurence's ethic of care is revealed through her formal choices of comprehensiveness, "digression," and vernacular in her memoir. Laurence intertwines peace activism and environmentalism with her family history, connecting them in a language resembling that spoken by Laurence and those around her. Responding to critical views of Dance on the Earth, I will argue that while the memoir is gynocentric, it challenges female identity categories as Laurence writes of the challenges of being a mother and writer and of her privilege in relation to others in Ghana and Canada. Laurence's claiming of a maternal identity is a means of connecting with others while her acknowledgment of its limits marks it as caregiving rather than absolute. In other words, Laurence's motherhood position in the memoir is a deliberate choice that allows her to connect issues traditionally fragmented into public and private, and to complicate traditional images of women

as mothers rather than to idealize them, while emphasizing the importance of connection.

Jill Ker Conway portrays a less than ideal mother-daughter relationship in The Road from Coorain and True North, as she remembers being caregiver to her mother. In her situation, the position fixes both women in a dependent relationship characterized by antagonism. Conway is critical of her upbringing as she traces in both memoirs how she left Australia and her mother. The critical challenge is to find a way to historicize Conway's construction of these difficult relations and her construction of herself as a woman in relation to cultural images of femininity. By approaching the memoirs through Women's Ways of Knowing's concept of constructed knowing, I trace Conway's emphasis on understanding herself as social because gendered. Reading her two memoirs together, I propose a caregiving reading that recognizes how Conway's memoirs trace a learning process. Reading the two as a process allows me to contextualize Conway's representation of mother and her sometimes contradictory representation of herself as a woman as part of this process.

My response to Ellen Prescott's memoir of her own and her daughters' abuse, Mondays are Yellow, Sundays are Grey focuses on the issue of the potentially different reading and writing positions. Derek Attridge's ethics of reading, which encourages identification, and Teresa Ebert's materialist feminism, which proposes a model of "difference

in relation within a system of exploitation," (19) facilitate the reading of a memoir that calls for recognition both of abuse as a social problem and of the potential vulnerability of the writer. I argue that Prescott's memoir confirms Janice Williamson's statement that the feminist critic can trace a narrative "that leads to the mother, and not simply as an object of blame" (141). Mondays particularly supports this approach because Prescott writes not only in response to her abuse as a daughter, but also as the mother of two daughters who are abused by their father. Writing as a mother, Prescott challenges the images and expectations of mothers and caregivers that oppress them within the context of abuse. In doing so, she writes feminist social practice.

Many readers will not have shared the experience of the Holocaust that Eva Brewster's Progeny of Light/Vanished in Darkness remembers, but Brewster relies on their ability to empathize. While celebrating her mother, and testifying to her own loss as a mother, Brewster's memoir writes about caregiving beyond that within a mother-daughter relationship that enabled survival. The question is how a critical reading can be consistent with caregiving. Dori Laub argues that readers of testimony (which he defines as a witnessing of trauma) come to partially experience the trauma (57) and have to address this in order to be present for the witnessing (98). Like Noddings' one-caring and Women's Ways of Knowing's connected knower, the readers must be present.

To be so, they must move past the defensive affectivity that Laub describes (72-73) which includes anger, withdrawal, fear, sanctification of the survivor, hyperemotionality, and foreclosure through facts, all of which distance the reader from the writer or speaker. In addition, they must grapple with differences. I read Shirley Neuman's "poetics of differences," Joan Ringelheim's exploration of responding to witnessing that focuses on gender and survival, and Simone de Beauvoir's concept of the ethics of ambiguity to move toward a reading of Progeny of Light/Vanished in Darkness that stresses the importance of relations between different individuals, as Brewster's memoir does.

Finally, I read Elizabeth Brewster's two memoirs as a collage that includes previous work and leads readers to other texts. As both metaphor and technique, collage represents a form that resists closure and absolute definitions while drawing attention to its form and necessarily involving its readers in the process of creating the text(s). Imagining connected knowing as a possible reading practice, Patrocinio Schweikart suggests that it moves beyond argument towards readers' completing the writer's project (318). The Invention of Truth and Away from Home, read as collage, encourage this kind of connected reading, which involves a process of transformation that Virginia Woolf, Schweikart, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, and Elizabeth Brewster call "becoming the author." I argue that Brewster's memoirs trace her own process of becoming the

author by exploring her reading history and the influence of texts on subjectivity while the memoirs' form encourages participation in this movement toward an alternative, autobiographical critical reading practice.

One of the more frightening and potentially rewarding results of engaging with an ethic of reading is being interpreted as "the door" in Lillian Allen's sense, and consequently, being open to ethical scrutiny. Living an ethic of care is a more difficult and ongoing project than writing about it, but I hope that in and through writing, the threshold is closer.

## Chapter Two:

### A Form of Caregiving: Margaret Laurence's Dance on the Earth

In her memoir Dance on the Earth, Margaret Laurence focuses on her life "as a mother and writer" (8) and celebrates the lives of her mothers while challenging patriarchal language and paradigms of female identity. Timothy Findley comments on this focus in his memorial review of the memoir, where he stresses that Laurence's fiction is not autobiographical, even if details of her life in Dance on the Earth resemble those of some of her characters (10). Laurence might well have approved of Findley's emphasis on fiction as formally structured. She stated in a 1975 interview with Bernice Lever that "the fact of trying to put down life, or one's consciousness of a character's consciousness in terms of words on the printed page is in itself a kind of form" (Kuester 1). I read Laurence's comment on fiction as applicable to memoir. Laurence patterned her memoir so as to guide readers to make the connections between earlier and later themes and images in her memoir, and between the memoir and earlier writing elsewhere. Its Forewords begin the process of connecting the four chapters named after her birth mother, her aunt and adoptive mother, her mother-in-law, and herself, to issues concerning others. The Afterwords form a compilation of Laurence's song, prayer, poetry, critical essays, and a convocation address, and these further connect the first four chapters to social themes. Dance on the Earth calls

for a reading that acknowledges its emphasis on connecting apparently different issues and styles in an accessible language. Rethinking negative reviews of the memoir, I argue that Laurence's choice of dance for the title suggests a movement toward a form that would also recognize that contested site, the female body, that for Laurence is inseparable from her understanding of the world. At the same time, her memoir challenges gendered and national identity categories to articulate a caregiving ethics that outlines the moral commitments that Laurence expects "as a natural born reformer" (57) from herself and her readers.

Many critics have pointed to the significance of dance as an element of Laurence's memoir. Greta McCormick Coger interprets its importance as a theme of regeneration with ties to traditional African dance and prairie dance halls (263). Laurence shares Coger's view of her writing when she insists in the memoir that it is both a craft and a birthing process. "You can't sit around and wait until inspiration strikes," Laurence comments (199), "but neither can you force into being something that isn't there." Laurence's memoir affirms women's claiming of public space for art that would transmit a vitality that the sculpture she called the stone angel in her novel was not able to. In the memoir, Laurence celebrates dancing as an empowering women's activity as she describes her joy in dancing to Highlife music. She also writes of dancing "pain, worry, loneliness"

when alone; dance becomes an act of "stubborn hoping in a terrifying world" (17).

Laurence does not conflate dance and the act of writing autobiography, but imagining the memoir as dance encourages a reading in which readers are involved in producing a caregiving emphasis. Alexandra Pett reads dance as a metaphor for the reading process in which "connections emerge and dissolve" (Pett 204). The connections may represent those between different themes within the memoir to which, Joan Givner writes, "the reader must respond to the rhythm as to a dance which is at times decorous and controlled and at other times spontaneous and fraught with intensity" (26). Critical of some of Laurence's self-construction, Givner adds that, "in places, there is some deft side-stepping to be manoevered by both partners" (26). Here, connections are between the writer and her readers. Imagining the memoir as dance assumes that readers are connected, and brought into Laurence's memoir by reading it: a caregiving emphasis.

Laurence's form brings together a wide range of topics as it discusses in the same context her family history, and her views on censorship, the arms race, pornography, abortion, and internment, and shows them to be, not so much spontaneous asides in the family history as interrelated. Metta Spencer's memorial essay on Laurence as peace activist offers a way to read the memoir's comprehensiveness,



juxtaposition of "unrelated" topics, and "momentary digressions" (xi). Spencer writes that Margaret Laurence

was not one to compartmentalize. Instead of urging that we ignore lesser social evils for the sake of curing a top-priority one, she viewed the entire array of problems comprehensively, and recognized their interdependence. Her feminism, for example, was not less central than her commitment to, say, the environment; instead, she assumed that women's emancipation would naturally manifest itself in the protection of life and the plainspoken defence of basic decency. (20)

Laurence's refusal to compartmentalize in her political thinking generates the form of her memoir. Her connection of environmental activism to anti-sexism, for example, is evident in her approach to writing specifically about her mothers. Refusing to write the women into an isolated domestic sphere, reinscribing that sphere as the norm for women, Laurence urges recognition of social concerns, creating a structure in which these are inseparable from individuals and family relationships. The formal effect is an alternating pattern of specific example and general social statement based on that. Elements of her family's lived experience become opportunities to discuss issues of immediate concern as they arise out of her own history.

Laurence's chapter on her birth mother Verna Simpson Wemyss offers three examples of her memoir's emphasis on the connection between her mothers' lives, her own life, and social issues. First, Laurence introduces her father's role as World War I gunner in this chapter, which allows her to discuss her hatred of war, calling the discussion "a

motherhood statement" (32). Second, she connects her concern about the environment to her family history as she reads her mother's baby book where her mother recorded Laurence's first picnic and drinking "out of a lovely clear brook" (39). The baby book writings become, in the context of Laurence's reflection on changes in the environment, historical records of environmental change as well as personal growth. Laurence writes that hers "was possibly the last generation of children to have known what it was to swim in rivers and lakes, to drink from brooks, to have known the land before it was ruined" and expresses her passionate belief that "we must repair the damage before it is too late" (39). Finally, she discusses her mother's privileged experience of childbirth (and her own birth) in relation to her pro-choice stance and childbirth in a historical context. In the days of her mother's youth, she writes "they had no choice at all" and "it is wrong not to have a choice" (36).

Laurence's connection of the personal and social has received critical dismissal. Several critics panned the memoir in the reviews shortly after its publication for the fact that Laurence addresses her readers directly. Laurence frequently connects with her reader as "we," bringing her expectations of our consent. Morton Ritts declared Dance on the Earth "preachy," and George Galt called it "didactic." The tone of urgency in the memoir, evident in statements such as "I believe that we cannot and must not give up,"

(99) is likely that which prompted the charges of didacticism. Laurence comments in Our Kinda Talk (a video interview) that "every serious writer is a moralist." I believe that, after she wrote The Diviners, Laurence pursued her desire to find a way "to write about things [she felt] passionately about . . . without writing propaganda" (Dance on the Earth 89). Moreover, as Thomas M.F. Gerry notes, "propaganda and didacticism are usually noticed and condemned only when the writer is promoting a challenge to established authority" (228). Laurence's outspoken views in Dance on the Earth are in part a response to censorship from those who felt she was too challenging.

While Laurence's writing of a woman's experience in The Diviners was challenged and censored as obscene, Laurence's memoir turns the charge of obscenity outward. She argues in Dance on the Earth that the true obscenity is all forms of violence and threats to the environment. She connects her feminist challenge of patriarchal language and exclusion to peace activism as she challenges the "patriarchally-loaded" (Marlatt 225) language of those justifying arms proliferation in particular. The foreword from Canada and the Nuclear Arms Race (included in the memoir's Afterwords) questions the concepts limited warfare, winning, (287) and "'acceptable losses'" (32) and the use of the word "overkill" (288). She had also pointed to leaders' misuse of language to gloss over atrocity in A Writer in the Nuclear Age (1985). "Megadeath," she argues in that the

1985 video interview, as she did in her chapter on her birth mother and father in Dance on the Earth, "is an obscene word when you think that it refers glibly to the deaths of countless millions upon millions upon millions of living human beings, women, children and men, real people."

Laurence chooses for her memoir a caregiving language that would contrast the disembodied language of the military, for example, and recognize its relationship to people.<sup>1</sup> In "Books that mattered to me," Laurence writes that each of the writers whom she admired conveyed "the possibility of human communication" (Verduyn 249). Laurence's faith in language as a bridge and potentially positive force for social change extends to her choice of language. Dance on the Earth is committed to colloquial forms indicative of her populism. The language in the prose chapters of Dance on the Earth is conversational, according to Colin Nicholson (181). Conversational elements include an apostrophe at the end of each chapter of the memoir that speaks directly to the woman she knew, as well as those created by contractions, absence of subordinating conjunctions, and colloquially correct but grammatically nonstandard use of verbs. Although it uses conversational

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1 Thomas M.F. Gerry observes the significance of where Laurence published (124)--popular Canadian magazines--a decision I read as a political. There, in an "article in magazine at hairdresser's," (Fire-Dwellers 17) she could reach a diverse audience, including readers who would be unfamiliar with or disagree with her views. Laurence emphasized accessibility when she urged that books be sold in airports, post offices (which they now are) and "even liquor stores" ("A Flourishing Art" 84).

elements, Dance on the Earth is not, however, written in a "conversationally unstructured mode" as Nicholson suggests (182). The poetry that Laurence includes emphasizes balance and refrain, (like the folk song Laurence wrote for The Diviners) while it is conscious of line breaks, spatial form, rhythm, and wordplay. Poems such as "Old Women's Song" are closer to songs of protest and empowerment sung in demonstrations than to experimental writing and their structure appears unstructured as a result.

The conversational quality of the language and structure of Dance on the Earth is also the result of the collaborative creative process which involved taped dictation, typed by Joan Johnston, Laurence's friend and anti-censorship advocate. Jocelyn Laurence explains, "the way in which she spoke, the rhythms and idiosyncrasies of phrasing, the choices of language and emphasis, are integral not only to the book but to the actual process of writing it" (Dance xiv). The process of her memoir's conception necessitated an awareness of form, communication with others, and time constraints. Laurence was relying on others and working from a hospital bed part of the time, after an earlier cataract operation, as June Callwood notes (56) and with the pain and lack of energy resulting from cancer. Aesthetic concerns in Laurence's Dance on the Earth are therefore inseparable from lived experience within her female body, affecting process and content.

Laurence's care with language stems from her knowledge of its ability to suppress and oppress, as well as liberate. Challenging oppression of women, she comments on how women take surnames that are sirnames (9). This play on words has become suspect to some feminist critics as an oversimplification of sexism. Laurence's emphasis, I think, is on the material effects of traditional name changes: women become hard to find. By contrast, as Neil ten Kortenaar writes, her memoir "resists the tyranny" of patriarchal language and systems "by tracing a genealogy through the mothers she has known" (30). Women's stories formally structure the memoir and reflect their centrality in Laurence's upbringing in which knowledge was passed down by women. Similarly, the poetry in Dance on the Earth such as "Old Women's Song," "For Adele Wiseman," "For a Sansei Woman," and "For my Sisters" emphasizes women's shared experiences such as birth, survival, death, and renewal and the desire for safe "homeplaces." "Old Women's Song" and "For my Sisters," a memoir in miniature, write of women collectively. What Daphne Marlatt writes is true of Laurence as well, even if their techniques and forms differ. Marlatt writes in "Musing with Mothertongue":

We also take issue with the given, hearing the discrepancy between what our patriarchally-loaded language bears (can bear) of our experience and the difference from it our experience bears out.  
(225)

Laurence's memoir seeks to include her mothers' experience as she understood it.

Dance on the Earth's discussion of women's exclusion from language extends to women's historical exclusion from Christianity. Laurence identifies as a "Christian, or aspiring Christian with an ecumenical outlook"<sup>2</sup> who asserts the "need to recognize both the female and male principles in the Holy Spirit" (221). She comments in the memoir that because so many of the referents of Christian hymns are male, she has felt "left out, deprived" (15). In response, she includes her mothers as an "integral part of the Holy Spirit" (13) which for Laurence means "not only God the Father and the Mother, but a kind of holiness in life itself, in trees and rivers and the earth and all creatures" (14). She shares the belief that women have the right to interpret scripture with early women writing autobiographically, such as Julian of Norwich in her Revelations of Divine Love. Laurence claims her right to write of spirituality without having either to be named a mystic or to transcend her female body. Since women's embodied experience has been excluded or repressed, Laurence's caregiving position urges its inclusion within her own religious tradition.

Recognizing that Dance on the Earth has specific formal effects, I connect Laurence's statement on women and Christianity to her inclusion of her experiences of pregnancy, labour, and child care in her memoir as political

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3 I read ecumenical in this context as reaching across differences as well as seeking unity.

acts that reach to other women and resist historical silencing while seeking an embodied tradition. Excerpts from Laurence's letters to Adele Wiseman, included in the memoir write of labour, birth, and first childrearing experiences. She includes these because birth was "the core of our lives," and admits that she had not thought to write about them in her early fiction because it was considered unconventional. She admits her internalization of social mores, and describes in her memoir one of her letters to Adele Wiseman as "guarded" and "conventional" (139). The memoir's theme of motherhood permits her to elaborate where even the private letter of years earlier could not.

Laurence's descriptions of "birth as [it] really [was]" (6) in Dance on the Earth are not sentimental or idealizing but descriptive of the particulars of her own experience of childbirth. She explains that forceps were used on her daughter during her labour. Revealing her reaction to the surgical incision that doctors made during her labour, she reasserts her sexuality by recalling how she exclaimed to a nurse, "Oh my God, I won't be able to sleep with my husband for months" (140). The description of circumstances around her pregnancy with her son David emphasize social context in a way that the letters gestured toward: the assumption that "white women in the tropics" were more often than not "neurotic," the leg straps that were deemed obligatory, and medical professionals' certainty that their care was



infallible. Laurence's memoir voices previously unheard stories from a mother's point of view.

Laurence's refusal to hide her embodied experience as a woman concerned both male and female critics. Biographer James King critiques her emphasis in the memoir on herself as caregiver as idealized, and his biography emphasizes when and how Laurence may have fallen short of the role of attentive mother. To avoid a distanced judgement of Laurence as caregiver to her children, I turned to Katherine Govier's 1976 article on mothers and daughters for Chatelaine, in which Laurence's daughter comments on being Laurence's daughter. Jocelyn Laurence admits to resenting the time that her mother's spent writing: "I remember my brother and me doing awful things like fighting outside her study door to get attention" (Govier 92). Even in this relatively early article, Jocelyn Laurence accepts her mother's vocation. Later, as editor of the memoir, she supports Margaret Laurence's representation of herself as writer and mother, rather than reinforcing an ideal of attentiveness to which Margaret Laurence was expected to meet or exceed. In Alexandra Pett's reading of Dance on the Earth, Laurence creates "personal myths" in order to represent herself as not victimized (206). The memoir, as a result, "transcends the need for referentiality" (Pett 204). Laurence's focus on herself as mother is in part one of these personal myths. Because Dance on the Earth favors a view of memoir as tool for social change, it avoids

confessional, not only to create personal myths, or to construct herself as heroic, as Joan Givner suggests, but, as Greta McCormick Coger argues, to avoid the kind of self-reference that would distract from the social issues to which Laurence wanted to draw attention (259). Moreover, being "more protective than revealing," (Ritts 70) even when Laurence refuses to admit to imperfections, is consistent with the ethics of care that she emphasizes in Dance on the Earth.<sup>3</sup> She explains in her Forewords that "there were areas [she] wasn't prepared even to try to set down" (7). Mindful of families' privacy (125), she does not write biographically of her son and daughter, nor about her lifetime friend Adele Wiseman and her mother Chaika or her mother-in-law at length. When citing personal letters, she includes only excerpts, shaping the content to coincide with her memoir's goals. King's reading overlooks that omission is part of Laurence's caregiving. To some extent, his reading of Laurence as less-than-perfect mother exemplifies the response that Joan Givner fears that Laurence's focus on herself as a mother and writer encourages.

Givner argues in "Thinking back through our Mothers" that feminist critics must interpret information passed down by foremothers "with all the tenderness and severity and toughness we are capable of" (30). She is particularly concerned with Laurence's apparent criticism of other women

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3 Some of the memoir's omissions likely result from practical concerns such as limited room for photographs that are published elsewhere in books and on video.

and the social effects of Laurence's potentially idealized self-representation as a mother. Givner reads Laurence's response to Sylvia Plath's death in Dance on the Earth, for example, as mother-blaming (29) because she emphasizes that while she shared some of Plath's experiences as a young, single mother and writer in London, she "had been given, as a child, as a teenager so much strength by [her] mothers" (162). I read Laurence as expressing gratitude for her life, but this point of difference from Givner is one that cannot be resolved. Laurence, Givner argues further, "has risked becoming a latter day angel in the house" when she emphasizes her rules of working only after the children are asleep (92). Laurence's statement on the traditional binary of life and art is as follows:

Real people are more important than writing. Life is always more important than Art. This may be a major difference between women writers who are mothers and men writers who are fathers. I certainly don't mean this as a diatribe against male writers, but many women writers have known the pain of being asked to choose between their children and their writing. For us, there is no choice. Children come first. (Dance on the Earth 166)

Laurence's statement, as Givner observes, stresses the sacrifice of art and claims an overgeneral "us." However, her very focus on the conflict between mothering and a "trade," as Laurence referred to writing, (Boland 5) in the memoir (beyond this particular statement) challenges the idea that Laurence perpetuates a troubling essentialist view of women.

Although Laurence writes that "no generalization should be the rule for either women or men," she admits that "this is not easy" (3-4) to avoid. She observes in Dance that "male writers seemed to have a kind of glamour attached to them while the reverse is usually true of female writers"; "far from having an aura of glamour, we are positively threatening" (Dance 171). Emphasizing gender difference, even as a social construct, is in part necessary to Laurence's critique of gender-based imbalances of power. When Laurence responds to Frank Davey's remark that women are "conditioned not to participate in the machinery of a culture" (Dance on the Earth 235), she emphasizes gender difference, pointing to her own uncertainty about computer use. Paradoxically, she does so in order to point to social inequities and to undo any essential gendering as an explanation for the difference. Laurence explains that lack of time due to caregiving responsibilities--not just conditioning and certainly not biology--has often been the reason for some women's distance from technology that might benefit them (235). She does not idealize or reify this position, but it appears as an explanation for relative historical absence.

Self-conscious of the social pressures on the relationship between caregiving and writing, Laurence critiques the dilemma of having to choose rather than insisting that women be angels in the house. The memoirs of her mothers in Dance on the Earth are in part stories of

women as caregivers who put others first. Her mother gave up a career as a concert pianist. Her Mum, Aunt Marg, gave up a teaching position. Her mother-in-law's (Elsie Fry Laurence) schedule of household work discontinued her work as an author, according to Laurence. Laurence interprets her mother-in-law's social and historical context as one that "demanded she choose what she felt to be the most difficult and morally right course" (129). Laurence's comment on people coming first needs to be read in the context of her critique of gender inequities. "For most women throughout history there was no choice," she writes, admitting her anger (38). Laurence's emphasis on this element of women's self-sacrifice calls for change. "So many women writers have," she adds, "for too much of their professional lives, put themselves and their work last, as women in all areas have been socially conditioned to do over centuries" (136). Laurence is careful not to idealize this position in her memoir or the moves toward women working outside the home. "The division of domestic labour is not as equitable as I had hoped it to be," (130) she writes. Laurence's emphasis on women's full-time care of children as socially constructed does not idealize self-sacrifice or her own caregiving abilities; rather, it points to the often unacknowledged full-time work many women have done.

Laurence calls for an aesthetic that does not assume a binary of art and life. "We've chosen people work" she affirms in "For my Sisters," (Dance on the Earth 294; 60)

creating continuity between people and work, trajectories assumed to be separate for women as caregivers. She further questions the binary of art and life, caregiving and work, by crediting her children's influence on her work. The context that "interrupted" her writing also generated it. "If I hadn't had my children, I wouldn't have written more and better, I would have written less and worse," she writes (166). Significantly, Laurence's novels appeared after she had a daughter, and then a son.

Sara Ruddick's concept of maternal thinking meshes with Laurence's strategy of emphasizing maternal identity and social concerns in her memoir. Ruddick proposes that maternal thinking can sustain political action, particularly peace activism. It represents an alternative to traditional concepts of Reason as disembodied, and it acknowledges what was formerly dismissed as "messy" and fleshly such as birth labour (3-5). In fact, cross-cultural childrearing practices that involve the protecting and nurturing of growth and the struggle toward non-violence (30) would form the model of an ethics of care. Maternal work would be acknowledged as "a political act, not an empirical generalization" (244) so that the work would be valued but not naturalized. Rather than relying on similarity or agreement, maternal thinking would lead to an imaginative collective that would let differences emerge (122). Laurence's memoir offers a similar epistemology that claims women's experience as a means to imagine social change. By

writing as a woman and mother, Laurence claims connection to other women, imagining a collective identity that recognizes differences.

Laurence's claiming of a category of women (in solidarity) defines female identity as both plural and constituted of common bonds across differences. "Can one be mother sister both / Daughter sister? I believe so" Laurence writes in "For my Sisters" (295-6). Her memoir's tracing of the metronymic, in keeping with this view, is not restricted to blood lines. Colin Nicholson finds four mothers in the text, as Chaika Wiseman is one whom Laurence credits as a mother to her. Adele Wiseman, Mary Adachi, one of the "Elmcott tribe," and neighbor Joan Johnston, and Laurence's daughter as editor could also be included as caregivers.

Laurence further defines female identity as plural when she complicates the image of herself as mother struggling to be a writer. Just when Dance on the Earth seems to gesture toward a feminism that claims a category of woman since challenged as overgeneral and exclusionary, Laurence questions her use of "we." Faithful to her belief that "no generalization [about gender] should be the rule," she consciously explores her privilege as a mother as she recalls her time in Ghana where she received caregiving from other women and men. There, she realized that she would be not only a mother but a colonial figure of maternal power,

"a memsahib, a position [she] hated and despised" (143).<sup>4</sup> During this period, 1955-1960, Laurence was working on her first novel, This Side Jordan, which is overtly critical both of colonizers' sense of entitlement and their liberal apologies. Natalie M. Rosinsky observes that, while mothers and daughters are a kind of minority group, the pressure of "social definitions of motherhood and 'proper' female behavior is exacerbated by the women's being members of other oppressed groups" (265). This Side Jordan explores this effect briefly when Afua receives unwanted "assistance" from Miranda after giving birth in hospital, removed from her own mother's birth wisdom and care. Laurence explores her position as she describes the help that she received:

Shira, the wife of Grey, our cook, washed my children's diapers and clothes while Grey planned and made the meals. This helped me more than I can say in terms of my writing, but I still felt ambivalent. How could I justify it? I couldn't, but I accepted it, not only because it was the line of least resistance but also because I badly needed that time to do my writing. (152)

The passage about Shira and Grey acknowledges that Laurence's position as mother is informed by her historically-determined economic and social position in relation to other women on the globe, and that the caregiving of a Ghanian woman and man, perhaps with children of their own, enabled Laurence to write. Similarly, as she

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4 In "The Very Best Intentions," she explains that "white Westerners'" fears of being "sahib-types" overlooks the negative impact of their liberalism, and the actual concerns of those toward whom they project and direct their fears (Heart of A Stranger 33-43).



writes in chapter three about her Mum, Margaret Simpson Wemyss, the aunt who raised her, she acknowledges that her "mothers were white women in a predominantly white society, and thus in some ways greatly privileged" (10) while they were not necessarily aware of their position as such (47). She immediately places her families' history within the context of colonization. This information indicates her expansion of the category of woman, which other feminist theorists were beginning take up in the 1980s.

Just as she had complicated the concept of women and oppression with the story of Shira and Grey, Laurence resists a kind of positioning that would label her writing as representative or typically Canadian, even while she affirms its roots in her country of origin.<sup>5</sup> In a 1972 interview by Clara Thomas with Irving Layton, Laurence asserts:

I don't think that Canadian writing has to express an identity which is homogeneous. I don't think that it does and I think it is a good thing that it doesn't. If we have any meaning at all, it is in our variety. (Thomas 66)

Coming to terms with the idea of a Canadian identity in writing involved identifying and unlearning prejudice. The process appears in and through her novels. Morag Gunn and Jules Tonnere in The Diviners, for example, challenge the

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<sup>5</sup> After she learned from reading As for Me and My House "that one could write from where one was, even a small prairie town" (286) and returned to Canada from Ghana, she was able to imagine Manitoba as a vital setting for fiction. She became, as she recalls of Margaret Simpson Wemyss "an early evangelist for Canadian writing" (285).

social forces that separate them. Only when Hagar Shipley shares her hospital room with Sandra Wong at the end of The Stone Angel is she able to both give and receive care. When Hagar wonders, "Maybe I owe my house to her grandmother's passage money," (286-7) referring to the head tax imposed on Chinese people attempting to reunite with their families by bringing them to Canada, Laurence has Hagar interrogate her own place in systemic discrimination. Although, as Findley cautions, readers should not conflate Laurence and her characters, Laurence's comments on her characters' situation in an interview with Graeme Gibson could equally apply to her own project of unlearning prejudice:

I don't think that real liberation comes from turning your back on your whole past or on your ancestral past. Rather it comes through coming to some kind of terms with it, knowing that there is a certain amount of mental baggage, which you would just as soon not carry, but nevertheless, you're stuck with it. (Gibson 203)

She practices this call to examine the past in the main chapters of Dance on the Earth when she questions her own positions of privilege and family positions. Recalling childhood name-calling, Laurence comments "What a lot we had to learn and overcome" (54). She claims her power in writing and her position as Canadian author to challenge prejudice when she remembers the War Measures act and internment of Japanese Canadians (77-82). "For a Sansei woman born on the fifth day of the fifth month" is dedicated to Mary Adachi who worked for Canada House when Laurence lived in Britain. The poem addresses Adachi as sister

recognizing "the once-rejection" of internment that affected Adachi deeply long afterward. Laurence's convocation address in the Afterwords section of Dance on the Earth continues the indirect questioning in her novels. "We are not immune in Canada," she tells the graduating students, "to . . . injustices and acts of inhumanity. Racism, violence, violation of civil liberties . . . all these exist in some measure or other here, too. We should never deceive ourselves into smugness on these issues" (281). Laurence's own history in the memoir turns to the past to confront injustice. Laurence questions the limited history of Canada that she was taught in school: "When I think of what I learned of Canadian History, I feel cheated, not by my teachers but by the society in which I grew up" (77).

I turn to the curriculum content similar to that of Laurence's early schooling to imagine her context. Gammel's History of Canada (1921-25), for example, once presented official history and factual accounting, can now be contextualized as historical and ideological. Its author addresses his imagined reader not only as a "universal" 'he' but also as a "lad." Stereotypes of progress and prosperity prevail in the text. European (male) immigrants are cast as redeemers, thinkers, and men of action while other immigrants and First Nations peoples are constructed in stereotypical terms exactly mirroring those to be found in the popular adventure stories of the day. To note this interpellation is to witness the identification that

Canadian women writers such as Laurence have written of being expected to have when they read. These exclusions extend beyond gender and are exemplified through the material evidence of a high school textbook. Laurence recognized that the official histories of her country lacked many peoples' voices, while realizing that its individual teachers, also caregivers, could not be separated out from the context in which they were also taught. Dance on the Earth states unpleasant truths about the past, and Laurence exposes any shame and liberal guilt that she feels rather than blaming or pointing outward. She understands her life and those around her as socially constructed and open to change.

In Dance on the Earth, Laurence imagines caregiving extending to those beyond one's immediate family, and she writes that "we are an integral part of all humanity everywhere" (281). Could a motherhood position unify the personal and social? In 1968, Laurence wrote as a mother, articulating a caregiving position, in a short memoir "Open letter to the mother of Joe Bass". In that letter, she responds to the police shooting of an African American boy in Detroit and refers to the famous Life magazine photograph of Phan Thi Kim Phuc after a napalm attack in Vietnam. "I cannot exclude myself from the dilemma. I cannot say them," she writes, bridging the distance between herself and the children (Heart of a Stranger 202). Laurence's motherhood position allowed her to imagine a common ground.

At the same time, she acknowledges her relatively comfortable privilege of distance, suggesting its uneasy proximity to complicity, when she writes to Joe Bass' mother that "perhaps you know who the enemy is--perhaps it is I" (203). Laurence's open letter recognized the possibility that her intended audience might not be the one really needing or wanting to hear her struggle with their pain, and that it might be an intrusion. She writes that she is "afraid for all our children," (203) extending the loss of Joe Bass to reflect on war. Significantly, Joe Bass' death was the result of a particular condition of prejudice directed at African American men, and the woman to whom Laurence addressed her open letter likely did not have access to it. While I cannot resolve the issue of Laurence's use of a particular situation to comment on violence in general, rather than commenting on how violence arises from systemic prejudice, the issue of address publicly within a Canadian journal suggests that the message is directed at an audience other than Joe Bass' mother. Phan Thi Kim Phuc's response in 1995 to her Life magazine photograph further complicates a reading of Laurence's essay. No longer a "nameless" girl child, Phan Thi Kim Phuc stresses that while Huynh Chock Nick Ut's photograph may have helped to end the Vietnam war, the attention that she received from western journalists had a destructive effect on her as an individual: "My picture made me very famous but it made my life not what I want" (Mason 41). Laurence could

only imagine such a response when she wrote her essay which first appeared in a shorter version in Al Purdy's New Romans in 1968 and then later in Maclean's. Although separated by time, cultural, personal, and geographical distance, Phan Thi Kim Phuc and Margaret Laurence's common ground in writing becomes their appeal, as mothers, to end war. Laurence's emphasis on Mrs. Bass' loss as a social loss reminded her other readers of the civil and human rights struggles around us, an approach she would later bring to her memoir.

Mary G. Dietz argues that motherhood statements cannot guarantee that calls to recognize humanity as connected and vulnerable to nuclear technology will be realized. "It is only when mothers become politicized and, in particular, when they act collectively as feminists," Dietz argues "that they can secure public policies that, among other things, protect children" (33). Elizabeth Grosz notes that there is a "perceived conflict between the role of the mother and that of political or civic being" (Volatile Bodies 16), and Dietz's remarks suggests that this perception can exist even within a feminist critique. Laurence, however, breaks the binary of mother and civic being by connecting the roles in her memoir and outside of it. She joins her voice with other activists when she notes how resistance to nuclear power is dismissed as "just a motherhood statement" (32). Activist and novelist Donna Smyth similarly explains that

environmentalists are often dismissed by industry and government as being too emotional or even hysterical. Women are familiar with this kind of accusation. Our cultural role is to be emotional, intuitive, imaginative while the male is rational, scientific and intelligent. In this way, intellect is split off from the world. The female is body, the male the severed head. From this head has sprung the child Science who has no mother. (Subversive Elements 146-7)

Laurence's memoir reclaims the motherhood position as political, and counters the binary of body and mind that Smyth discusses. She insists that both men and women question the products of science and defend the emotional, intuitive, and imaginative as well as acknowledging maternal bodies.

It is important to emphasize that Laurence's position in her memoir is not one of the assuaging mother offering a comforting humanism that claims that mothers are inherently peaceful. Laurence's humorous anecdote about "refighting the Battle of Culloden" with a visiting writer named Miss Campbell admits to complicity in some of the attitudes that, in extreme form, lead to conflicts. In addition, Laurence does not suggest that simply caring is a substitute for political action. While Laurence's preferred medium was writing, and while her memoir speaks of her particular experience of motherhood, Laurence's politic actions extended beyond these. At the time Laurence was writing her memoir, the period of 1985-1986, peace movements were visibly active in Canada. Australian physician and environmental activist Dr. Helen Caldicott, whom Laurence names a "courageous worker in the cause of peace," (Dance

289) was on lecture tours in Canada and elsewhere. The National Film Board produced her documentary If You Love this Planet. Laurence's dancing mothers were visible in the song of peace(ful) marches and later in the Raging Grannies' work. By being willing to preach and "make a spectacle," women were able to focus attention on environmental and human survival concerns. Laurence participated in her own way as part of a collective. Metta Spencer writes of Laurence's commitment to banning nuclear power, recalling how Laurence signed letters for Energy Probe of which she was a board member in 1980 and 1981, and how she protested Canadian sale of tritium to the United States. Laurence had been active with Project Ploughshares in 1983 and Operation Dismantle around this time. Dance on the Earth continues this collective work, and affirms other women's words, as it insists that motherhood may become a caregiving position in which one imagines all children as one's own and thereby imagines social responsibility. While some critics interpreted the period between Laurence's last novel and Dance on the Earth as a silencing interruption in Laurence's career, it represents a period of activism informing, and including, her final essays and memoir.

Laurence's Dance moves toward recognizing the continuity between her position as writer and mother in relation to other work towards justice. Caregiving as a model imagines these roles as continuous. Her memoir articulates caregiving as it asserts Laurence's faith in and



care with language, her claiming of female experience, and her willingness to question female and cultural identities. Laurence cannot be mother to us all, but her writing embraces a concept of caregiving as social responsibility in which motherhood is a social position that neither pretends to total control nor receives blame when that power cannot be exercised. "My Final Hour" published in Up and Doing: Canadian Women and Peace implies a form of caregiving that accepts human limitations:

I can now accept with some sort of equanimity that many things are beyond my power. I can try to help friends or family or strangers, but I can never 'save' another in the profoundest sense.  
(Verduyn 250)

Moreover, caregiving in Laurence's memoir does not position the recipients of care as colonized or dependent. By expressing love for her children, for example, Laurence is not Mrs. Oliphant, pressed by convention to insist on the attachment of her grown "babies." Laurence's "For my daughter on her twenty-sixth birthday ... August 1978" writes of herself and her daughter as

connected      related  
but not bound  
by blood      by love (250; 3-5)

If anything, Dance on the Earth positions readers as responsible. Although Laurence questioned whether her work would have lasting impact, and claimed much earlier that she did not write for "the immortality stakes," (Margaret Laurence: First Lady of Manawaka), the final chapter on her own life as mother ends with a direct urging of readers to

make "the dance go on," (222) which suggests that continuity and a recognition of the need for caregiving was Laurence's hope.

Laurence's form of memoir influenced my reading of Dance on the Earth and other memoirs, so a caregiving reading of the memoir involved recognizing that form and emphasizing Laurence's care with language as part of her politics. Reading for a story detached from the many forms Laurence worked with--poetry, essay, fiction--would fail to recognize Laurence's emphasis on connections and continuity both within her work and between people and social issues. Because Laurence connects what I call caregiving to her work as mother and lived experience within her female body, my reading attempted to situate that within Laurence's context as a feminist and writer. In many ways a humanist position, Laurence's motherhood position considers the cultural specificity of her own and her mothers' experience. At the same time, her memoir takes on a political dimension of challenging injustice that extends beyond her own experiences and her gynocentric approach. Recognizing this, the reading became caregiving as it challenged charges of essentialism and didacticism against Dance on the Earth. Laurence's emphasis on connections over differences enabled me to critically attend to other women's memoirs.

### Chapter Three:

Learning Constructed: Jill Ker Conway's Road from Coorain and True North

While Dance on the Earth, with its emphasis on global caregiving facilitated a caregiving reading, other memoirs, such as Jill Ker Conway's The Road from Coorain and True North prove more challenging. Conway argues in Written by Herself, one of several anthologies of women's memoirs that she has edited, that "autobiographical narrative seems to free us momentarily from ambiguity (Vol I.; vii-viii). However, her memoirs, which are fictive, but not fiction remain ambiguous as they resolve neither all conflicts in Conway's life, nor internal textual contradictions. One apparent contradiction is Conway's self-representation as both feminist representative for women within academia and as a wife and model of beauty. Similarly, Conway's anguish about her mother that emerges in True North after the historian's perspective and acceptance at the end of The Road from Coorain suggest that the writer's life exceeds the formal structuring and learning process that one memoir offers. Conway's challenge as historian and memoir writer, to examine and critique social constructions of femininity but not scapegoat the women who appear to embody these, becomes the critic's challenge in writing about Conway's representation of herself and her mother. I argue that her memoirs call for a critical reading strategy that privileges

affiliation over opposition and first works through Conway's apparent rejection of caregiving paradigms.

Published five years apart, Conway's two memoirs form a larger structure or reading effect, the second beginning where the first ends, in mid-air as Conway flies from Australia to the United States to continue her education. Conway's choice to make memoirs her primary form of, and subject of, public writing suggests her commitment to recording women's experience as historical, and to understanding the social significance and source of the personal, and more specifically memoir. Like the female student whom she recalls realizing that, as "the subject of history," she can change history, (True North 201) Conway writes to influence the women who read her memoirs. Such a position is described in Women's Ways of Knowing as the position of constructed knower, who integrates the empathic potential of the connected knower with methods and procedures and a view to social change. Any memoir writer must encounter one important aspect of constructed knowing: that the truth is seen as a process of construction in which the knower participates (140). Similarly, a caregiving reading of Conway's memoirs involves acknowledging them as a process of construction that represents a learning process. In this light, the changes and contradictions in Conway's self-construction in her two memoirs are an inevitable part of the process. The young woman portrayed in The Road from Coorain, as well as Conway's critical work on memoir,

informs my reading of the professional scholar in True North. Read together, Conway's memoirs trace how she comes to understand herself not only as individually empowered, but as gendered, and therefore, social.

Part of the challenge to a caregiving reading practice is Conway's distrust of concepts of caregiving, directly stated in her critical work. Influenced by her training as a historian, Conway traces how gender is socially constructed, so she is skeptical of the assignation of particular characteristics to women in general. As a result, she strongly rejects caregiving as a model for women's social action. She associates caregiving with oppressively totalizing views of women, specifically "the cult of true womanhood" (The Female Experience xix) and with "Victorian notions of femininity" ("Jane Addams" 762). Both working class and middle class women "came from traditions in which femininity was equated with caring for the sick and aiding the poor and sheltering the child," she emphasizes ("Jane Addams" 774). Conway, who studied social reform, questions, not the impulse to care, but the translation of the political action of caregiving into the natural and inevitable work of women.

Conway similarly questions late twentieth-century feminist proposals of caregiving models of education. In True North, she suggests that assumptions about women as caregivers, such as one professor's assertion that women are unable to both raise children and teach, led university

systems to justify gender-based wage differentials and inequity in promotion rather than furthering equity. Conway equates concepts of caregiving with reductive notions of essential womanhood, and in models of education with segregation of female scholars, overwork, and less research time for women (True North 218).

Conway's situates herself historically as a student in her memoirs, which allows me to understand her rejection of such models. A context in which caregiving and professional roles were segregated is one source of her concern that women's education would be limited by assumptions of caregiving. In this context, traditions passed on by authorities determined what roles women were to play in society, as Conway describes in The Road from Coorain:

There were clear injunctions from the adult world about what fields of university study were appropriate for a woman. 'Not law,' we were told, 'it's not a good field for woman. You'll only end up trying divorce cases, and besides a good law firm wouldn't take you in'. . . 'don't take science,' family friends advised. 'There is too much mathematics, and besides, what would a girl like you do in an industrial laboratory?' The things that were 'nice for a woman to study' were unintellectual, like nursing, physiotherapy, or occupational therapy, or strictly decorative, like music or a foreign language, subjects which only the strangest parents thought their daughters might pursue professionally. (143)

A gendering of caregiving had been an imposed cultural expectation in Conway's own context, so that personal grounds constitute part of her critique in the first memoir. "Daughters in Australia were supposed to be the prop and stay of their parents," she writes (Road from Coorain 151).

Conway "felt [she] had no right to exist unless serving the family in some tangible way," (Road from Coorain 156). In light of these reflections, I read her pursuit of an education as an attempt to escape such gender norms; education, for Conway, represented a break away from the caregiver-equals-female model.

While her overt rejection of caregiving roles stands, her discussion of teaching in True North suggest the influence of the very caregiving models that she apparently rejects, especially as they concern women's education. On one hand, Conway is skeptical of caring approaches to teaching because she assumes that they will recreate a family dynamic. In True North, she argues that

Overly nurturant teaching, from which all overt criticism has been removed, seemed to me to run the same danger for the young as permissive child rearing, because both obfuscate the nature of power and thus limit the possibility of rebellion. (True North 218)

Conway interprets rebellion as students' development of independent critical thinking while she equates a caring model of teaching with denial of asymmetries and existing power structures. On the other hand, while Conway's direct statement on nurturant teaching does not imagine a caregiving pedagogy that does not replicate the nuclear family, True North offers evidence of caregiving education in Conway's university life. Conway's women friends created a "well-functioning family" (43) while attending university and formed study groups, for example. She describes how

they create a caring learning situation alternative to the "competitive academic arena" (True North 44) by collaborating. Later, this process is replaced by her collaborative teaching practice and development of history courses with a colleague that represented an alternative to the conventional curriculum and pedagogical assumptions. Even while questioning the attachment that she associates with caregiving models of teaching--an attachment that she argues would be detrimental to students and teachers--Conway admits that she "cared about teaching undergraduates" (True North 154).

Conway's discussion of models of education in True North echo that in Women's Ways of Knowing in particular. When Conway describes herself as a teacher, she is able to "present herself as a person while retaining her objectivity but to present objectivity as a personal issue" as Clinchy, Goldberger, Tarule, and Belenky argue characterizes the position of a constructed and connected teacher (Women's Ways of Knowing 226). I read Conway's description of teaching as also consistent with Nel Noddings', who advocated connected teaching as a form of ethical action and whose ethics of caring informed Women's Ways of Knowing. In both Noddings and Clinchy, Tarule, Belenky, and Goldberger's vision, the instructor as learner "starts from a position of respect or regard for the projects of the other" (Caring 176). As Conway's memoirs trace a shift in her views of education, they offer a model of teaching that approximates



Women's Ways' midwife model. Conway tries to "discern the truth inside the students" (Women's Ways of Knowing 223) rather than imposing outside authority. In her words, the student is recognized as "a possible colleague" (True North 46). Her geographical move to the United States represents part of this learning process--a pedagogical shift away from a model of what Tarule, Clinchy, Belenky, and Goldberger called received knowledge, in which learners assimilate the views of others and reiterate them, and external authority is accorded the highest value (40-43). Conway describes the move as one

from a colonial ideal of education, in which the instructor disciplines the student so that he or she measures up to standards externally developed, to a setting in which each student was viewed as a potential Nobel Prize winner, a possible colleague whose talents might one day transform what was regarded as important knowledge. (True North 46)

Her paradigm shift, or in Women's Ways of Knowing's model, movement from one form of knowing to another, values the students' own experience as a source of knowledge.

Conway's memoirs as a representation of a learning process, by the end of True North, not only offer a model of caregiving teaching, they assume a caregiving model of reading. Conway's description of herself as a reader conducting dissertation research situates her as a caregiving learner when she writes of "liv[ing] with" and "engag[ing] in an inner conversation with" the women whose lives she studied (True North 56). This description of the reading process resembles that of Women's Ways of Knowing's

constructed knower, who seeks to understand the other's perspective as if in conversation. Constructed knowers have access to both "subjective sources for knowing" and traditional forms of reasoning, and they integrate others' voices (Women's Ways of Knowing 134). "Attentive caring is important in understanding not only people but also the written word, ideas, even impersonal objects, according to Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule (143).

Constructivists "establish a communion with what they are trying to understand" (143). The challenge of reading Conway's memoirs is establishing the necessary readerly communion when I become conscious of differences in our positioning and of contradictions in Conway's representation of herself as a female student. Attentive rereading discovers a way to include by not dismissing Conway's learning process represented by her memoirs but rather recognizing the importance of reading the memoirs as a process.

Conway's technique of narrating, not from a retrospective position, but as if she is present in the thoughts and experiences of herself as a young woman does not always work to situate readers in communion with her, as the negative reviews of True North suggest. Carol Brightman's strong criticism of Conway's self-representation in True North, for example, centers on Conway's apparently unconscious reading of herself through a romantic script and patriarchal norms of femininity ("Beyond Coorain" 12). She

argues further that Conway's self-construction cloaks her search for individual success within the academy.

Responding to Conway's description of her potential Smith College presidency as a matter of little thought, Brightman argues that "such disclaimers . . . do little to disguise the evidence that gathers in 'True North' that Ms. Conway is driven by formidable ambitions" (12). Even if I might question the choice of "formidable," rather than "considerable" or "laudable" to describe Conway's ambition, a drive that Conway herself identifies as socially unacceptable for women within a patriarchal history, I could not dismiss Brightman's observations about Conway's self-construction and position of power.

I attribute the contradictions in Conway's self-construction to her language choices. In The Road from Coorain, Conway describes her rejection by External Affairs as an act of systemic discrimination, but refers to it as a "blow of fate" (191).<sup>1</sup> While her choice of language is sometimes contradictory, a caregiving reading of her memoirs as a continuum includes her own theories about memoir. In True North, Conway as historian notes that, "looking over

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<sup>1</sup> Brightman's second concern is that Conway "never questions the 'hierarchy,' whose defense, of course, rests on her capable shoulders (12). Because Conway uses language that often appears to reinforce the hierarchies and traditions that she seeks to challenge, and many of her choices cannot be easily explained or defended, such as her reference to remaining in Australia as "intellectual suttee" and her similar reference to a possible return to her mother as "self-immolation" adopting Jung's language, even as she questions it (True North 68; Portable Jung 149).

the span of a hundred years, what was constant was the unyielding social pressure which operated to define women in romantic sexual and emotional terms" (151). In When Memory Speaks: Reflections on Autobiography (1988), Conway suggests that romantic and caregiving roles are common within stories of women's lives, and they prevent women from claiming other abilities. Her discussion in later critical work of this phenomenon enables me to read the memoirs as revealing, and, to some extent responsible for, a growing awareness of the impact of gendered roles on her own life. Moreover, I read Conway's willingness to discuss complicity, and the ensuing strong responses from others, as the result of her decision to position herself as a learner in the memoirs. Conway represents the views of her younger self, leading some to equate that voice and those beliefs with those she currently holds. Performing her changing response relies on her readers staying with her on the journey across time and space by suspending disbelief and argument and providing the constructivist's empathy.

Women's Ways of Knowing argues that the move from a more passive receptive position to an active, questioning, yet connected one characterizes constructed knowing. This position closely resembles True North's representation of Conway's understanding of herself and the women reformers whose lives she studied. Conway's description of women as knowers resembles that of Women's Ways of Knowing's received knower. In her words, "an inner voice and self exist but

may have had a minimum of attention, particularly if the women have learned the lesson of 'weeding out the self' (True North 136). Conway's awareness of how she and others have occupied this position is evident especially in her second memoir, where she writes that "a woman could live her whole life seeking power and influence for the causes she favored but not be conscious of any but the approved spectrum of emotions allocated her in the patterning of gendered temperaments" (True North 151-2). Conway writes that while "one has to know the existence of one's rage or passion for change to transmit its energy to others," (152) women are conditioned to be unaware of their own direction. Rather than being unaware of, or intentionally disguising this energy in herself in her second memoir, she constructs her previous lack of awareness of it, and the social sources of this lack of awareness. Both of Conway's memoirs practice her belief, expressed in critical writing, that memoirs "give us the chance to see how the categories by which we analyze our own lives might be changed" (Written by Herself Vol. 2, xv). Her memoirs perform and outline these categories, and they allow for a caregiving reading that connects reader and writer in the learning process, if not the specifics of lived experience.

Sidonie Smith argues in A Poetics of Women's Autobiography that "the woman who chooses to write her life story must negotiate the figures of 'man' and the figures of 'woman' promoted by the cultural discourses that surround

her" (19) whether she does so consciously or not.

Femininity, Conway recognizes, is one of the categories by which women analyze their lives, and she chooses to record how she, like others, embodied and resisted some of the accepted cultural discourses of femininity. Reading True North with The Road from Coorain in mind facilitates a critical reading that considers the pressures on Conway. Although critical readers of True North access only the white-collar adult professional, not the impoverished girl remembered in the cover photograph of the Vintage paperback edition of Road from Coorain, that image is crucial to understanding the writing position of the later memoir. Conway describes how she overcompensates for her academic focus in part to achieve independence from her mother, to give herself care that she lacked growing up, and to approximate the 1950s era image of the lady. "Ladies, we learned, did not consider comfort more important than propriety in dress or manners," she writes (Road from Coorain 101). She explains how her work as a model represents a "customary occupation" for Australian women (Road from Coorain 209), yet she was "still smarting from rejection of [her] intellectual talents" when she took the gender-based job; she had been denied a professional one on that basis. Understanding this, it is not surprising that she turned to a profession that valued what the culture expected women to do anyway--be rewarded for meeting expectations about appearance. Working as a model, however,

demystified the process of the beauty business for Conway so that she "stopped buying fashion magazines, began to wear comfortable shoes, and started to dress as [she] liked" (Road from Coorain 209). Conway's memoirs, read together, suggest that a change in appearance was not a simple capitulation to norms of femininity, but a transformation in which she began to imagine herself differently.

Writing critically about memoir in When Memory Speaks, Conway encourages readers of memoirs to seek signs "that their authors are struggling to overcome the cultural taboos that define these women as witnesses rather than actors in life's events" (88). I traced this struggle in both of her memoirs in how she writes about her husband. Her tribute to him in the title of her second memoir fixes him at the centre of her world and activity, which explains Brightman's observation of a romantic script in True North. Conway writes that her husband's "moral integrity, courage, and devotion to humanistic learning were certainly [her] compass point, the true north one needed to set directions on this continent" (True North 132). She admits to being temporarily "captive to [a] romantic myth" of dependency on a husband (132), but she goes on to complicate the romantic myth. The compass metaphor for her husband does not erase her critique of the constraints of the expectations for women in her circumstances that accompanied marriage. In addition, True North does not end at the point of her marriage--an option that she had initially rejected as a

life choice. It ends with her focus on her public role within the university as a representative for women faculty and students. She describes her new identity as public (227), and reclaims the image of the direction-giving compass from paternal or spousal authority when she writes that she and her colleagues "were laying down a path for others to travel" (True North 187). Attending to Conway's theories of reading memoir, and by reading Conway's memoirs as tracing a learning process, I am able to read Conway as not simply complicit in, but critical of gendered roles. Her comment on norms of femininity in both memoirs is central to her self-construction as a learner.

Conway's memoirs trace a gradual change in her image of herself as a learner. One change involves her recognition that she is connected to others through shared experience. In The Road from Coorain, Conway admitted that "many years spent caring for the emotional needs of others made [her] long for some wonderfully abstract study, elegant clear, free of messy human demands" (143), but in True North, she acknowledges the impossibility of detachment. Further, she finds that caregiving was inseparable from her studies. She supports her husband through his long periods of depression, and as a professor, she supports daycare strikers, and creates a program to prevent sexual assault on campus. Such caregiving becomes social action. "I'd moved from advancing my own career to thinking about other women like myself,"



she writes, (True North 205) indicating that her gendered position is social rather than individual.

As historian, Conway is concerned with the real ways in which women are educated. The second memoir raises the issue of problems for women within academia, revealing another change in Conway's understanding of herself as a learner. Education, her memoirs demonstrate, does not guarantee that others will recognize individual breakthroughs, and Conway's memoirs do not idealize her experience of university. The story of how "the staff in the medical center looked first for psychological problems of adjustment in women students before considering a possible physical cause of any ailment" (True North 22) and, as a result, an outbreak of salmonella went undetected for weeks exemplifies the institutional attitudes that she critiques. Conway records how she struggled with internalized expectations of her academic role, and True North recalls many of these. She writes of having "grown up being constantly reminded that 'brainy' women were good for nothing in the 'normal' domestic area of feminine life" (True North 91). She recalls that marriage was followed by the "need to perform as a super housewife to justify [her] career" (True North 91). In The Road from Coorain, she observes that "women were supposed to be governed by love" (187), and in True North, she notes with frustration the similar social setting of Harvard, in which "the rules were clear. Men and women belonged in couples, and only in

couples, like so many candidates for Noah's ark" (True North 21). She shares her research on the experience of women in nineteenth-century American universities to put this reading of female scholars in historical perspective in the second memoir. The example of Oberlin College to which women were admitted to promote heterosexuality and to complete male students' domestic chores points to the inequitable side of coeducation, which Conway and other women inherited. "Women were simply to be added to an ongoing enterprise designed to maximize male talent," Conway explains (True North 240).

Reading Conway's memoirs as a process of learning, I bring her history of her position as a female student to my reading of her self-representation as professor in the second memoir. Conway may occupy a position of considerable power within the academy, but her memoirs act as a reminder of the "actuality of power" (Martindale 246) that had granted only a token place to female academics early in her career. True North explores Conway's marginality as a female academic studying women's history, which is described by colleagues as "'Jill's interest in women'" (True North 123). Even when she was published in Dædalus in 1964 alongside prominent critics such as J. Hillis Miller, enjoying a legitimacy that other academics did not, the journal's biographical note emphasized the marital status of each of the female contributors (802-3), interpreting them

as extensions of men rather than scholars in their own right.<sup>2</sup>

It is hardly surprising that Conway's memoirs should present her as identifying with male authority and literary figures to distance herself from the limited expectations of women that she encounters. In The Road from Coorain, she describes herself as identifying with Stephen Daedalus, who represented her "ideal of intellectual life," (Road 174). Conway was not provided in her early experience or early education with a world view that allowed her to recognize that she could occupy a social position as a woman. In reaction, she became, in her own words, an isolated female historian who "had unthinkingly taken on the identity of the male writer" (Road 171).

Conway does not link this temporary identification to how she understands and represents her mother in the memoirs, but as a reader, I am able to consider the influence of literature to understand the sources of her interpretation. In the Road from Coorain, she compares herself to Hamlet whose "good mother is bad mother unto [him]" (149). The hero's sense of betrayal informs Conway's understanding of her situation, while I note the differences between the characters in Shakespeare's play and Conway's family. Rather than remarrying quickly after her husband's death, Conway's mother immerses herself in the role of

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2 I am not trying to single out Daedalus here; by 1970, the notes are consistent with those in current use.

mother and gives up romantic and vocational life, as Conway herself tells readers. As David McCooey notes (97), Conway also compares her situation to that of the son in Samuel Butler's The Way of All Flesh. The way in which she writes of her own mother's comments about her children to visitors closely parallels Butler's description of Pontifex. Butler writes:

Mr. Pontifex would say it was only right to give a boy his option, and was much too equitable to grudge his son whatever benefit he could derive from this. He had the greatest horror, he would exclaim, of driving any young man into a profession which he did not like. Far be it from him to put pressure upon a son of his as regards any profession and much less when so sacred a calling as the ministry was concerned. He would talk in this way when there were visitors in the house and when his son was in the room. (Butler 31)

Conway reconstructs her mothers comments as follows:

"Of course I want my children to be free to do what they want, travel where they choose, and not be tied to me." . . . "I can't stand parents who think they own their children," she would announce, not mentioning her ferocious attacks on the character and motives of any friends I was incautious enough to bring home. (Road from Coorain 174)

The content of Conway's passage is close enough to Butler's to be an allusion, especially given her reference to reading the novel. The feeling that the parent is controlling and hypocritical is shared. The most significant difference is that Conway's final clause is less satirical of a "type" of person than a remembrance of a painful situation.

Nevertheless, in interviews after the publication of The Road from Coorain (1989), as in her identification with male

literary figures, Conway seems to support McCooey's interpretation of her first memoir as a rejection of feminist relational models of subjectivity (93) in favour of a subset of memoirs, the Education. In one interview, she states: "It's very much the vogue . . . to talk about women as developing their moral consciousness through a connectedness to mother, but I think that's misleading" (Heron 3). There, she names The Road from Coorain "a story of separation--of independence and breaking away" (Heron 3). An attentive reading can acknowledge where Conway cannot that, in order to represent a break away, both of her memoirs repeatedly return to discuss Conway's mother, and not because Conway has achieved intellectual distance as a result of her education, as the literary references might suggest.

According to Barbara Clarke Mossberg, many twentieth-century women writers have adopted a writing position she calls the "daughter construct," in which "the writer dwells on childhood experience" (205) and "seeks to be independent but in crucial ways she never leaves home, literally or figuratively, dwelling there in her mind and art" (206). This construct represents "an identity forged from the effort to escape the maternal matrix and the patriarchy which bounds it" (206). Because women as mothers have usually been the primary caregivers, they come to represent, as Susan Sulieman suggests, values that daughters may wish to reject:

To the extent that she is perceived as a defender and an instrument of patriarchy, the mother takes on all of the father's negative attributes even while lacking his power: as such, she is the perfect target for both the son's and daughter's anger. (165)<sup>3</sup>

Conway's memoirs to some extent perpetuate this rejection where they does not question the identity that she has taken on. At the same time, they represent a struggle to understand her mother's life and her own and to perform her own life differently as she becomes aware of their status as women within history. As a result, the memoirs construct traditional fields, such as nursing, her mother's vocation, and other highly disciplined fields as unintellectual or decorative; they are reduced because feminized: "Nursing and mothering roles are presumed to be 'natural' to women and because of this they are taken for granted and even devalued" (Murphy 37). In a climate in which caregiving was assumed to be natural, Conway rejected caregiving roles, and, temporarily, those who practiced them.

Conway's refusal to generalize women's experiences contributes to her dilemma as memoir writer and feminist historian attempting to understand her mother within patriarchy. She rejects views of women as inherently caring or totally oppressed, for example. Conway argues that "one couldn't ascribe all the free will to men and all the determined life experience to women" (Road from Coorain

<sup>3</sup> Conway records her father's contradictory request of her: "If anything happens to me, promise me you'll take care of your mother . . . get a real education and get away from this damn country for good" (Road from Coorain 64).

237). Further, acknowledging her mother in her specificity in the memoirs involves disclosing her mother's "sudden and violent rages" and her addictions (True North 199).

However, because Conway most objects to what she perceived to be her mother's practice of "turning living, breathing people into lifeless objects to be possessed," (True North 199) she must avoid objectification in her memoirs of her mother.

The most significant part of the difficulty in writing about her mother must be her sense of personal betrayal. She describes her mother as "a sardonic woman who mocked [her] emotional life as though it were the stupidest farce" (Road from Coorain 180) and "whose only interest" in her daughter "was as an object to ease her own neuroses" (True North 142). Because she is representing her own feelings and beliefs, she cannot consistently maintain a historical perspective on her mother. Her interpretation of mother's reading mystery novels as escapist (Road from Coorain 89) for example, implicitly values a literary canon over popular literature--one of the places in the memoirs where readers may distance themselves from Conway. Similarly, while Conway writes with frustration that her mother, "feminist though she was . . . did not question the accepted wisdom which defined the menopause as a time of ill health" (Road from Coorain 111-12), readers can recognize that Conway's mother could not have transcended her times; this "accepted wisdom" was not challenged until twenty to thirty years

later openly in her cultural context. The issue of their differences in faith presents particularly difficult challenges for Conway writing about her mother. Conway understands the Catholic Church as "a Christianity that recognized female transcendence" (True North 85) while her mother dismisses it as "Popish nonsense aimed at the suppression of women" (Road 184). Early in The Road from Coorain, Conway recognizes her mother's right to difference when she acknowledges her mother's reasons for rejecting Catholicism. She comments that her mother "had delivered unwanted children of Catholic mothers, watched the mother's life ebb out after botched abortions, and she would have nothing to do with a faith she equated with the irresponsible male dominations of women she resented so bitterly" (23). In True North, Conway responds to her mother's disapproval of her marriage and adoption of Catholicism. She admits that the choice is in part a "negative commentary on her [mother's] decision not to share in [her] father's religious life" (84). True North emphasizes Conway's emotional response rather than the historical perspective gained through her education.

Conway's first memoir provides a model for reading the second because there, Conway connects her understanding of herself as gendered and her estimation of her mother. In The Road from Coorain, she explains that when she was the only student refused a job with External Affairs (Road 191) on the basis of gender, she decided to rethink her



identification with male peers and literary figures. She admits that she had been acting unreflectingly as though [she] were a man, bound to live out the script of a man's life" but that "this one blow of fate made [her] identify with other women and prompted [her], long before it was politically fashionable to do so, to try to understand their lives (Road from Coorain 193). Conway almost credits the discrimination for her change in world view: one in which she realizes that she is a woman, and in relation to Aboriginal Australians, a colonizer, not only a victim of discrimination and her mother's verbal abuse. She admits in The Road from Coorain that her view of her mother changes as a result.

Conway's first memoir reflects this changed perspective. The Road from Coorain provides details that allow a caregiving reader to historicize where the more emotionally connected writer cannot in True North. While Conway does not connect information about her mother's past with her mother's later behaviour, these details assembled from both memoirs allow me to do so. In The Road from Coorain, Conway describes how her mother, in addition to losing a vocation, suffers numerous physical problems, including hearing impairment, a hysterectomy (whether she had endometriosis like her daughter, Conway does not write) followed by pneumonia. After her husband's death (possibly by suicide) and her son's in a car accident, she suffers

depression, a fractured wrist, dependency on tranquilizers, hyperthyroidism, and high blood pressure.

While in True North, Conway confesses to her momentary impulse to kill her mother, The Road from Coorain provides a historical reading of her mother's situation. It begins with several pages of description of the heat, drought and "disorienting" "emptiness" (25) of the western plains of New South Wales and the toughness necessitated by the unpredictable life, which made men good soldiers while women "lacked such a calling" (9) so that their endurance skills have no direction. She explains that her mother's entire savings had gone into the house at Coorain, "a nightmare of desolation" (Road from Coorain 18), which she later discovers had been subsumed into her husband's estate (Road from Coorain 74) so that she saw "the product of fifteen years of unremitting labour disappear" (Road from Coorain 82). Earlier, Conway's mother had been deserted by her father and witness to "the casual sexual exploitation of her mother" (Road from Coorain 21). In Conway's historical reading in the first memoir, her mother becomes one of many women, and she provides the information that allows for a better understanding of her mother's destructive side. "Lacking a power for good, she sought power through manipulating her children," Conway writes (195). While insisting on education for her daughter, her own "lack of education was a real handicap because she had no historical or philosophical perspective from which to analyze her own

experience of loss and grief" (115). In Sydney, her mother is socially isolated by mores and "the cultural wasteland of suburbia [where] there were no schools or evening classes she might have attended which could offer an intellectual approach to her quest" (Road from Coorain 115). "A loyal follower of Marie Stopes," the birth control proponent, and Havelock Ellis who theorized women's sexuality and wrote literary criticism (Road from Coorain 22) she spent "endless afternoons ironing in the kitchen" (Road from Coorain 35) rather than engaging in community activity that she had enjoyed before her marriage. Conway explains that her mother "settled incongruously into the model domesticity that was to be the ideal of the fifties" (Road from Coorain 110). By situating her mother's life in relation to a historical ideal of women's domesticity, she encourages readers to understand her mother's life as a woman in a social context.

The caregiving reader can note where Conway represents her mother in a positive sense in both memoirs so as to avoid blaming either woman for their responses to life. The Road from Coorain in particular traces Conway's mother's feminist influence and her insistence on education for her daughter, the legacy that permits Conway to analyze her mother's life and distance herself from the aspects she wishes to avoid. Conway's mother expected her daughter to take academia seriously contrary to cultural expectations. She taught Conway to read, was a more effective teacher than

the hired tutor, and "encouraged a strict equality between" her male and female children (Road from Coorain 35, 34). As constructed knower, Conway is able recognize her mother's contribution as a teacher and her presence in Conway's own values as feminist historian. This recognition is apparent in Conway's rhetorical question in True North about her own abilities to act as university administrator: "How did I learn to manage time? The answer was simple," she writes, citing her "mother's flawless management of two or three people's jobs on Coorain" (215-6) as the teacher. In The Road from Coorain, Conway sets aside her subjective responses and "discover[s] a new person" (197) in her mother. She recognizes one source of conflict as a matter of differences, and recognizes her mother as a person with different tastes in art and architecture from her own: neoclassical instead of romantic. Conway had interpreted her mother's work in the garden as a bourgeois retreat from social action, but in the final chapter of True North, having moved away forever from her mother's garden, a gardening simile explains her decision not to continue work at a Canadian university (248). Conway writes:

It might touch greater numbers of women indirectly if I ran a Canadian university but the influence would be fleeting, and the institution would revert to type the minute I left, like some hybrid iris or daisy lacking cross-fertilization. (248)

Perhaps significantly, at the end of her second memoir, she takes up her mother's interest as symbol, in her own chosen form of expression: writing. However, as a reader

attending to the memoirs rather than imposing expectation, I had to accept the lack of resolution about how Conway finally reads her mother. Because her feelings are complex, even the structuring of her life in her memoirs and her representation of herself as a learner cannot conclude where as a feminist reader I might wish her to: with reconciliation.

Conway's critical writing on memoir, beyond her two memoirs themselves, provides continued comment of her life. I read this commentary, which references the two memoirs, as indicative of Conway's conception of memoir as an ongoing process. Her reference to her earlier writing allows a reader to rethink her memoirs' construction of her mother in particular. In When Memory Speaks, for example, Conway comments that learning of her father's heart problems (information that her mother apparently did not have) helps her to understand his death differently: "It still makes a difference, even fifty years later whether his going was intentional or not" (184). Her reference to a much earlier event, recorded in her first memoir encourages a reading of her memoirs as a process as it returns me to her description of the event in The Road from Coorain, and as Conway writes, "changes the emotional and moral climate" of her childhood (When Memory Speaks 184). In light of the new information, Conway's mother is understood, not as indirectly responsible for his death, as Conway suggests when she comments on her mother's rejection of his faith, (84) but as powerless to

prevent it as her daughter was. That Conway continues to comment on her relationship with her mother in the critical writing, and by extension her previous representation of her own life story, suggests that her project of learning is ongoing. A caregiving reading recognizes this process and takes the later perspectives into account. The memoirs' truths become contextual, and the memoirs become documents of changing understanding of self and others, rather than artifacts.

True North and The Road from Coorain trace Conway's journey from the assumption that caregiving necessarily represents an abstract concept imposed on women and that education offered freedom from caregiving, to an understanding of how both education and caregiving are essential. As Conway recognizes her connection to her research subjects and her students as women and as learners, she assumes what Women's Ways of Knowing calls the position of constructed knower. From this position, she recognizes herself as gendered and therefore connected to others, and through memoir she traces this gradual realization. Education is transformed from a symbol of freedom from the social to a tool that enables Conway to question educational history and her own life as well as traditional expectations of female students. Because Conway is writing about her own life, she cannot escape her emotional responses, and as constructed knower, she offers them as evidence of a learning process. She writes of her male identification,

influenced by literature, that affects her representation of her mother. Where she is closely connected, her historical perspective in the first memoir can be brought to the second, allowing me to take up a position that avoids reading her mother as wholly destructive, or at least, considers her as socially constructed. Reading Conway's memoirs together suggests a possible form of caregiving for reading memoirs in general, that is, interpreting the writing as representation of process in which the writer is understood as providing the knowledge that she has at the time. At the same time, readers can similarly recognize, like constructed knowers, that our own frames of reference will differ and shift historically and culturally.

#### Chapter Four:

##### Responding to Alarming Utterances: Caregiving as Reading for the Social in a Survivor's Memoir

Although this chapter follows on my reading of Jill Ker Conway's memoirs, it informed my reading of those. Just as that reading needed to recognize that Conway's framing of herself and relationship with her mother was inseparable from her feelings, a response to an emphasis on mothers' roles in memoirs of abuse survivors calls for a caregiving reading that recognizes the emotional involvement of each writer. Caregiving is a central theme in memoirs of survivors of sexual abuse because the writers experienced absence of care. Janice Williamson, who has written critical work on survival in interviews, essays, and a longer memoir, offers several ways of reading survivor's memoirs ethically. One way, Williamson suggests, is that "the feminist critic can trace" in survivors' memoirs of abuse "the shadow of [a] narrative in the text--one that leads to the mother, and not simply as the object of blame" ("I Peel Myself out of my own skin" 141). Williamson's suggestion enables a reading of Ellen Prescott's memoir Mondays are Yellow, Sundays are Grey in which Prescott writes as mother and daughter, and as caregiver. Prescott's reconstruction of her discovery of and fight to end abuse traces the mother, in Williamson's words, "not as an object of blame." In the memoir, Prescott confronts the very images of femininity that surround, and contribute to the



abuse, or are used to defend it. The memoir records how idealization and vilification of mothers individualize and blame survivors, rather than acknowledge and prevent abuse. A critical reading within an ethics of caregiving recognizes this theoretical and political element of the memoir, as survivors Elly Danica, Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray urge, in keeping with Williamson's tracing. Identifying themselves as survivors, rather than victims, the writers call for public recognition of their experience that ensures that the telling has an effect in preventing further violence and neglect. At the same time, the act of writing about autobiographical writing about sexual abuse survival is bound to raise ethical concerns. These include concerns about the critical approach potentially imposing values from academic criticism that do not adequately take into account the emotional connection of the writer to the memoir or that objectify both. Commenting on the ethics of critical reading, Derek Attridge imagines reading as an encounter with an other that involves identification, perception of difference, and transformation. I inform this approach to reading with Teresa Ebert's materialist critique of patriarchy, to move toward a caregiving critical reading of Ellen Prescott's memoir.

In "Innovation, Literature, Ethics: Relating to the Other," Attridge describes the reading process as one in which "I recognize the familiar contours of a human being, which is to say I accommodate him or her to my existing

schemata" (22). This recognition could be called identification. When someone writes in first-person in a text, I am encouraged to identify as I read; "I" becomes dialogic, representing both the writer and the reader. The empathy is greater when I know that the text is non-fiction, and that the person about whom I am reading has a living correspondent. Janice Williamson, citing Nicole Brossard, describes the effect of the process of reading survivors' memoirs as as one in which "grief and pain are re-enacted and born 'in ourselves'" (146). In this reading, not only detachment, but to some extent, distinction between the reading and writing "I"s falls away.

For many readers, the shared experience will stop at the end of the memoir or some time after reading it. Reading Mondays are Yellow, Sundays are Grey, it may stop at the point of relief when a previously resistant and skeptical doctor confers her medical authority, confirming Prescott's worst fears, but also affirming her instinct and allowing her to protect her children. A caregiving reading involves recognizing the different positions of writer and reader, whether or not writer and reader share similar experiences, without losing the ability to read oneself in.

The issue of anonymity illustrates one possible, important difference between writer and readers. Just as shelters' and safe houses' locations are kept secret, some writers use pen names to protect themselves and their families and friends. Ellen Prescott "is the pseudonym of

an award-winning writer who has also worked as a resource person in the field of child sexual abuse" whose choice of surname is her mother's maiden name in the memoir. It also shares the name associated with a case of abuse in a Canadian town. Prescott explains that the pseudonyms protect her children, who requested them: "They're big enough to say. And they say No, no real names" (205). The pen names protect the women from the abuser as well as forms of public response.

"The risks taken in the course of critical reflection are never equally shared," Sherene Razack notes in "Storytelling for Social Change" (113). She observes that "there are penalties for choosing the wrong voice at the wrong time for telling an inappropriate tale" (117). While Razack's essay focuses on issues of speaking by women marginalized because of ethnicity, some of the issues of listening and speaking are transferrable (or doubly relevant) here. A woman who writes about an abusive situation risks the exposure to others' prurient curiosity or rejection that Danica describes in her response to her own memoir: Beyond Don't. Writing creates a situation in which, Elly Danica argues, it is "as though [she] were experiencing" the abuse "all over again," (Beyond Don't 41) because the language is embodied and has bodily effects. Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray argue that "bringing things into the realm of discourse . . . can contribute to our own subordination" (260) because "disclosure and repression are

mutually reinforcing, so as to constitute a single economy of discourse" (269). Prescott's memoir supports this view. Prescott writes of poverty and ill health resulting from the disclosure. She became a single mother (in a society that still stigmatizes women without male partners) with children who needed full-time care and counselling. Disclosing the abuse, for a time, positioned her as vulnerable to further violence from her partner, rejection from friends and family, and lack of institutional support. Prescott's memoir breaks out of this economy by exposing the ways in which community failed to recognize and take steps to resolve the situation.

Breaking out of this economy as a reader involves recognizing what Attridge calls the "singular otherness of the person" (22) writing and attending to her situation while recognizing its social implication. Following on the work of many feminist theorists, Attridge proposes a recognition of difference that is a model of difference in relation. A reading becomes not simply a matter of identification, but one of transformation. Learning that Prescott's abusive partner will go free, for example, "the experience" of reading becomes "an encounter with the limits of one's powers to think and to judge, a challenge to one's capacities as a rational agent" (Attridge 22, my emphasis). When, as a reader I realize that I cannot absorb or explain all of the information or images that a memoir presents, I am in a position to be transformed by it.

A possible change brought about by reading is recognition of the pervasiveness of abuse. Nearly every memoir written by a woman that I have read across a broad range of class, ethnic, religious, and national backgrounds recorded at least one incident of abuse against the writer, even when that was not the focus of the memoir. One of the earliest autobiographies in English, for example, The Book of Margery Kempe, begins with Kempe's revelation of threats of sexual assault by a man in her community. The common threads in women's memoirs over time suggest that abuse is not a marginal topic, but an ongoing problem. When abuse is defined as including suggestive remarks, exposure to pornographic material, unwanted touching, as well as the more extreme physical forms such as forced sexual acts, few women have been free from it.

Transformation may therefore also involve recognition of shared experience. The effect may be that the memoir writer's action opens the door to memories or to understanding unforgotten experience differently. As Liza Potvin writes, "when one woman speaks her story, she sparks a memory or a flashback for someone else" (White Lies (for my mother) 177). That effect of reading can be eventually healing, if as Janice Williamson argues, "those incest survivors who communicate their experience to others through writing re-create this community of understanding and release many readers from silent collaboration in their own secreted guilt and shame" (135-6). As they expose the

abuse, the memoirs' work against abusers' imposition of silence and normalization of the acts. Memoirs validate not only the writers' own understanding of the experiences but of other women who share them, and they take on a crucial and social healing role as a result.

Teresa Ebert's "Ludic Feminism, the Body, Performance, and Labor: Bringing Materialism Back into Feminist Cultural Studies" allows me to inflect Attridge's proposal that reading is transformative with a politics that emphasizes the social and recognizes gender as a common ground. Ebert responds to abuse indirectly in the essay while challenging feminist critical approaches that she argues do not lead to social change. She is particularly wary of mere affirmation of difference, and calls for a response that involves transformation as social change. Ebert's materialist feminism claims a "difference in relation within a system of exploitation" (19, my emphasis) which Ebert names patriarchy. She explains that, although "women's identity is not identical; they are not the 'same' as each other," "they are all subjects of the same structures of oppression" (22). While Attridge's idea of reading as transformation is helpful to a caregiving reading, it needed this recognition of gender.

A caregiving critical reading can attend to how women writers respond individually to patriarchal structures of oppression. Women's memoirs of survival reflect a materialist politics defined as one that challenges

"dominant institutions that as a totality, distribute economic resources and cultural power asymmetrically according to gender" (Ebert 5). They critique how "differences have been produced out of regimes of exploitation" (Ebert 7).<sup>1</sup> As they situate abuse as social, survivors' memoirs challenge beliefs about the inherent safety of various social institutions such as the family, heterosexuality, social services, the legal system, friendship, and images of women and "their place." The potential effect on readers is that the survivor's memoir may cause a change in world view rather than support existing beliefs about various institutions and selves as gendered. As Janice Williamson observes in Crybaby, "the controversy unmask[s] the structures of authority that maintain traditional domestic relations: a dangerous threat to the status quo" (185) which explains the often violent reaction to disclosures of abuse, and the defensive refusal to listen.

A reading that emphasizes a critique of patriarchy permits recognition of the social character of abuse, and social responsibility connects survivors and non-survivors. Acknowledging the perspectives of survivors, including written forms, helps to keep present in public memory the

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1 Barbara Nelson insists on the social rather than private character of abuse, which is linked, as Ebert's materialist feminism recognizes to poverty, patriarchy, and other forms of violence (12). Nelson observes that intervention appears when social trends toward justice, such as the Civil Rights Movement, enable a broader concern with individual and social rights.

need for safeguards against abuse. This form of recognition is ideally consistent with "an ethic of care [which] rests on the premise of non-violence--that no one should be hurt," (Gilligan 174) and this ethic of care has informed feminist interventions against violence in practice as well as feminist theory. Elly Danica, commenting on her own memoir of survival, emphasizes the importance of this ethic when she writes that she "wished to encourage readers to care enough to work together to take whatever steps are necessary to stop the abuse of children" (Beyond Don't 45). A critical response to them can similarly point to how what "is" can change (9). It is with this goal that I turn to a reading of Ellen Prescott's Mondays are Yellow, Sundays are Grey.

The memoir takes its title from Prescott's daughter Carolina's designation of colours for days of the week, grey being the days visiting her father, who admits his abuse of his daughters only toward the end of the memoir. Part One leads up to Prescott's realization that her partner is abusing her daughters. This narrative intertwines with memories of her own childhood, and her father's abuse of her mother, and of animals. Part Two begins her struggle to protect her children. Prescott relates her growing unease and the jarring reactions of her partner to their children, her growing awareness of a problem and her emerging feminism, and her attempts to find support. In Part Three,



she describes the aftermath of the abuse and comments on the writing process.

By crediting others' help and questioning her own actions within the memoir, Prescott does not imagine herself as individually heroic. While reading her as heroic involves giving respect, a necessary component of a caregiving reading, it also situates the writer as vulnerable to readerly expectations of heroes and possible rejection. Prescott insists, not so much on her individual success, but on the importance of connections between people as a necessary response to social conditions--as Ebert's materialist feminism does. Mondays emphasizes the need for community recognition, given Prescott's experience of the inadequacy of community support systems for mothers in general as recently as 1982 (although her memoir is dedicated to the "women who work to stop sexual assault"), and in the context of escaping an abusive situation in particular. Mondays challenges limiting understandings of motherhood and femininity that contribute to dismissals, blaming, and lack of support. Although Prescott questions her own interpretations and fallibility throughout the memoir, she effectively challenges stereotypes. Her questioning works to unmask the patriarchal processes by which survivors of abuse may initially understand their lives.

Prescott's prologue begins Mondays with a dramatic admission of her own potential maternal violence, which

risks possible misreading of the motives and actions that she describes having. "In 1982, when my daughters were four and one," she writes, "I decided to kill them" (1). The declaration may repel or attract readers, but Prescott purposefully follows it with a description of her psychological and physical situation as a mother who suspects danger but has not discovered the abuse. Prescott explains: "I didn't know why I wanted to kill my kids. I knew it arose from instinct, that I felt like a cornered animal, fiercely protective" (3):

The girls were in trouble . . . I only registered the threat as it swelled towards them like fire, pressing its vivid story. I only knew I had to save my daughters, that saving them was more important to me than breath. And so, I should kill them. (3)

At the peak of her frustration, she imagines her children as junkies addicted to her, and parasites (67). Fortunately, the moment at which Prescott believes that the only route to safety is to kill herself and her daughters passes. In the same week, she realizes that her children are being abused and that she alone cannot protect them. Prescott admits in the memoir that she writes of such humiliating and painful moments in order to be represent herself accurately (205), but it also effectively illustrates the desperate courses that a mother may consider when offered few choices and no way to articulate her situation.

It is especially risky for Prescott to begin with these images given that they potentially conjure that of the

"female hysteric" that Linda Alcoff and Laura Grey argue is an ever present background code to interpretations of women's statements about abuse (285)--a code that reads them as unreliable. Ebert's materialism would locate this code historically. In The History of Sexuality, Foucault identifies the "hystericization of women's bodies" as one of the "four great strategic unities which, beginning in the eighteenth century, formed specific mechanisms of knowledge and power centered on sex" (103-4). The "most visible form" of this hystericization for Foucault is "the Mother, with her negative image as 'nervous woman'" (104). Prescott's representation of herself as mother at times epitomizes this image. Prescott questions her own actions and motives throughout Mondays. A caregiving reading attends to these doubts, reading them as an effect of oppression. Prescott's willingness to question her own position exposes the image of the violent and nervous mother as a social construct and effect of abuse that she, and other women, can reject.

As mothers, survivors encounter blame. One form of blame suggests that the mother is responsible for the violence while feminist research projects undo this stereotype. Janis Tyler Johnson's research on sexual abuse, for example, concluded that most women were unaware of its occurrence as the abusers had carefully concealed their actions, and like Prescott's father, had created an atmosphere of fear in which disclosure seemed impossible. Her partner similarly relied on shaming and a culture that

dismissed women's words. Nancy Chodorow and Susan Contratto, in their essay, "The Fantasy of the Perfect Mother," argue that focusing on maternal violence is part of the binary that includes idealizing mothers, and that both parts oppress women. Their main concern is that maternal violence "is described but not opposed" in feminist critical analysis of motherhood (208), and they critique in particular Adrienne Rich's exploration of maternal violence in Of Woman Born. I read the difference in their positioning and Rich's as one of emphasis. Rich also emphasizes that idealizing mothers may parallel other strategies to delimit women in terms of strict gender roles, but she demythologizes women's actions when she urges that women as mothers be recognized as living within a social context in which their work is underpaid if not devalued, and in which women still struggle for equality and safety. Prescott's memoir is consistent with Rich's point of view as it moves beyond the paralyzing image of the woman who believes violence is her only recourse, to document not only her struggle against the abuse, but also the way she is figured in its context, to show how this positioning can be resisted.

Prescott's memoir dispels potential prejudice against her as a mother or mistrust by detailing her own struggle with the changes she and her family go through with her growing realization of the abuse. The memoir undoes the stereotype of the collusive or uncaring mother by writing

about this need for legitimacy within a disbelieving and/or unsupportive community. In Mothers of Incest Survivors, Janice Tyler Johnson reveals that many women who did disclose sometimes ceased efforts to seek protection due to lack of support from others (120-21). Prescott documents the systemic forms of patriarchy that permit the abuse to continue, such as judges continuing to grant abusers custody and unsupervised visitation rights. She documents the situation of a girl in the women's shelter who is raped on custody visits and then returned.

Like Elly Danica in Beyond Don't, Prescott demonstrates how people tend to "sentence a mother for what the abuser and society have made it impossible for her to do": that is, protect her children (Beyond Don't 54). Prescott's recollection of a social worker's explanation of abuse works to emphasize the social or shared aspects of her experience, and the memoir becomes a resource for others as it speaks from a feminist perspective:

"What we've been trying to tell you, is that you're not responsible." She slapped the table to emphasize her point. "It's a set-up. These guys work to alienate moms from their children. There are all sorts of behaviour problems, and the men capitalize on that, blaming the wife. (154)

Like the social worker whom Prescott cites, Linda Alcoff and Laura Gray also point to the strategy of reversal involved in the social sentencing of mothers. They observe that "the disclosure and speaking out by victims of sexual violence is transferred into evidence of their own pathology, while the

speech of the perpetrator is taken as decisively authoritative and privileged" (273-4). Prescott also illustrates this process of reversal in which disclosure to others initially makes her suspect to others.

Mondays relates how others dismiss her when she seeks support for herself and her two daughters after they leave the abusive situation. Friends who accept the tradition of male authority choose to support her partner and label her paranoid. Her first case worker asks if the charge is "a ploy" (134) to gain custody. She loses friends; her brother and sister do not believe her. These positions of rejection do not prevent the abuse, nor do they guarantee the safety of those who hold them. Prescott recalls how one former friend is murdered, becoming a victim of violence against women herself. In Prescott's case, economic dependence furthers the women's vulnerability. Mondays explains how the abuse by her father and her husband typically included more general controlling behaviors and financial neglect. She writes of how her mother had to literally beg him for child support after separation. While Prescott "could barely afford to feed the girls, who lived on a financial tightrope," her former partner would visit, "enthusing that he'd saved \$3000 in [their] nearly three month of separation" (97). Prescott observes "that he'd saved it at his children's expense" while questioning her ability to provide (97). The memoir recreates the context in which Prescott as a mother, and her mother, were attempting to

protect their families. The popular images of the heroic and protective or destructive mother are shattered by the memoir's accounting of the real situation in which the women live.

Mondays traces how mother blame becomes internalized. Prescott records in particular the internalized expectations of the omniscience and omnipresence inherent in the concept of the "perfect mother". Mondays remembers Prescott's feelings of guilt precipitated by the concept when she says "I should have known . . . what kind of mother am I?" (110). She expresses her fear that she was "crazy," or responsible for the changes that she sees in her daughter Carolina's behaviour. Prescott, fighting internalization of social expectations, emphasizes that motherhood is only one aspect of subjectivity and not the whole of it. She even admits, a risk in the context, that "there were times when [she] was firmly sick of her [daughter's] presence" (44). She records her own self-doubt in statements such as "I supposed I was a bad mother and probably--my secret worry--crazy. Wasn't it insane the way I didn't want to be home full time with my daughter?" (38). At the same time, her memoir makes clear that Prescott is not "crazy" because she cannot always resemble an ideal, and, as a result, readers can revise their own expectations of (her and themselves as) mothers. Prescott recuperates mothering theorist D.W. Winnicott's concept of "good enough" mothering to acknowledge the real conditions of her situation as a single mother. "The kids

have 'good enough' shoes. 'Good enough' food. 'Good enough' parenting," she writes (206).

Memories of Prescott's childhood abuse, and her challenge to the concept of the perfect mother, lead her back to her own mother, in Williamson's words, "not as an object of blame." In present tense, they illustrate Prescott's emerging awareness of her childhood abuse by her father, mainly his threats to prevent her disclosure, and the abuse of her mother that she witnessed, such as his near shooting of her. Prescott's writing of her own experience and her memory of her mother's revise the negative image of the woman who colludes in her daughter's abuse. She is also able to write of her mother as an empowered woman who has distanced herself from an abusive situation, who can support her emotionally and provide her with a "getaway fund" (178-9). Even as the memoir works through painful memoirs of their relationship, Prescott considers her mother's position. One of the memory passages recalls her mother's addiction and her initial blaming of her daughter (15) for the abuse. Bound by traditional expectations of self-sacrifice and commitment regardless of circumstance, she is also at first accepting of her grown daughter's abuse by her partner. When Prescott reports her partner Frank's knife attack to her mother, and her mother responds as if it could be dismissed like an inappropriate joke or insult, "I'm sure Frank didn't mean it, dear," Prescott, remembering herself as an unprotected child, declares, "when my mother was bad,



she was horrid" (85). She alludes to the Victorian era nursery rhyme beginning "There was a little girl and she had a little curl . . . ," (Opie 37) which tells of a girl's punishment after making noise, connecting women's utterances and social censure. In the rhyme, the girl's mother is responsible for enforcing the rule that the girl must be silent. Prescott refigures the cautionary children's rhyme by placing her mother in the punished child's position. However, Mondays finally complicates the simple morals of such popular constructions of women when Prescott later reintroduces her mother, recognizing her vulnerability to her husband's violence and economic control.

Mondays, like many other survivor memoirs, challenges compulsory heterosexuality and the power dynamic of the traditionally male-headed household. It exposes the isolating world of the abuse, a restricting structure that isolated both mothers and daughters. Prescott is emotionally abused and physically assaulted, as well as bound to her partner by shame about his family's knowledge of her mother's depression and about her past abuse by her father. Like her mother, she at first believes she is lucky to married, and her partner represents what she perceives as a "solid, stable, and wholesome family" (22) in contrast to her own. Mondays also records her own difficulty in breaking free from the terrible but familiar. Prescott writes of the loss of social status in becoming a single mother with two children: "Frank was our authenticity," she

writes, "I could not see the three of us as a whole, as a 'family'" (86) without him. The North American image of the nuclear family as the only valid structure of relations worked to keep Prescott tied to her daughters' abuser.

Teresa L. Ebert explains how women's obligatory connection to men works to subordinate them, in fact, define them:

By producing the female subject as complemented and completed by her relation to a male partner, patriarchy naturalizes sexual identity, marking the cultural construction of the feminine, thereby continually reproducing women in a subordinate position. ("Romance of Patriarchy" 19)

Prescott includes such images early in her memoir to highlight her internalization of cultural expectations. The power positions are clear in her declaration that "Frank was the magnet; [she] was the iron shavings we'd pushed around on our school desktops" (8). She admits that even after disclosing the abuse, separating, and questioning her own sexual orientation, she struggles with the impulse to keep in contact with him.

Mondays avoids the sweeping constructions of gender that Ebert associates with preservation of the status quo. Prescott's relationship with another woman in the memoir potentially further marginalizes her because of homophobia and its equation of homosexuality and pedophilia. She writes of having to repeatedly assure social workers that she does not "hate men" because she has become a lesbian and feminist. Writing about the relationship allows her to come

out. However, her memoir does not idealize lesbianism and female friendships, which remain complex. Her first female partner leaves her for a man, but they remain friends. Two feminist friends reject her because of the pressures created by her efforts to protect her daughters.

While Teresa Ebert's empowered voice assists my critical reading, it was the materialist politics in Prescott's memoir that led me back to Ebert's position that transformation involves a recognition of women's common experience under patriarchy. Prescott's memoir has a materialist emphasis on women's experience as social as it consistently considers Prescott's individual experiences in relation to others. Her description of her experience of being a single mother, for example, connects her to other women. "It was rough and chancy being a single mother," she writes:

I often imagined it as a state of siege, mothers in apartments and houses all around the world, behind sandbags, praying for reinforcements . . . We mothers need each other. (45)

The paragraphs that write her experience of childbearing also connect her to other women. Since as Tess Cosslett has argued, "childbirth has been marginalised as a subject for public presentation," Prescott's words counter historical silencing as well as her partner's controlling response to both of her pregnancies. Such words, Cosslett argues, affirm solidarity "between types of women the official discourses would like to keep separate," (77) such as women

of different class and or cultural backgrounds, or heterosexual, lesbian, and bi-sexual women. Prescott writes how pregnancy changes identity and refigures time, generalizing her experience to include others:

Pregnancy is an infinitude. Any fool can say it is only nine months, but any pregnant woman knows better. Pregnancy does not end. Pregnancy is a lifetime, and each day within it has the scope of a year. A pregnant woman has always been and will always be with child. (24)

The memoir describes Prescott's emotional experience of the process. The moment of seeing her daughter after giving birth to her becomes spiritual when she writes that "Carolina struck divinity into [her] heart" (30). While the length of pregnancy expands in its effects on her body, the time of her children's infancy is much too short. "Every day," she explains, her daughter "was brand new." "I'd have been happy to stop any one of those days. It wouldn't have mattered. A spool of one looping day again and again," she writes (31). This comment does not contradict her earlier ones, of frustration at being a full-time caregiver, and a caregiving reading of her work cannot rely on resolution or fault the presence of multiple truths. These details of enjoyment of mothering in Mondays give Prescott the chance to revisit the happier times of the past that were threatened by the abuse, in a new, healing context. Significantly, Prescott's first experience of pregnancy is as a teen, and is possibly the result of rape by her father. Motherhood in this context is an extension of patriarchal

control, which Prescott refuses, but she still experiences its projections of her as "dirty" and an "unwed mother" (18). Cultural silence around women's bodies and pregnancy resonate in her memory from 1971 of her milk letting down and her realization that "no one told" (19) her that would happen. Prescott owns her body in describing wanted childbirth and care, reclaiming it from the imposed narrative of the abusers and from historical silencing. Even moments of ordinary frustration at, for example, the children's demands for attention or difficulty sleeping, represent experiences shared by other women that are outside the abuse.

Prescott avoids positioning herself as authority over her daughters' lives, balancing the memoir's violent opening image, by including an Afterword which is her grown elder daughter's response to the memoir. While Prescott reconstructs her daughter's childhood language and behaviour in the body of the memoir, Carolina's letter urges readers to recognize her as a woman with a voice who also consents to her mother's representation. It opens: "Mom, You are beautiful. And your book is beautiful. After reading it, I want my turn. Do with this what you will" (213). Carolina acknowledges her love for her mother within her desire to speak independently, and the memoir reciprocates by printing the letter as the final note. By doing so, Prescott offers a model of caregiving that recognizes the survivors' story in her own words.

Carolina consents to Prescott's interpretation of the memoir as "a story of resilience, of strength, and of love" (210). Carolina's letter also mirrors Monday's insistence on connection to others, and abuse as a social problem, but provides another's perspective. When she adds her own memories to the events her mother represents, Carolina also responds to cultural discourses about sexual abuse, even providing a context for her mother's childhood story. For example, she writes that "sexual abuse is often intergenerational. Survivors of it can grow to love men who mirror the abuser" (214). Her comment on the survivor's internalization of the abuser's view of her offers a way of reading the single devastating flashback passage in Part Two of the memoir in which her mother, Prescott, remembers abuse by her father and several other men. The passage is most disturbing because Prescott expresses, in a child's voice, the abuser's image of her as consensual. This memory passage and her daughter's similar disclosures--"alarming utterances" (206) which reveal both fear of and a sense of loyalty to the abuser--must be read in context as an effect of abuse. At the beginning of Part Two, Prescott guides readers by remembering the same incident as an adult who understands the powerlessness of her situation as a child. She writes: "Eight. I was eight. Naked. Dead" (109). She also writes, remembering, that she "wanted to scream and never stop screaming" (109). Through Mondays, Prescott and readers understand world-views imposed by authorities as

truths alternatively as operations of power. In the letter, Carolina similarly distances herself from abusive authority when she writes that she does not "want to fall in love with a man who will violate [her] (or anyone else)" (214). Like Prescott, she refuses the abuser's impositions which blame and implicate their victims.

"Our fathers had entered us as food, as language, as sleep, sending each of us to the brink of mental illness, then back," Prescott writes of herself and her daughters (210). Prescott refuses this invasion by claiming an empowered feminist voice that affirms her understanding of what happened to her family. The memoir structures her own responses in a way that public situations thwarted. She records, for example, her answer to a social worker's culturally laden expectations of how she should respond:

When I do calm down you think I'm unnatural. If I'm emotional, I'm hysterical. If I'm cogent, you think I'm intellectualizing. If I'm angry you think I'm overreacting. If I'm not angry, you say that in my shoes you'd be damned pissed off.  
(152)

She describes her position after discovery as "a place where language seemed to be my enemy, where my thoughts and feelings were so tangled and complex that I couldn't unravel them, couldn't write a cogent sentence past a scant, factual recounting" (162). Questioned in an accusatory tone by social workers, she cannot refer to the times she has witnessed Frank's violence against herself and her older daughter. Her memoir can write against trauma by including

these details in a coherent form that also writes her out of the violence. Having moved from a position in which she was silenced by paternal authority, Prescott became aware of imposed definitions of women, and her memoir exposes these. The labels and the abuse have their own life as an intrusive "vivid story" (3) that Prescott counters to move from victim to survivor.

Women's memoirs of abuse survival, such as Mondays are Yellow, Sundays are Grey, represent activism, theory, and healing process. Appropriating Ebert's confident critical voice, one that joins critical response to other work against abuse, I did not disclose many of my reader responses: grief, sorrow, fear, anger, even care. Even when supported by Attridge's relational model and Ebert's emphasis on response to gender-based oppression that unmask gender as a construct, the fear of intruding, and a sense of protectiveness toward the writers, remains.

I recall wondering on more than one occasion whether it would be better to shelve these memoirs out of sight, so that they will not "fall into the wrong hands" to be mishandled and misread. Williamson writes of similar concern when she describes how Elly Danica's memoir moved from a feminist circle to "mass market" (147). I want to note here the difference between mass and trade paperback sales because as Williamson suggests, there are "telling



differences" (145) in the forms in which memoirs appear.<sup>2</sup> Ellen Prescott's book appeared in a Canadian trade paperback edition; these are presented, priced, and marketed differently from mass paperback editions, in which true crime and celebrity confessionals appear, forms that interpret their readers as consumers rather than agents and position them as voyeurs. It is unfortunate that the more accessible, less costly mass form is often reserved for the bestsellers and formulaic works when memoirs like Mondays are Yellow, Sundays are Grey, by contrast, teach readers to respond as critics both of specific conditions and of larger structures of oppression.

Mondays are Yellow, Sundays are Grey challenges the social constructions of women that isolate and stigmatize us. By repeatedly raising these images, writing of her own fears that they reflect reality, and demonstrating as Teresa Ebert notes they are, like patriarchy, reproduced and "always historically determined," ("Romance of Patriarchy" 19) Prescott's imagines, and offers her readers, alternatives. Becoming a caregiving reader involves, as Derek Attridge suggests, identifying and changing, and as Teresa Ebert proposes, imagining a collective that can oppose the literal and linguistic impositions of abuse. This can translate to a material practice that works through

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2 Martin Danahay argues in "The Commodification of Autobiography" that autobiography in general is a staple of mass-market publication (116). These paperbacks often frame lives in sensationalist terms.

radically different experiences to foreground shared values of caregiving.

### Chapter Five:

Reading Past Difference and Survival to Social Change: Eva Brewster's Progeny of Light/Vanished in Darkness

Eva Brewster writes her experience in Progeny of Light/Vanished in Darkness for similar reasons as Ellen Prescott: to prevent violence from recurring. Her memoir of the Holocaust embodies a promise to do so. At her twenty-first birthday gathering in the concentration camp barrack at Auschwitz, her mother emphasizes her daughter's agency even within imprisonment: "You are free to do with your life whatever you want. Use your freedom wisely" (Progeny of Light 185). After their escape from a cattle car transport, her mother adds: "If we have one mission in life, a debt to all who have died, you will carry it out. You . . . will see to it that young people will not ever again be persecuted for their race, colour, or beliefs" (239). "That day, so long ago," Brewster writes "I promised my mother, my murdered little family, our six million dead, and myself that, never again, as long as I lived, would a dictatorship rob our children of their birthright, their freedom, and their happiness" (240). Her memoir makes the painful events of the past measures of the present in order to fulfill the promise. Because it does so, it raises the question of readers' response and responsibility. Simone de Beauvoir's consideration of World War Two in The Ethics of Ambiguity, particularly her analysis of subjectivity in response to freedom and oppression, with its specific reference to the

moral dilemmas and repercussions of the Holocaust, offers theoretical perspectives through which Brewster's memoir can be read within a caregiving ethic that is also assumed to be a social act. I will read Brewster's memoir as a story of survival and activism informed by Trinh Minh-ha's, Shirley Neuman's, and Joan Ringelheim's discussions of difference.

Brewster's memoir of her experiences has been published in at least three different NewWest Press printings. These have been translated into several languages. Canadian printings differ in format. The cover of my copy of the first printing of the first edition is a graphic design of three faces whose mouths are obscured. This image of despair, silence, and anonymity contrasts another printing's cover photograph of Brewster holding her daughter Reha. The second edition, published in 1994, is retitled Progeny of Light/Vanished in Darkness. Its cover photograph of Brewster's mother holding her granddaughter Reha emphasizes the book's dedication to family members who have died. In all editions, Brewster chooses to identify as Daniella Raphael, by the first name that she took as a member of the resistance and the surname of her first husband.

The first edition, Vanished in Darkness, is a memoir of the period of Spring 1943 including her arrest, release and immediate rearrest in Berlin, and her transport with 50 other people to Birkenau, her experiences at Auschwitz, to the period after her escape from a transport with her mother Elizabeth to Belsen on January 26th, 1945, just after Allied

bombings began on the concentration camp. The second edition is arranged in three main sections entitled "Gathering Shadows," "Vanished in Darkness," and "Progeny of Light" and an introduction by Cleo Mowers. Andrew Ogle's epilogue from the earlier Vanished in Darkness edition is replaced in Progeny of Light/Vanished in Darkness with one by Brewster. She incorporates the details that he had added to the earlier edition in her own words into "Gathering Shadows" where she describes more of her life before her arrest to tell of the social climate before and during the war. The first part of the new title is open to several different interpretations. "Progeny" connotes descent or lineage but may refer more broadly to successors or followers (Oxford English Dictionary vol xii; 585-6). The progeny of light may represent those who try to make sense of the horror of the Holocaust, such as Brewster's family, hopeful within an oppressive context, and Brewster's readers. The title Vanished in Darkness likely refers to the family's lost loved ones, to the millions murdered, and everyday life before the Holocaust and war. This chapter will read the later edition in keeping with Brewster's decision to provide testimony of life before and after her time at Auschwitz.

A caregiving reading of the memoir necessitated working through the question of difference. Within academic criticism, specifically feminist debates about subjectivity, the concept of difference(s) among and within women has been

approached in at least two ways: as a manifestation of diversity and as a form of othering imposed by a dominant group or belief system that involves a monolithic concept of the subject. I will consider the first possibility first.

Simone de Beauvoir writes in her (1948) Ethics of Ambiguity that "if individuals recognize themselves in their differences, individual relations are established among them, and each one becomes irreplaceable for a few others" (108). De Beauvoir's words, which she intended to counter the dehumanizing crimes of the Holocaust, also foreshadow and influence later feminist theorizing of the local and social, of difference and diversity. Individuality in her theory of subjectivity is a concept that allows recognition of each person's humanity. It should not be mistaken for a notion of the Individual that effaces differences. In fact, de Beauvoir devotes much of The Ethics of Ambiguity to describing and rejecting what she calls the "Serious": a subject position that makes absolute claims--mistaking the individual or particular for the whole--and becomes nihilistic when these claims fail to be realized (45, 50). De Beauvoir points to the dictator as the obvious example of such a position. Why return to an existential concept that has been interpreted as reinforcing ideas of uniqueness and self-development over social change? The recognition of the individual, according to de Beauvoir, does not encourage a solipsistic subject, "since the individual is defined only by his relationship to the world and to other individuals"

(156). This understanding of individuality foreshadows the self-in-relation that feminist critics of autobiography such as Mary Mason associated with women's subjectivity, except that, for de Beauvoir, the concept of a self-in-relation is not gendered (even it is literally in her use of the "universal" male pronoun). While the idea of a relational self led to a defense of women's autobiographical writing as different from men's, de Beauvoir's concept of the individual allows a recognition of difference as an inherent aspect of any person.

An emphasis on difference, if it seeks to assert a monolithic norm or referent, excluding or suppressing others that cannot or do not conform to it, is oppressive. Difference theory has been appropriated to present a benign face to separatism and intolerance of diversity, influence, and connection. As Trinh Minh-ha writes in Women, Native, Other, referring specifically to apartheid, "'difference' is essentially division in the understanding of many. It is no more than a tool of self-defense and conquest" (82). Trinh, rejecting this ideology of separatism, also questions the relegating of difference as a "special third world women's issue." The move to make difference a "different" other issue reinstates totalizing categories of gender that efface differences among women and gestures toward a suspect "pure origin and true self" (88). While explaining the danger of such categories as "woman," Trinh nevertheless calls for solidarity among women. Such a move urges

response to gender-based oppression but avoids the identification of femininity or femaleness that often perpetuates various forms of it.

Progeny of Light, like Trinh's essay, teaches about possible effects of emphasizing the concept of difference while claiming a category of woman. My first reading of the earlier edition of Brewster's memoir, Vanished in Darkness, placed it within the frame of an account of a mother and daughter whose strong bond was a reason for their survival. Brewster wrote her book from a context in which she was geographically separated from her mother, who was living in Israel. I argued in that draft that her memoir can be said to bring back a time of the connection to her mother and their shared experience. When she writes of several weeks of separation, for example, her words convey that she has lost part of herself. After she learns that her mother, taken to work for officers, "was really alive and well and even seemed to be in a position to do something to for prisoners in Birkenau," she also "felt alive again" (151). Her description of the women's march from the camp in freezing weather emphasizes that her mother acted as a caregiver who ensured her daughter and other women's survival. "My mother went from one to another trying to rouse them," Brewster writes (214):

The snow was soft and inviting and I curled up in it. The next moment my mother gave me a stinging slap in the face and brought me back to my feet and to my senses. I, who had promised Otto to look after my mother, was ready to give up, and my



mother, with superhuman strength and energy, kept me awake. Throughout that endless night she told me stories, rubbed my hands, slapped my face and back, and made me run up and down the length of the field. (215)

Her mother's actions save her life and those of several women around her that night. While testifying to Brewster's mother's strength, Progeny of Light points to the limitations of my original framing of it as a memoir of a mother and daughter relationship. Even if the memoir does tell of Brewster and her mother's cooperation and survival, it writes of many other relations and issues. A caregiving reading necessitates attention to these relationships and issues in their complexity.

It became especially important to remember that, in the times Brewster witnessed, women and children were subject to an oppressive concept of nation and women's roles that became dangerous for women and their families even before concentration camps existed. Under national socialism, people were categorized as types or homogeneous groups. The mass dehumanization of that logic is embodied by the mark of identification that was tattooed on Brewster's arm. She explains, rehumanizing it, that the number means that "fifty-one thousand prisoners have come here before us and almost forty-five thousand had already died to make room for us. That number did not include the old people, mothers with children, and the weak and the sick who were never tattooed at all" (119). Women designated authentic were urged to produce children, while women in persecuted groups

were forcibly prevented from doing so and lost their families. Brewster recalls how prisoners are never permitted to retain a sense of individuality, that sense that de Beauvoir insists is inherent to freedom, also writing that her experience cannot be shared by all readers:

A person who has never been in a prison camp cannot imagine what it is like to be alone for the first time . . . Nobody can appreciate what it is like to be jostled and pushed every minute of the day and night, never to have a moment of unobserved peace; to be lying like a sardine, wedged in at night, trying to stir, trying to avoid the clammy contact of other bodies; washing and undressing in a crowd; working and standing in crowds all day long. (80)

At the same time as grouping was a form of othering used to justify terrifying state actions, affirmative social connection and shared tradition among persecuted groups was prohibited. The memoir teaches that shared cultural and religious beliefs and practices, chosen or imposed, deserve a place in the often cited list of "race, class, and gender" as identification categories that critics take into account, while it demonstrates the inadequacy of any list. The memoir's emphasis on individuality also affirms De Beauvoir's and Trinh's call for recognition of individuals and specific experience.

My knowledge of difference theory came from feminist theorists' calls for complicating the category of "woman" that we had previously claimed. Difference theories promised for feminisms not diversification sanctioned by an already-assumed central position, but an undoing of

hierarchic thinking and divisions, so that there would be the "diversity in the structure of a theory" (Lugones 44). It would offer ways of rethinking ways of reading and writing about others and their connection to or presence as social action. Thinking about difference meant questioning the terms women and woman, to explore how identity categories reinforced binaries and hierarchies as well as mobilized action. It also entailed for individual women and groups a self-interrogation of their history and places in it: our privileges, marginality and responsibility to ourselves and others. These ideas of differences within informed autobiography theory, which had previously emphasized "women's" writing as "different."

When Shirley Neuman, for example, called for a poetics of differences in reading autobiography, she imagined a self that "is neither the unified subject of traditional theory of autobiography nor the discursively produced and dispersed subject of poststructuralist theory" (225) where identification and identity categories are subject to erasure, or, as Paul de Man argued, "de-faced" (926). The latter concept is particularly objectionable in a historical context where particular identities have been subject to erasure in a literal sense. Neuman adds:

Nor is it a self 'silenced by hegemony, an 'empty self,' or a self marked by only its 'difference,' its otherness in relations to a hegemonic subject. It is a complex, multiple, layered subject with agency in the discourse and the worlds that constitute the referential space of his or her own autobiography, a self not only constructed by

differences but capable of choosing, inscribing, and making a difference. (225)

Her concept of self recognizes that someone writing autobiography of trauma does not necessarily reinscribe victimhood or otherness but rather reclaims his or her life.

A reader responding to that writing is similarly powerful, but not necessarily hegemonic or othering. Dori Laub, writing about testimony, emphasizes the importance of attentive listening so that the one witnessing trauma does not re-experience it by not being heard (67). The witness to witnessing also faces psychological hazards, he argues (72). These include paralysis and fear of merging. Significantly, the hazards in turn have a greater effect on the witness to trauma. If as reader I withdraw, sanctify the memoir writer, obscure her story with factual details, or submerge her story in my need to express care, all potential effects of testifying to trauma according to Laub, (73) her words may not have the necessary effect. A caregiving reading facilitates the testimony, and the reader recognizes that s/he or I am not the centre to which the "different writing woman" refers, a construct, according to Trinh, in which the writer is constructed as the reader's own while simultaneously reified as different. At the same time, real differences and similarities between the women do not cease to be important. Differences might be better imagined as diversity within a relationship. Citing Barbara Smith and echoing de Beauvoir, Trinh writes that feminism

needs a vision of total freedom,<sup>1</sup> in other words, a sense of connection that facilitates equity and justice for all.

Cleo Mowers emphasizes the potentially caregiving aspect of reading memoir in the introduction to Progeny of Light, when he writes that Eva Brewster's "plea is that everyone practice tolerance and respect" (my emphasis 5). In other words, bridging differences becomes important, especially as grouping categories in themselves become suspect.

Like critics more recently arguing for self-reflexive or auto criticism,--what de Beauvoir calls internal criticism (154)--de Beauvoir writes that the critic or theorist must "assume the subjectivity of his judgment" (69). After reading Brewster's memoir many times and then writing about it critically, I feel that, as a reader, I have crossed an invisible line. Attempting to draw back across it would lead to an illusory kind of safety that is actually a negation and silencing. Reading the memoirs as "a book" (separate) in the way that I have, until recently, been taught to read literature did not fully acknowledge the person behind that book. I have to unlearn this training in observing and dismantling, or at least the attitude some might bring to that study. De Beauvoir calls this somewhat detached position the "aesthetic attitude" in which the reader in this case would be like the tourist whom she

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1 Linda Gordon notes that the recognition of difference in academic debates "coexist[s] with one of the worst periods of immiseration for the urban and rural poor" (91) but she also questions the utility of collective self-blaming among feminists (92).

describes, considering "the arena of the Coliseum, the Latifundia of Syracuse, the thermal baths, the palaces, the temples, the prisons, and the churches with the same tranquil curiosity" (75). This attitude, in other words, glosses over the differences in histories of those places, their uses, and the people who occupied them. A comparable attitude in reading compares diverse texts as if they are equivalent. "Such an attitude appears in moments of discouragement and confusion; in fact it is a position of withdrawal, a way of fleeing the truth of the present," (75) de Beauvoir comments. This flight is an illusion because, as she argues, "there is no project which is purely contemplative since one always projects himself toward something, toward the future; to put oneself 'outside' is still a way of living the inescapable fact that one is inside" (76). To recognize this connection is to move towards "historicizing the present" and one's own position. A response to memoirs necessarily implicates its reader. As a reader, I can never fully identify because I have not experienced, but I cannot be detached. When writing about Progeny of Light seemed impossible because of the difference in Brewster's experience and my own, I remembered the paranoid hate pamphlet shoved into the notice board in a public library elevator, and the Nazi salute that I heard young men shout on a street near my apartment in Calgary. Signs that needed witnessing. Signs that I could not settle

back into a privileged avoidance, nor "sweep under the carpet" my own approaches to criticism.

The memoir is a space in which the reader can attempt to understand another's experience. Dori Laub reads accounts of the Holocaust as a form of testimonial that emphasizes others' response as well as the social content of the individual's life story. Laub observes that Holocaust memoirs rely on their readers: "Testimonies are not monologues; they cannot take place in solitude. The witnesses are talking to somebody" (70-1). Brewster's memoir fits the traditional sense of testimony as swearing to truth in a public forum while it is not recorded by or spoken to a single person. Brewster calls for the "maximum of tact and understanding" (259). In this context of trauma and reliance on a witness, empathy and understanding is most important. The experiences that Brewster describes make the gap between the writer and many readers most apparent, but they also bridge that gap by asking readers to imaginatively identify and become socially responsible. The question remains of how to do so in critical writing.

De Beauvoir's championing of ambiguity over certainty offers a valuable theory supporting feminist critics' searches for caregiving, non-oppressive forms of criticism. "We repudiate all idealisms, mystericisms [sic] etcetera which prefer a Form to man himself," (145) she writes. Her statement has implications as a response to an oppressive regime that placed a Form before the existing diversity of

people which it then attempted to suppress. Embracing ambiguity is not to reject theorizing in favour of a kind of nihilism. As de Beauvoir argues, such rejection always reinstates the very presence that it seeks to reject. Instead, I turn to the theoretical praxis of reading autobiography that Shirley Neuman offers, one that "would emphasize the textual particularities of autobiographies and would foreground the knowledge borne by their narrators' saying 'I' rather than subsume those particularities, that knowledge under categories that are often indifferent to them (226). To critically witness what Brewster witnesses, my critical reading of Progeny of Light/Vanished in Darkness will attempt to emphasize her goals for the memoir.

The overall goal for Brewster's memoir is the one that I cited in the introduction to this chapter: to end prejudice. As Brewster told of her experience in classrooms and engaged in public debate in her Lethbridge Herald column, she reached toward that goal. Her memoir acts as part of this project as it reminds readers of the effects of negative generalizing and marginalizing and of social actions based on the same, and makes connections between Brewster's early life in Germany and contemporary Canada.

Most know the details about the regime, Brewster writes, but "what they don't fully know and understand is what it was like for the Nazi's domestic victims to live in



Germany once the mousetrap<sup>2</sup> closed and all hope for getting out vanished" (56). Progeny of Light emphasizes the importance of remembering how dangerous changes gradually took place in Berlin in order to prevent similar occurrences elsewhere. The memoir includes testimony of forced factory labour, increasing restrictions such as the banning of school attendance, her sister Lotte's emigration to escape Berlin, her sister Kate's exclusion from the 1936 Olympics after a false newspaper "report" of her "sprained or broken ankle," the expropriation of their father's business, and his death the following day. Brewster notes the public's failure to notice contradictions in Hitler's speeches, and the assumption that no one would be convinced by the irrational ideas (8-9). Her own family assumed that the anti-semitism was "no more than a passing shadow" (31), and her first contact with prejudice was that of a neighbour who offered to hide the children but viewed their father as a "pet" (29).

Progeny of Light questions the notion of systemic prejudice as "past" and remote from Brewster's adopted nation. Her epilogue links the past events in Germany to those within Canada more recently: her daughter's reasoned response to a young man espousing hate, who recants as a result of her comments and Brewster's memoir, and her son's refusal to join the military that he had trained for because

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<sup>2</sup> Brewster may have in mind Art Spiegelman's two-part memoir Maus which tells his father's story of the Holocaust through cartoon.

the application form conflated religion and nationality. Strangely, "Canada" in its original spelling is the name of a barrack in Birkenau, the division of Auschwitz in which many of the murders were committed. Canada, the country, contrasts the living conditions at Birkenau, yet represents a place that must fight its own current and historical forms of hatred--the history of internment camps within Canada during World War II in British Columbia, for example, is now documented. Brewster's career as a journalist began as a response to prejudice within Canada: a German band at the Calgary Stampede playing songs popular during Hitler's rule and, for a witness, inseparable from that ideology. In Andrew Ogle's 1984 epilogue to the first edition, Brewster comments:

I hope this book will explain to my critics why a seasoned, objective journalist would react so strongly to, for example, the suggestion made a few years ago in the Alberta legislature that prisoners and welfare recipients should be put to work at "voluntary" labor in the southern beet fields. The objection that "there might not be enough 'volunteers' to fill a string of boxcars heading for labor camps in the South" evoked in me nightmare memories that have to be shared to be understood. (Vanished in Darkness 142)

Progeny of Light/Vanished in Darkness, insisting that Brewster's experiences are not simply those of someone else or some time long ago (and they occurred less than fifty years ago), underlines the importance of the sources and effects of social productions such as the songs that she writes of, and the danger of sweeping responses to complex issues. She recalls that, in Berlin, her father "had

managed to surround [the family] with a sense of security that had made this anti-semitism appear insignificant" (31). Years later, she confronts anti-semitism again and regrets not discussing it with her children:

Hoping they would never experience it, I had not wanted to burden them with the horror I had lived through or with the terror that irrational hatred of Jews could lead to. In short, I made the same mistake my parents had made. (259)

Her memoir represents a public response to dangerous silence that became collective. Rather than vilifying particular nations, her emphasis is that "to preserve one's cultural background does not mean sweeping under the carpet or hiding behind slogans every painful memory or mistake of one's recent past" (259). By connecting her past and its social impact to current issues within her adoptive country, Brewster encourages readers to consider immediately our connection to her experiences.

Joan Ringelheim's essay "Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research" influenced my rereading of Brewster's memoir. In it, Ringelheim considers women's oral testimony of the Holocaust but focuses particularly on the critical models that she brought to her research. Ringelheim, questioning her initial response to women's testimonies of the Holocaust, challenges her reader, as Trinh does, to consider that the category of woman might be insufficient as an approach to studying women's lives in this context. First, however, she considers how women as

women survived concentration camps.<sup>3</sup> She writes that they formed new families that collaborated to better their chances of living; "they created the possibilities for material and psychological strength" (Ringelheim 328). "Their relationships," she writes, affirming what Brewster writes in Progeny of Light, "helped them to transform a world of death and inhumanity into one more act of human life" (Ringelheim 328). Ringelheim cautions against extrapolating from this observation to making general conclusions about women and men in concentration camps on the basis of gender. However, her highlighting of this aspect of many women's experiences can lead to a reading for important specific experiences in Brewster's memoir.

Progeny of Light reclaims community as it writes about how Brewster and her mother and other women imprisoned at Birkenau and Auschwitz were able to resist the negative grouping and form coalitions in the face of oppression. Caregiving beyond family ties is essential to survival in the memoir. Brewster writes that, after she learns of her husband's murder, her friend "Susan and her sister sat with [her] till the early hours of the morning." "Nobody spoke but their nearness and comradeship was the last saving grace. It preserved my sanity" (155). Brewster writes of many instances such as this one, in which, although never

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3 Sara Horowitz similarly questions both a "unisexual version" of reading and one that "inadvertently reproduces the marginalization of women, by presenting their experience almost exclusively in terms of sexuality" (265).

alone, and without privacy, she is in an isolating situation in which she avoids divulging information about the camps that would hurt others--putting the social good before her own need. One of the more hopeful incidents occurs on her twenty-first birthday party held in one of the barracks, and it reveals the women's interdependence. They work together to find and make presents for Daniella, which she then distributes. "About thirty of us were sharing my bounty," she writes, "I was rich" (185). Brewster also credits the advice of Ruth, a nineteen-year old, "old woman," prematurely aged by malnourishment and trauma, with enabling her to survive. Each is an example of Progeny of Light's focus on remembering community.

Ringelheim cautions that a focus on women as women in Holocaust testimony potentially leaves unchallenged gender "differences and the structures that established the possibilities for some of those differences" (331). Here she uses the term "differences" defined as oppressive or limiting. To focus on women as caregivers, for example, might not question the social expectations of this role. Although Ringelheim's work does not focus on Brewster's work, her caution informed my rereading of Progeny of Light. A focus on women's community alone in the memoir overlooked Brewster's resistant friendship with Otto, the men's Capo who provided food and clothing and information that helped Brewster and her mother escape. It overlooked the extent to which Brewster emphasized the importance of her wartime and

post-liberation resistance work with both men and women, and the support of her husband. It also overlooked how Brewster's memoir remembers the abusive female Capos and the invective of the anti-semitic woman with whom she and her mother stayed after their escape. In addition, it did not necessarily attend to the particulars of Brewster's family's situation such as her mother's professional nursing position, a caregiving position that not all other women in the camp shared.

Ringelheim argues that "we must resolve not to use research either to valorize oppression or to blunt or negate its effects" (332). She underlines that, because millions died in the Holocaust, stories of survival need to be put into perspective (332). "Did anyone really survive the Holocaust?" she asks (336). Brewster's memoir chooses to focus on the details of life before concentration camp and, in the time during which she was imprisoned, largely on the human responses rather than on details of dehumanizing acts and conditions. As a witness, I chose to do the same and move away from emphasizing the horrors of camp conditions after reading about the details and tracing where she and her mother were imprisoned. Progeny of Light's emphasis on personal experience and remembering others reclaims dignity and emphasizes human connections that enabled people to fight oppression. Emphasizing this element does not valorize oppression, but rather is guided by, and consents to, the writer's emphasis.

Progeny of Light underscores that resistance took place in ordinary activities, and involved reclaiming an identity from the slurs imposed from without. The precariousness of people's positions in Berlin is obvious in a passage that demonstrates how small acts of caring became political acts. Brewster recalls shopping for food in the street with her baby:

Sometimes, a kind woman in a fruit shop would wrap up a few apples if nobody was around, but if Reha saw this, she would cry all the way home for me to give her one. I could not risk letting her eat an apple in the street . . . an apple or a piece of chocolate seen in the hand of a Jewish child had been the excuse for deportation of whole families.  
(86)

Brewster's taking her child to visit her grandfather in hospital becomes an act of resistant caregiving as well. She describes her refusal to be shamed on those trips in the underground and on buses where she was legally forbidden to sit down. She writes: "I now flaunted my yellow star rather than hid it. For the first time in my life I felt a pride in who I was and contempt for the hateful racists who persecuted others for their religion or the colour of their skin" (64). Her attention to particular incidents in her own life such as taking the subway and looking for food asks readers to acknowledge circumstances that others shared. In doing so, the memoir reclaims dignity and relations that the Nazis had attempted to destroy.

Compassion predominates in Brewster's memoir as a way of resisting imposed brutality and avoiding its logic, so

that it will not recur. Brewster is a heroic survivor for refusing to shoot a Nazi war criminal, the female official that had beaten and tormented the women around her, including Brewster's mother Elizabeth. When she is generous in her descriptions of several officials, she risks being accused of encouraging readers, in Ringelheim's words, to "blunt or negate [the] effects" of oppression. In telling her story, Brewster must occasionally give voice to those who perpetuated hate crimes, not only resurfacing the violence against her, but trusting that the reader will understand and stand in her position as she testifies.

Progeny of Light ends with survival, and hope, but as Ringelheim insists, this does not compensate for the losses. Progeny of Light makes Brewster's experiences immediate and painful. As a memoir, it refuses unproblematic endings. To a great extent, Brewster's very subject position prevents these. Even after Brewster happily marries, she tells of losing another family member, her son, in a highway accident. She and her children continue to encounter prejudice in her new home. There is always a tension between relief that Brewster and her mother escape and the feeling that they are never freed from its effects. Lawrence L. Langer's description of narrative as structurally composed of story and plot, like E. M. Forster's in Aspects of the Novel, in part describes the significant reading effects of memoirs of Auschwitz:



Auschwitz as story enables us to pass through and beyond the event, while Auschwitz as plot stops the chronological clock and fixes the moment permanently in memory and imagination, immune to the vicissitudes of time. The unfolding story brings relief, while the unfolding plot induces pain. (73)

Progeny of Light ends with Brewster's description of a life outside of internment and one committed to social activism through teaching and journalism. This voice does not, however, erase the recurring voice of grief and sometimes self-blame, which is particularly painful to read. She painfully recalls her sense of fault when the circumstances placed her in an impossible position. Daniella calls out for her mother when guards torture her, and they implicate her in reminding them of her mother's existence and thus in her mother's subsequent arrest. The internment forced women and men, including Brewster, to feel shame if they survived. That resolution of the voices of survival and loss is impossible is especially apparent when Daniella learns that her baby daughter Reha for whom she had arranged safe-keeping has not escaped, and has been at the camp, that a trusted former teacher has taken her child to the gas chamber. "The world reeled and vanished in absolute darkness" (139) for her, and this fact is central to all editions of the memoir and to her experience. The events Brewster describes recur in memories and nightmares, she tells us, indicating that her memoir offers survival but not complete relief.

The story of a few women's survival, however, is enormously significant. Its "textual particularities" become part of a broader understanding of the Holocaust and women's lives. They also affirm, as individual, individual differences that permit, to return to de Beauvoir, (Ethics 108) relations between different people, and promote social change. In emphasizing survival, Progeny of Light looks toward the present and future. Brewster's Epilogue discusses her life in Canada and her work through writing and public speaking to assist immigrants and to confront and stop racism. It necessarily asks the reader to consider his/her relationship to the memoir and brings him or her "out of the glasshouse of apathy and indifference," (Progeny of Light 6) toward in Shirley Neuman's words, making a difference (225). Brewster's memoir calls for a caregiving response. At the same time, reading the memoir may not establish rules for critical reading in general in terms of method. In fact to extrapolate would be to deny the very particular importance of Brewster's work and its effects, as well as to move toward reductionism. "A poetics of differences," Shirley Neuman argues, "cannot be systematized; it can only be accumulated from the ongoing reading and writing of many autobiographers, many readers . . ." (226). A poetics of differences is, therefore, similar to de Beauvoir's concept of the human subject, who is not fixed or completed but changes over time. A reading of memoirs through this poetics does not represent an

abandoning of criticism, but places the interpretation in a social context in which "meaning is never fixed . . . it must constantly be won" (Ethics 129).

## Chapter Six:

### "Becoming the Author," Connected Reading, and Caregiving: Elizabeth Brewster's Collage

By concluding with a reading of Elizabeth Brewster's two memoirs as collage, I may seem to be shifting away from the focus on an ethical reading of women's representations of traumatic experiences to an analysis of form that is less directly connected to a politics than Laurence's Dance on the Earth is. Brewster's experience of World War II and abuse survival could be brought in as ground shared with the other memoir writers, but they are not the focus of this chapter. Rather, the challenging form of Brewster's memoirs raises the question of the relationship between form and a caregiving critical reading approach.

Brewster has been writing for sixty years in which she has published two collections of short stories, two novels, several critical essays, and fourteen collections of poetry, yet most of her later work, published by small presses such as Oberon and in journals such as Canadian Literature, has received scant critical attention. Her two memoirs, Away from Home (1995) and The Invention of Truth (1991) review her own work and consider the possibility that she has "been writing autobiography all [her] life" (5)--a possibility that encourages me to read the various parts of her memoirs, which include previously-published poems and short stories, as connected parts of a form that recognizes all as autobiographical constructions. In this reading, Brewster

traces her reading history and development as a writer in a form that encourages readers to invent and "become the author" ("Time and Tide" 11). Her emphasis on the reader is consistent with Blythe McVicker Clinchy's theorizing of connected knowing as empathic and receptive (and therefore caring) and Patrocinio Schweikart's interpretation of connected knowing as a possible approach to critical reading and writing. Brewster's choice of form not only connects readers, it also offers an autobiographical self that materializes the concept of the self that Elspeth Probyn theorizes, one that is in process.

I read the two memoirs together because Brewster introduces Away from Home as "a sort of companion to The Invention of Truth" that "fill[s] in a gap of some consequence" noted by readers and reviewers (Away 6) indicating that she is writing in response. Within the memoirs, Brewster does not provide a table of contents with title headings that would suggest a selection of potentially unrelated works as a compilation or sampling of various periods in her writing life. Rather, the first three sections of Invention encourage me to read for connections between them, and to read both Away and Invention as seeking a form that suggests continuity but resists linear narrative. Her introduction to the first memoir, entitled "The Invention of Truth: Beginnings" comments: "I look this over, and decide that I am going in too straight a line, organizing my thoughts too firmly" (7). The theme of the

search for a form is taken up again later in the memoir in "Essence of Marigold" and "The Real Truth: Clara Flagg's Journal," and throughout Away from Home. She chooses for her memoirs a form that allows her to wander from a straight line while allowing her to explore her development as a writer: the collage.

The important question for my reading becomes how to connect collage as technique to the concept of connected knowing and caregiving. In an interview with Paul Denham, Brewster admits that she was "a rather lonely little girl, the youngest of the family, living at a distance from neighbours, so that writing poems and stories was originally in part a substitute for other kinds of companionship" (153). Her later work may not be a substitute for companionship, but Brewster's model of critical reading retains the reach toward connection.

The approach that Brewster specifically suggests for critical reading is to "become the author," a concept drawn from Virginia Woolf's essay "How should one read a book?," which offers a model of reading as participation in the writer's poetics or form and his or her presence. Brewster materializes this reading process in writing as she reviews other writers' work. Responding to Virginia Woolf's The Waves in "Time and Tide,"<sup>1</sup> for example, she creates a wave structure within her essay that returns to different

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1 Brewster's essay title echoes that of the British Suffragette Press newspaper founded in 1920.

occasions on which, and different ways in which she reads Woolf's novel. Similarly, her critical response to Bliss Carman's poetry, "Haunted by Bliss," combines poetry and apostrophe to the author as part of the process of interpreting his writing and acknowledging his influence. In such a pastiche, one writer "becomes the [other] author" repeating his or her form and diction to comment on it or to make new statements. Griselda Pollock's brief comments on interpreting literature within her feminist theory of art criticism offer a caution about the stance of traditional literary criticism in which "the critic who, while pretending merely to comment upon, in fact refashions the meaning of the work of art in his or her own ideological image" (26). Brewster's essays offer a model in which she refashions in a way that is obvious to readers, acknowledging her subjectivity as reader and her writing hand. In addition, both of Brewster's critical essays offer a model of interpretation that constructs the reader's process of exploring the text rather than following a more traditional form of assertion and support.

This emphasis is consistent with a caregiving approach that involves what the authors of Women's Ways of Knowing called connected knowing in particular. Connected knowing, in Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, and Tarule's model "is characterized by a stance of belief and an entering into the place of the other person or the idea that one is trying to know (Goldberger 5). Blythe Mcvicker Clinchy, elaborating

on their original definition, turns to Woolf's model of "becoming the author," as Brewster does, to define connected knowing ("Separate and Connected" 208). Becoming the author in her essay is an effort of the reader rather than a form of writing, but both emphasize a caring approach to the authors and texts being studied.

Patrocinio Schweikart proposes that connected knowing is a possible mode of response to texts that could include literary criticism. She suggests that a connected reading assumes a different relationship between reader and writer than does traditional argument when she writes that "arguments against argument presuppose a different notion of discursive interaction," (323) a "communicative action oriented toward understanding" (314) rather than "separate knowing manifested in argumentative adversarial discourse [which] becomes the public face of professional literary criticism" (311). "What is at issue is not the structure of the utterance (argument)," she adds, "but the structure of the privileged discursive relations (adversarial) conventionally imposed on the interlocutors" (323). Schweikart seeks a non-adversarial relationship between writer and critical reader.

Emphasizing the structure of relations, Schweikart's discussion of connected knowing as a critical approach emphasizes the attitude brought to texts rather than the form in which criticism appears. Schweikart likens reading another's works to Keats' renowned "negative capability,"



(317) which Keats' defined as being "capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries, doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason" (43). Keats, on rereading, sounds like Women's Way's of Knowing's subjective knower who does not want to spoil the experience of beauty by discussing it as structural or ideological, or within a set of criteria or particular form. Schweikart and Clinchy carefully distance themselves from this position which effaces much of twentieth-century literary theory and is not connected or necessarily caring. The subjectivist position is not intersubjective, according to the authors of Women's Ways of Knowing, because it emphasizes the reader's response rather than the writer's or another reader's ideas, or exchange. Clinchy uses verbals that involve the body, such as believing, reception, and listening to describe connected knowing. These contrast both the arguing and doubting of separate knowing and the embodied characteristics of subjectivism such as "projection," "emotional contagion" (in which one takes on the perceived feelings of others), "deaf"ness to others' views, and "cozy" validation (Clinchy 230, 225, 208, 210). Connected knowing is, by contrast, subjective, but not projecting. It attempts to understand, not judge or subsume, the other in the response. Although Schweikart cites Keats, I read her emphasis as different from the poet's. She neither suggests that response "obliterates all consideration" (Keats 43), nor does she insist that an essential or objective meaning is to be found

in the text. Rather, connected knowing is procedural, as Women's Ways of Knowing insists, and active consideration is part of the intersubjectivity that Schweikart is also proposing in her response to that text. This involves making claims even while positioning oneself as receptive to the author.

A connected critical reading would be consistent with caregiving. Schweikart likens the relation between writer and reader to the position that Nel Noddings identifies in her ethics of care. The reader, according to Schweikart, is the "one-caring," attentive to the writer, but not immersed; "devoted," but "grounded in her own cognitive and moral values" (320). The reader and writer's roles are asymmetrical as in "actual encounters between self and other" (321) and, as the idea of "becoming the author" suggests, the positions are not fixed.

In a connected reading, "The writer's project must be completed by the reader" according to Schweikart (318). Retaining the collaborative sense she suggests, I would substitute Elizabeth Brewster's concept of invention with for the idea of completion, especially because both of Brewster's memoirs avoid conclusion. Poems with themes of renewal appear last in both memoirs. One is entitled "Not an Ending." The concept of invention as a form of connected reading recognizes that no approach "will ever be completely successful" (Invention 6) nor successfully complete.

Reading Brewster's memoirs as collage honours her model of connected reading as it recognizes that collage is one of the forms that Brewster chooses to name her autobiographical writing. To support a reading of Brewster's memoirs as collage, I will rely largely on Marjorie Perloff's definitions because she traces connections between the more common visual art forms and literary forms of collage.<sup>2</sup> While Brewster's memoirs do not present different media together or experiment with typeface, they combine different forms. Short stories, fragments from diaries, fictional diary entries, photographs, obituary, and tarot readings are juxtaposed within chapters. Collage offers the memoirs a non-linear form in which seemingly disparate elements and different times can appear simultaneously, allowing the writer to experiment with and comment on previous work.

Because I read both Away from Home and The Invention of Truth together and cite poetry published elsewhere, I will describe the form of both memoirs briefly. Both include what I call memoir chapters in which Brewster writes about her life and writing directly. These include diary entries and parts of poems and stories. The Invention of Truth's memoir chapters could be said to be "The Invention of Truth: Beginnings" and "University Days: Dreamer and Dream." Brewster reprints the short stories "Essence of Marigold"

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<sup>2</sup> I am not proposing that visual and verbal art are identical, although collage often appears as is a literary form with language or script, and literary text is often visual.

and "Visit of Condolence." Longer poems "Inheritance," (sic) "Great Aunt Rebecca" and "For My Brother" appear on their own in their entirety. Invention's "Collage" and "Victorian Interlude" are memoir chapters with subsections. In the first, eight sections entitled "Dreams" alternate with others entitled "Ghost Stories," "Lunch at the Petit Colombe," "My father goes fishing," "Names," "Question in London Ontario," and "Maps," and a selection of family photographs appears. "Collage" ends with "Final dream in Victoria," "final tribute paid," and "In Memoriam" written after her father's death. The following chapter, "Victorian Interlude," written three years later is organized in a similar way to "Collage," but the sections are dated diary entries and numbered sections entitled "Cards" after the Tarot. "The Real Truth: Clara Flagg's Journal," a fictional diary with a postscript, appears before the final ten poem sequence in Invention. "Poems for your hands" addresses a lover holding the poem. The second memoir, Away from Home, incorporates all poems into chapters except "Coach Class" and the poem that ends the memoir, "In favour of being alive." Four short-stories, "A Perfect Setting," "Strangers," "A Question of Style," and "Comfort Me with Apples" appear independently as chapters in the second memoir. The memoir chapters of Away from Home focus on the period 1946-51 in response to responses to the first book. "Away from Home," "Harvard-Radcliffe Daze," "An Imperfect Setting," "On the Banks of the Jordan," "The Summer of '49,"

and "Friends and Exiles" and "Not an Ending" like those in The Invention of Truth include poems, such as "Roads," and diary entries.

Brewster's collage technique closely resembles what Diane P. Freedman's calls intratextuality. Freedman defines intra- or inner-textuality as "the quoting or reworking one's own old texts or tropes in newer ones" (108-9). While Brewster's memoirs refer to others' texts and forms, they also refer to (and include) parts of her body of work. The effect is of gathering fragments of different parts of her writing life as her "texts echo one another" (Brewster; "Time and Tide" 16). Within the memoirs, different sections also cite each other to create transitions. For example, the introduction to The Invention of Truth ends with a comment on university, which is the subject of the following chapter. Her observation that "[she] is the same age now as [her] father was then" (24) at the end of "University Days" leads into the next section, "Collage"'s reminiscences about her father.

A subtler form of intratextuality is the repetition of whole phrases from her other works. "Cards: Judgment" in The Invention, for example, echoes Brewster's poetry. "Sometimes I dream of moving," she writes alluding to the title of one collection of poetry, "into a new house with my mother and father and others now dead. We unpack the books and the dishes" (68). The image of the "angel, the eagle, the ox and the lion who stand at the four corners of [her]

bed and protect it from harm" (Invention 68) that appears there reappears in Brewster's most recent collection of poetry, Garden of Sculpture, in "Child's Prayer: A Gloss" (29-30).

The memoirs' intratextuality, like collage's, shuffles moments of chronological time to mimic rising memories as elements from different temporal contexts appear together: "All times and places come together, as if one time were pasted on top of one another," as Brewster writes (Invention 28). Brewster's technique in "Collage" extends into her other chapters where she includes her own letters as both historically verifiable archival material, and as images to generate writing. As in collage technique, the "first scrap starts off a whole train of thought" (Lynch 10). An associative movement, mimicking this effect, creates the transitions between sections of "Collage." For example, "My father goes fishing" discusses fertility, which leads to why she was named Winifred (Elizabeth is her middle name), which leads to the section called "Names," in which Brewster remembers different members of her family.

The repetition between texts in Brewster's collage creates a continuity between Brewster's "I" in the memoirs and that in her poetry and fiction. For example, the story "Essence of Marigold," which draws on Brewster's first meeting with P.K. Page (who, like Brewster's character Marguerite, is a visual artist) at a poetry awards ceremony of the New Brunswick Authors' Association, is consistent in

style with Brewster's memoir chapter writing. Daisy Lister, like Brewster in the memoir chapters, asks questions and seemingly free associates when she considers the past. Similarly, questions appear throughout Brewster's fiction, non-fiction, and poetry as apostrophes to particular persons, to a reader (inviting consideration, and response), or as rhetorical questions. As Lister explains her own style in "Essence of Marigold," she suggests a way of reading Brewster's work. She declares: "if I paint the phoenix, I must demonstrate that he flies like a crow, or the day of judgment resembles a farm auction in the Depression" (Invention 96). Brewster's memoirs contain this vision of the divine in the everyday, and her willingness to compare the two is part of the "anti-romanticism" and "terrific bluntness" (Away 33) that she admits to sharing with her characters.

Reprinting the short stories in the memoirs emphasizes the stories' autobiographical element. Brewster considers that "everything any author writes" may be autobiographical, "since (even if she wishes she cannot go totally beyond the boundaries of her experience and observation" (Invention 5), and she discusses the personal sources of her fiction within the memoirs. She admits that part of her character Isabel Nash's experience in "A Perfect Setting" is true to her own, for example. Nash is a young teacher beginning a job in a time and place that coincides with Brewster's 1947 teaching position in Cobourg, Ontario. Nash (repeatedly) declares

her surroundings "insipid," and somewhat like Catherine Morland of Austen's Northanger Abbey, as the "perfect setting for a novel" as she understands her new home as Gothic in contemporary terms, the hallway lights "burning blue and creepy" (Away from Home 430). Nash considers different plots for stories within Brewster's representation and/or parody of the inexperienced writer, longing for adventure. In "An Imperfect Setting," the memoir chapter which immediately follows, Brewster discusses the story as fictional and plays on "setting" as she describes her back injury, which had to be reset, and questions the diction of the short story, distancing herself from its content.

The continuity between the characters in her fiction and persona in her poetry and the memoir chapters also has the effect of suggesting that the "I" within the memoir chapters in Away and Invention is, like the short stories, constructed. Brewster's 1980 interview with Paul Denham discusses the "I" in her work and supports this interpretation. "The 'I' is myself," she comments "and yet is also a creation, so perhaps it's more a creation of personality than an expression of personality" (Denham 155). Like the photographs appearing in the middle of "Collage," the female characters in her short stories and the persona in her poetry exemplify the tension between reference and representation. They refer to real people, but are created by the photographer and the medium, the passage of time, as well as by their ordering in the text, and Brewster's



comment, or lack of comment, on them. The "I" in Brewster's collage as a result formally avoids the binaries of some of the subjectivity debates of postmodernism; she is and is not her. Brewster's collage, emphasizing representation, draws attention to her writing hand. As in collage, her writing refers to lived events and living persons but draws attention to representation, even to the act of writing. Like a collage, it allows referentiality and construction to coexist.

Brewster's choice of collage does not resolve the question of to what extent the self in her memoirs is invention. Her attention to her writing's forms and the very continuity between her life and that of her characters may lead to suspicion that perhaps her memoirs offer another level of parody. Robert Gibbs, reviewing Brewster's poem "What I want is stone" (from Passage of Summer) comments that her writing contains a smile that is "directed at herself and any reader who might be taken in" (26). Desmond Pacey observes that Brewster "always possessed a devastating power of sarcasm" (61). Further, humour and satire is a common effect of collage, and Brewster's memoirs contain both. Is Brewster fooling the reading eye/i? Her interpretation of her dream about the opera and the donkey potentially positions her readers as the hero of Apuleius' The Golden Ass before transformation, stuck in the glue that is the foundation of collage as word and technique. As part of the collage, readers cannot always know for certain where

Brewster's satire begins and ends. As unsettling as the form is, it also frees readers to explore possible significations.

An example of what Brewster calls "a creation of personality" (Denham 155) is "The Real Truth: Clara Flagg's journal" in The Invention of Truth. It takes the form of entries of a two-month period, in which the narrator reflects on relationships and the process of writing a novel. A postscript dated 3 February 1989 that follows the journal asks readers to distinguish Brewster from her characters, while it also explains that people and events in the fictional diary correspond to ones in Brewster's life, that "The Real Truth: Clara Flagg's Journal" was a frame for her novel, The Sisters,<sup>3</sup> and that it is based on an actual diary of a four-month period. The fictional journal allows Brewster to write her reactions to others while avoiding naming and the narrative positioning of conventional biography, which often assumes a factual understanding of another, while recognizing that the writing that she includes in Invention in some way makes up her history. Her real diary was "more emotional,"<sup>4</sup> Brewster writes (134).

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3 Jane Marchant, in The Sisters, shares elements of Brewster's life; for example, both her father and Jane's make money selling magazine subscriptions (89). New Brunswick's Washademoak and Sussex appear as Moss Lake and Milton in the novel. Clara Flagg, as Brewster was, is working on a novel that includes a character named Jane.

4 Valerie Raoul writes that "the non-public, non-literary nature of the 'genuine' diary is the first feature which made it a form of writing considered appropriate for women" (58). Brewster's use of diary entries provides intimacy and

That remark suggests that Brewster is still emphasizing the craft of writing fiction as distinct from recording personal feelings. However autobiographical, her published work is still representation.

Collage as an art form's emphasis on representation encourages connected reading. "Representation," according to Griselda Pollock, "signifies something represented to, addressed to a reader/viewer/consumer" (6). Moreover, collage relies on the reader or viewer to note the difference between the object and its representation in print. "The spectator must perceive this rupturing for collage to come into existence" (Polkinhorn 216). Dependent on the spectator, collage also "works to bring the spectator into the picture" (Perloff 42) as an inventor.

Brewster's intratextual highlighting of construction or representation does not figure readers as clever witnesses to, or participants in a game of characters and structures. Because of the correspondence to Brewster's life, readers are expected to empathize, particularly when she writes about her suicide attempt in Away from Home, the "gap of some consequence" (6) in the first memoir. Her own description of her poetry as concerned with "the struggle to lead a human and rational life" (Colombo 98) suggest leanings toward referentiality and morality rather than attention to form for its own sake. Brewster's admission in

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withholds personal information, emphasizing the diaries' presence as literary.

Away from Home that twenty-four years passed before she could write in first person in a poem about her decision to live (141) suggests that her decision to do so in her memoirs was preceded by a long period of near silence on the subject. Her willingness to write openly about her experience positions readers as intimates for whom she has a message about the connection between identity and reading.

Even when writing about a subject so directly affecting her, Brewster continues to trace literary influences, specifically the dangers of particular forms as part of a message for her readers. Away from Home suggests that a person's understanding of a situation at a given time may be so infused with particular plots, or "illusions" (142) that one may feel she cannot live beyond it. "Not an Ending" distances Brewster from her initial understanding of her situation--an ended relationship--as final, and at the same time, from literary forms that enclose her in romance or finality. She attributes what would have been the "more definite ending," (140) the result of the suicide attempt, to an unhappy love affair that "was probably largely illusion" (142). Brewster links literary forms and states of mind when she writes that this period in her life, if final, would have represented "complete closure, like the couplet of an Elizabethan sonnet" (140), a structured form with common themes. Brewster attributes partial responsibility for her suicide attempt to literary influences. Encouraged by her collage technique to make

textual connections, I go outside of her memoir to her poem "Pathfinders" in Wheel of Change where Brewster writes about literary influences that either appeal to romantic emotion or represent endurance. She writes in "Pathfinders":

No longer do I yearn for the young poets  
With their nightingales and the green blood  
Of their romantic veins; their early deaths  
Pathetic or full of rage.

It's the others I need now,  
Those who have lived old and written long,  
Hardy or Yeats or Frost or Tennyson,  
Sophocles or Hilda Doolittle,  
The tough survivors with their gnarled faces,  
their gnarled lines.

(Wheel of Change 84)

"Pathfinders" rejects the image of the self as tormented poet, an image generated by the "young poets" Brewster read, and it chooses longevity over intensity. The story "Visit of Condolence," which is seemingly less connected to the other parts of The Invention of Truth--a piece of the collage that stands out as distinct--finds a place as a story with central characters who are mature women who have survived earlier stormy relations. In the image of Brewster's two memoirs as collage, the short story represents an alternative to the literary influences that Brewster writes of. Having become the author, she offers the gnarled lines that she writes of needing in "Pathfinders."

Brewster writes to a reader "for hortatory or didactic reasons" (Away 147). "In Favour of Being Alive" directly addresses an imagined reader with an urgent message:

You don't know how much  
 you may yet enjoy  
 just waking up  
 and peeling oranges  
 to eat with sugar  
 while you listen to the clock strike  
 down at the Town Hall (Away 147)

Directly addressing the reader who is assumed to share her doubt about life, Brewster provides an image of hope in the form of attentiveness to small details. Another poem, influenced by George Crabbe's writing (the subject of her dissertation) also declares: "Let me rejoice in the presence of the actual" (Away 29). Clara Flagg in Brewster's fictional journal similarly favors the ordinariness of life. "I won't let myself be frightened of life again," she writes; "Life is full of violence and death and poverty and danger . . . But life is also full of beautiful, beautiful dullness" (Invention 132). Although Brewster considers her work constructed, the continuity between her fictional characters, poetic persona, and memoirist emphasizes the latter's values, and one message of her memoirs, rather than de-centering them.

Brewster's attention to her own literary construction is characteristic of collage, which comments on the materials from which it draws (Lynch 9-23). Brewster's memoirs as collage respond to possible forms. "Collage"'s "Ghost Stories," for example, insists:

This is not a story. A story has a beginning, a middle and an end. A story has direction. A story has a theme. It has a conflict you can recognize. There is a climax, maybe a recognition scene, a reversal. A story has a mystery. A

story is like "The Cask of Amontillado" or Oliver Twist. (Invention 33)

The definition of story as narrowly confined to Poe's or Dickens' content and form draws attention to the difference between her storytelling and that of a particular literary tradition. Brewster recalls that her father told stories that were anti-climactic, but she writes that she "can't tell stories in his way" either (Invention 33), and she wonders if her collage is, instead, a collection of "prosaic prose poems" (49). This apparent lack of confidence gives way to comments on the potential restrictions of a conventional form in an entry of "The Real Truth: Clara Flagg's Journal:"

Sometimes the novel form as such bothers me. It formalizes life too much, excludes what seem to the author irrelevant facts, builds up to artificial climaxes. How do you know what facts are going to turn out to be, improbably, relevant? (Invention 109)

Clara Flagg's questioning of form--a fiction written by Brewster--suggest its author's choice for that fiction and for her memoirs, one that could include momentary impressions and digressions and avoid a beginning to end structure. Significantly, collage offers a form in which different elements and times appear together simultaneously. A collage has no end or beginning. The improbable is made relevant by the context in which it appears, and its relationship to the other elements of the collage.

Brewster's intratextuality and her metatextual questioning of form reconsider her history of reading. The

Invention of Truth's "Beginnings" introduces Brewster as a connected reader. Brewster then cites, alludes to, or directly names literary influences throughout both Invention and Away from Home: Frost, Keats, Whitman, Northrop Frye, Alden Nowlan, Desmond Pacey, Atwood, and P.K. Page. She introduces Wordsworth in Invention, and his influence continues as a motif in Away from Home where she admits that "The Prelude was a model of one kind of memoir, and a poem to which [she has] come back many times in [her] life" (64).

As Brewster traces her literary upbringing in both Away and Invention, she writes about how its representations differ from her experience.<sup>5</sup> When Brewster asks in The Invention of Truth whether it is "arrogant . . . to set out to do what Wordsworth was doing in the Prelude?" (7), besides suggesting a conventional modesty of self-presentation, and doubt about the authenticity of a life for writing, she situates herself in a literary tradition that, as Sidonie Smith argues, historically reinstates the authenticity of a masculine subject (Poetics 50). Inventing collage by reading Brewster's memoirs with poetry published

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5 First, she recognizes that her literary and geographic "home is somewhere in Canada" (Away 129). Brewster claims Bliss Carman and Charles G.D. Roberts as poets of her region and country. "I could not, like Wordsworth, sit in the room where Milton once slept, or see the marble head of Newton and think of that mighty mind "voyaging through strange seas of Thought, alone," she writes, "But I glimpsed Charles Roberts when he visited St. Anne's Church where his father had once been the pastor, and I walked past the house where Carman had lived (Invention 21). "Did I feel I came from an invisible country?", Brewster asks about Canada from her time at Harvard (Away 17). Recognizing her home and its literature accompanies her acceptance of her writing.



elsewhere, such as "For Dorothy Wordsworth," (Entertaining Angels 23-27) uncovers resistance to a subjectivity that would be subsumed by gender norms. There, she writes that it was Dorothy Wordsworth

who talked to the old leech-gatherer  
and the gypsy peddler women  
at the door  
and the little boy begging for bread  
  
and handed their words to William  
for his poems (25)

By doing so, Brewster identifies with Dorothy Wordsworth, rather than her more famous brother, yet questions her deference. While her purpose in discussing her literary history may be to draw "her reader on to other books," (Brewster; "Time and Tide," 11) the combination in the memoirs of her evaluation of her own work and short stories whose theme is a female writer's development emphasizes the relationship between gender and literary form. Brewster's choice of collage allows her to act as critic of her earlier writing. She includes in Away from Home, for example, excerpts of an unfinished short story with a male protagonist, Ellis Mann, and admits to sharing the experience of some young female readers' identification with male characters. Brewster decides in retrospect that the story is "too precious, too full of famous quotations, and full of adjectives" and "too revealing" (31). Although she does not elaborate, the story is possibly "too revealing" because she shared some of her character's feelings, and because the story's diction exposed her literary allegiances

of the time, such as Joyce, in terms of subject matter and form. Brewster comments in Away from Home that she admired women writers' stories of their own lives (74). In her own memoirs, Brewster traces her movement over time towards writing in first-person. "Death by Drowning," the first poem responding to her suicide attempt appeared in third person masculine. The later short story "Comfort me with Apples" works through the event from a woman's perspective. "Essence of Marigold" and "A Perfect Setting," have female characters who "become the author".

Brewster raises the issue of gendered differences in power and writing subjects in "A Question of Style" (from A House Full of Women) a story chapter in Away from Home based on Brewster's visit with a patron<sup>6</sup> after winning the Lord Beaverbrook Overseas scholarship. Lorna Ridley confronts a male patron who insists she has "style" but refuses her request to hear the throne speech because she is a woman and not a peeress. Ridley rejects the injustice, and her scholarship is not renewed. The story ends with Brewster's character looking back considering Lord Peake: "out there in whatever space you now inhabit. I'm not giving up," she writes; "I'm trying to speak out." Like Brewster, she decides to speak out with her own voice, in her own style (113): in first-person.

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<sup>6</sup> This character is likely drawn from Max Aitken, Lord Beaverbrook.

When Brewster writes about T.S. Eliot, she further challenges traditions of literary stature and gender. Away from Home questions Eliot's renown, the classical tradition that his "Traditional and the Individual Talent" upholds, and by extension, the idea of major literature. She quotes a letter to her parents of May 17, 1947 which reduces his stature but indicates her identification with him at the time. She

was really sorry for [Eliot] when the master of ceremonies introduced him as 'the greatest living poet'--he seemed so embarrassed and distressed, as though he felt he was being pointed out as a freak, like the biggest living elephant or the only existing set of Siamese twins. (Away 27)

Her comment that he looked "commonplace--A Prufrock figure" (27) identifies the author with his ineffectual poetic persona. Brewster's diary entries deflate the stature of "Tradition" that has marginalized women writing, and view Eliot's fame in her letter as an objectifying process, even stigmatizing. She sympathizes, but her description is satirical. Similarly, in "Harvard-Radcliffe Daze," the part of "Poems for Seven Decades" that shares its title with a chapter from Away from Home, she writes after hearing Eliot speak:

I too planned to be a poet--  
Maybe even (such is youthful arrogance)  
The Greatest Living

Though how could a woman  
From backwoods New Brunswick  
Be so uppity  
As to place her individual talent  
Next to all that Tradition? (Wheel of Change 71-2)

Uppity, as in "A Question of Style," is claimed as a position of strength in Brewster's rhetorical question.

Elspeth Probyn, responding to Elaine Showalter's discussion of women as readers, argues that "it is not far-fetched to say girls and young women first turn to books to better understand their personal lives," (Sexing the Self 35) but, committed to "staunch anti-humanism," (113) Probyn argues for the need to situate reading "as a woman." The conditions under which women develop a love of books ought to be written, she implies. Brewster points to this need also in the poem "Harvard-Radcliffe Daze," and her memoirs detail what it was for her to be a reader who was also a woman from New Brunswick. Brewster's autobiographies materialize what Probyn argues is the task of reader-response criticism: the trope of "girls and books."

Details in her memoir chapters of the locations where Brewster read offer very particular conditions that disrupt the image of women's reading as leisure. Brewster first read books belonging to others in homes her mother was cleaning, she writes in Invention, and she read at home growing up in "the Pest House," an affordable house on the edge of town that had been abandoned because once quarantined. Later, she read in a one-room schoolhouse, and at home after she dropped out of school for a few years. She read while classmates signed up with the Armed Services from which some did not return. She writes of her time studying in London during food rationing that "postwar

England was hungry and cold, and we seemed to spend much of the time thinking of how to make ourselves comfortable" (87). While reading did not offer escape, it initially represented an opportunity to shift economic classes through education.

Brewster's construction of her reading history represents a form of the "arduous systematic self-reflection" (Clinchy 219) that memoir can offer. "Without self-knowledge we cannot preserve the otherness of the other" in connected knowing, according to Blythe McVicker Clinchy (230). Brewster introduces the possibility of the relationship between memoir writing and connected knowing in The Invention of Truth when she writes: "'Know thyself,' 'Dig within,' the old sages said," and she asks whether "that digging in [is] unhealthily narcissistic," or "one of the ways of knowing the other" (6). As memoir writer who has chosen collage, Brewster can leave the questions open, but her process of collage suggests that inventing the self is a means to knowing the other. Memoir writing offers many women as readers and writers the possibility of considering the self in a way consistent with connected knowing and the complexity that Probyn urges is necessary to a politics of unlearning privilege and prejudice. Through collage, Brewster materializes the kind of self as form (not substance) that Elspeth Probyn proposes for feminist critics. It is one that offers an alternative to the understandings of the self within "an apparatus of truth and

individuality or one of interpellation and ideology" (Sexing the Self 135). The self becomes a "point of view" (Probyn 96) produced in writing activity (130). This self as point of view, a speaking place, "produces or provokes connections" (96). The reader brings to this textual self, according to Probyn, both empathy and imagination, both characteristics of connection and caregiving that could be described as a willingness to invent with the author.

Although Brewster writes that she is "almost as much the child of William Wordsworth or Jane Austen as of [her] parents" (71), family is an important element of The Invention of Truth in particular, which explores her relatives and other significant friends and mentors as literary influences themselves, recognizing them as crafters of language. As connected knower and collagist, Brewster reads her mother's knowledge as knowledge by including it as part of her "growth of a poet's mind" even as it falls out of the realm of literary canon.

Brewster remembers her mother in "Victorian Interlude," for example. "Victorian Interlude" imitates in writing the laying out of Tarot cards and their associative reading to generate dreams and healing, and to create meaning. The images on the cards and the dreams inspire the reminiscences in each section. "It's from my mother that I picked up my small irrational superstitions," Brewster writes (55), picking up one card. She also credits her with her introduction to literature:

. . . my mother introduced me to the Sacred Scriptures: The Bible, the fairytales, romantic novels. It was while sitting on my mother's lap as she turned the pages of Shakespeare that I saw The Tempest illustrated and wished to read it, and Hamlet holding the skull in his hands and a procession of angels greeting Catherine of Aragon. (Invention 56)

As Brewster associates or reads via the cards, she considers her mother as the magician and as everyday transformer like the images on the cards:

It required pure sorcery, miracles of bread and fishes, to keep a family fed in the days of the Great Depression. My mother's magic power were sometimes strained. Is magic a trick or a miracle? Does it require faith or merely skill? Both, perhaps? (Invention 57)

She highlights the mystical in the everyday, affirming magic, miracles, and her mother's skills as truths.

Her connected reading involves recognizing that she has been transformed by texts, and by others. The imperative to become the author, therefore, must have further implications besides (or including) adopting formal techniques or acknowledging the element of assemblage in critical writing. Being haunted by, as she suggests that she is when she reads Bliss Carman, is quite different from adopting the style of another writer. As connected knower, Brewster admits to fear of her mother's influence. While recognizing that influence, she admits to being afraid of becoming the author, if that involves total absorption. Her exploration of a dream in particular comments on this anxiety, as well as with her image of the student as male:

Long ago, when I was a student at university, I had a dream of a young man who had the disconcerting habit of turning into his mother. His life was ruined. Young, brilliant, ambitious, he wished to enter public life, to attain a commanding position. But, just as he was about to make a speech or assume authority, his mother would take over. He would disappear, her skirts would sweep the ground. The voice and words would be hers.

Did I object to being a woman? Or did I simply fear that I was overwhelmed by the power of my mother's personality? Swallowed up in her? (Invention 69)

The fear of being consumed in the dream is an example of the fear of the mythic devouring mother. Erich Neumann identified her as one aspect of the Great Mother archetype who represents the unconscious (148). She reappears in textual fantasies about mothers, and in women's writers memoirs of abusive and neglectful mothers, such as Sally Carrighar's in Home to the Wilderness. In Brewster's example, the mother speaks through her child, but also subsumes him. Brewster's first introduction to reading by her mother was, she writes, to "keep [her] quiet":

When we were visiting Grandma, my mother used to read sentimental novels, lying on the bed with me beside her. I wasn't supposed to make a noise on Sunday; reading along with Mother kept me quiet. That was the room where I was born. (Invention 7-8)

In this context, reading silenced her while it influenced her and later gave her a voice. Becoming the author speaks of a kind of temporary occupation but not a loss of voice: being "swallowed up," one remains intact. Blythe McVicker Clinchy notes that fear of fusion is a common response to the idea of connected knowing. She argues that connected



knowing offers not fusion, but transformation (231).

Brewster similarly chooses transformation over fusion when she reinterprets the dream to accept herself as connected:

I thought then that the dream was a nightmare. Now I can see that there are worse things than being taken over--temporarily--by my mother's ghost. She speaks from my depths.  
(Invention 69)

No longer identifying with the male student, her own mother's position exists within her, along with other influences, and speaks through her.

Becoming is a active process. To become is to continue to develop. "Becoming the author," therefore, is also a process. Brewster's memoirs as collage write becoming rather than a finished self, and they encourage a connected reading in which the reader participates in the process of invention. I choose fragments from Brewster's memoirs and create a pattern and highlight some; a reader interprets my writing. A critical essay that attempts a connected reading may not take a particular form such as pastiche or collage, but it has certain characteristics. In a connected reading, meaning is not the property of the critic (or the writer) but is "the product of a discursive interaction of a community of readers" (Schweikart 309) over time. Support for claims, as Patrocinio Schweikart writes, is provided in the critical text but relies on the critic's reader. A critical response, like a collage, is selective, partial, and turns to another. Imagined as a practice of connected knowing, it is, like Brewster's memoirs, without an ending.

## Chapter Seven:

### InConclusion

This dissertation has gone through several changes of content, theme, and form: from a focus on mother-daughter relationships in women's memoirs, to one on the practice of reading these and other aspects of women's memoirs. I see it now as connected to my initial reason for choosing literary studies, which was to learn what literature had to teach, and to a resulting engagement with the debates about gender, subjectivity, and ethics.

I turned to women's theorizing of ethics to read women's memoirs because, historically, this work has been overshadowed. I am aware of a slight tone of justification throughout my dissertation and in the work of other feminist critics, which suggests that feminist theories are still shadowed by constructs of women as non-rational. In literary studies, feminist criticism is often read as applicable only to deconstructive readings of gender rather than offering structural approaches. Critics may single out a figurehead such as Emmanuel Levinas rather than gathering the plural contributions of feminist theorists, who also argue that ethics assume a relationship, within their work.

Advocating a caregiving reading of women's memoirs presented a number of difficulties, some of which were personal. To accept the validity of an ethics of care applied to literary criticism, I had to overcome

internalized sexism that declared such approaches as free of critical challenge or characterized by reductive biologism. The term "caregiving" may raise concerns of oversimplifying women's subjectivity and relegating us to domestic roles. However, as a critical theory, it offers a means to resist oppression if it is recognized, along with the work of caregiving, as valid, as Margaret Laurence urges in Dance on the Earth. Bringing an ethic of care to a critical practice, I imagined ways of reading women's memoirs that solved some of the dilemmas that I encountered when reading debates about how to write critically, and in particular about autobiographical texts.

The ongoing debates about writing criticism and analyzing autobiography suggest that many others are still seeking alternatives to existing literary criticism. Autobiography studies has been legitimized by emphasizing texts' construction so as to permit the application of traditional critical approaches to literature to autobiographical writing. More recently, after the identification of structures of privilege, power, and exclusion, the position of the critical subject in relation to the autobiographical subject has been scrutinized. Critics of autobiography have explored ways of foregrounding, but not imposing critical subjectivity. Several are committed to identifying their positions explicitly in their critical texts through various forms of self-reference, in the way that anthropologists may expose

their methodology and subjective responses, documentary filmmakers may place themselves in front of the camera, or instructors may position themselves as learners with their students, as Paulo Freire advocates. What drives this self-identification is a concern with the ethical and the relationship between writer and critical reader. Because memoirs assume a correspondence between the life represented in the text and the writers' own, they invite such approaches, and they demand an ethical reader who can translate his or her attentiveness to the memoir into a written critical response.

Several times during this process, I struggled with the idea that the memoirs spoke for the writers and needed no critical comment. Women's memoirs in particular need critical attention because of the historical marginalizing of women's forms of expression. The possibility that such forms will be overlooked is even greater when these deal with trauma, or present issues that question or seek to change societal norms. I sought a reading practice that was able to foreground critical subjectivity while letting the memoirs speak within a dissertation. However, the apparently contradictory idea that formal elements within the text could form the basis of the response and that the critical response could be identified as also (in)forming the text needed a theory of reading to support it. Calling that reading caregiving, even when the texts read deal with themes of caregiving, potentially implies that other

critical approaches lack an ethic of care, or that there is one way to read, and it is important to emphasize that the approach must be situated as a response to particular memoirs. As Patrocínio Schweikart argues of asymmetrical communication, the emphasis in caregiving reading is on the attitude brought to reading rather than a set of instructions on how to analyze. Laurence Buell argues of ethics and literary studies that ethics is a "pluriform discourse" (7); it is "undemonstrable" and undefinable "prior to relations and names" (Attridge 26). Similarly, a caregiving reading is situated.

An ethic of reading suggests a set of practical principles, rather than an abstract concept or study. Although I had originally planned to write an overview of important issues using several memoirs as examples to support my argument in each chapter, this approach was not consistent with my experience of reading the texts as whole works with unique contributions, or with the idea of caregiving reading as attentive, however necessarily selective. I found that particular critical writing strategies were more consistent with the ethics of care articulated by feminist critics than others, and, as a result, could be called caregiving. These include discerning the memoir writer's own theories of how best to read from comments in the memoirs or in other critical writing, reading the memoirs as part of a continuum or process, rather than as discrete texts or "well-wrought

urn[s]," and finding evidence to support the writers' stated goals and assertions in the memoirs and elsewhere, rather than seeking gaps or faults. Where I did challenge the memoir writer's representations, or critics' views, I tried to avoid dismissive language or opposition for its own sake. At the same time, I wrote well within the confines of familiar argument, summarizing and commenting on others' evaluation in order to defend the memoir writers' views as I interpreted them, while taking others' critical views seriously.

The concept of a caregiving reading is an extension of, and an attempt to bring in, other critical views, rather than a novelty or a characteristically oppositional stance to the memoirs or critical views. While I would like to claim that a caregiving model came from a characteristically non-oppositional stance, a characteristic of women identified by Carol Gilligan, the idea of a caregiving reading came from a crisis of reading rather than an essential quality. I recognized (re-learned) the potential power of criticism after seeing an essay of mine published along side poetry, writing a response to Eva Brewster's memoir, and discussing Joseph Conrad's Heart of Darkness with a large group of students in a classroom setting. This shift in how I imagined reading and critical response suggested the possibility of working through some of the difficulties of writing about memoirs. For years, I had

struggled with finding a form of critical response to women's work.

I substituted the critical overview and analysis of mother-daughter themes in many women's memoirs with a focus on seven memoirs, two of which were published by Canadian small presses. What the dissertation lost in terms of different perspectives, I hoped it would gain in more detailed attention to each text, central to a caregiving approach. Although initially I was concerned that I would uphold a simplified and possibly exclusionary version of nationalism by choosing mostly Canadian writers and lose diversity by limiting the study to seven books, the memoirs proved me wrong. I was no freer of issues of difference, language, and care with Elizabeth Brewster's memoirs than I was with Ellen Prescott's, for example. Margaret Laurence's Dance on the Earth deals centrally with issues of prejudice and inequality as does Eva Brewster's memoir. While the specifics of each women's position is important--Laurence's and Brewster's experiences of World War II are very different--each of the memoirs called for a similarly attentive approach. I chose to interpret the differences as an inevitability and not a problem, while some discussion of the critical dilemmas in the chapters was necessary so as to avoid misinterpretation of a caregiving reading as imposing values.

Accepting that meaning-making occurs in what Schweikart calls intersubjective communication offers a way out of the

impasses created by focusing exclusively on differences in position and lived experience. A caregiving reading arises from dialogue with the memoirs and writers. At one point, I decided to discuss the memoirs with their writers directly in order to choose a form of response that recognized a concept of permission beyond copyright and towards actual intersubjective communication. I could not contact all of the writers directly, nor would I argue that this approach is the only one, but the process involved approaching others. My own work became open to response, as did my communication skills and use of language; in a limited way I allowed the writers to read me back.

Margaret Laurence's Dance on the Earth, on first reading, appeared to claim an overarching category of woman as a position from which to challenge an interlocking set of oppressive structures. On rereading, Dance on the Earth offers an opportunity to understand how the position from which Laurence speaks actually works to complicate overarching categories, by demonstrating how particular conditions of individuals are part of a larger history, while her emphasis on the connections between issues urges connections between all people.

Surprisingly, the chapter on Jill Ker Conway's memoirs became one of the more difficult to write because of the unresolved tensions in both memoirs, particularly where Conway writes about her mother. I had to confront the question of how to write a caregiving reading while



attending to the parts of the memoir that made a favorable reading difficult. I found myself struggling with strong reactions to some of Conway's statements and a desire to defend what I read as the positive elements of her work overlooked by other critics. Approaching these points of contention involved taking on the attentive position that Conway advocates in reading other women's memoirs. This position allowed me to understand Conway as a learner, and her memoirs as a representation of a learning process, which allowed me to see beyond the academic privilege and power that she seemed to hold.

I chose to read Eva Brewster's memoir because of its social significance in light of ongoing prejudice and actions based on that prejudice in North America and elsewhere. My initial motivation was fear that as Holocaust survivors are no longer able to tell their stories, the messages of these might be lost. However, part way through a written response to her memoir, I confronted a strong internalized "don't," the source of which was several of the reactions that Dori Laub writes of in Testimony. In fact, this response coincided with reading his chapter on witnessing with the realization that my project, if motivated by these reactions, might not best serve Brewster and others as witnesses. The other source of the impulse to stop writing was the issues of difference and cultural appropriation. It was important to note that the issue was not entirely resolved by writing about it, but that the

writing represented taking part in an ongoing discussion with different perspectives. The chapter represents an attempt to work with issues of difference by discussing several theorists' views while not letting this emphasis subsume the message of Brewster's memoir: that discrimination and violence must end.

Similar concerns arose when I responded to Ellen Prescott's memoir. I absented myself to some extent in terms of identification and difference in order to focus on Prescott's story and to emphasize the social significance of her memoir's message of challenging women's silencing and oppression. The social significance of the particulars that her memoir writes allowed me to move past the question of appropriation and the impulse to abandon the work for fear of intruding on an individual's story, or conversely, taking an impossible, heroic position. Working through how to write about Mondays are Yellow, Sundays are Grey ultimately informed the readings of all of the other memoirs here. The consideration of the effects of the critical response, the decision of what could be the focus of that response, and the attention to critical language, became elements of a feminist critical practice that affirmed an ethic of care by recognizing the presence of the memoir writer in the critical response.

Elizabeth Brewster's Away from Home and The Invention of Truth move the criticism in a slightly different direction. They offer unique forms that challenge generic

distinction. Presented as autobiographical, short stories and poetry appear within, and replace, chapters. No table of contents distinguishes or separates the genres. As a result, I read Brewster's memoirs, in part, as an experiment with presenting already-published creative work--fiction and poetry with personae distinct from the author--as autobiographical. Brewster's collage form insists on the autobiographical element of her non-autobiographical work and the crafted nature of her memoirs. Freed from a critical position that might pretend to a definitive reading, I am encouraged to identify the writer's poetics and her logic, and even enter it, to become the author, as an inventor who creates meaning with the writer. When this happens, the critical response moves towards the ideal communicative action that Patrocinio Schweikart extends from Women's Ways of Knowing's ethics of care: a reading that acknowledges both the critic's presence and the memoir writer's words.

What each of the readings of the particular memoirs shares is an implied focus on subjectivity claims. In the response to Progeny of Light/Vanished in Darkness, I reconsidered de Beauvoir's concept of the individual to recognize that it offered a materialist recognition of the particularities and humanity of each person. Rather than connoting the monolithic, privileged subject that the word individual has come to suggest, de Beauvoir's individual is the complex site of resistance. Margaret Laurence chooses

an explicitly gendered subject who is both particular and situated in relation to a category of woman that represents both social constructions of femininity and self-articulated, cross-cultural, shared, and embodied knowledge of experience common to many women. Ellen Prescott also claims an embodied category of woman and a motherhood position from which to speak about very particular experiences in order to combat violence against women. Jill Ker Conway's memoirs trace the author's struggle with categories of femininity. Conway's particular experiences become historical markers of a collective struggle, while particular elements of her life identify her as longing for status as an individual. While Elsbeth Probyn's "anti-humanist" emphasis on women's subjectivity being produced in the activity of writing might appear to contradict de Beauvoir's, or Laurence's, Probyn's concept of the subject, like Brewster's written "I," acknowledges the shared elements of the category "women." Probyn stresses more strongly the particular and contradictory to avoid erasure of the contrary and particular and to avoid the establishment of a norm. Like Patrocínio Schweikart, who emphasizes existing social asymmetries, or Teresa Ebert who recognizes an "individual in relation within a system of exploitation," (19) Probyn emphasises the diversity within the category of "women." While Laurence's apparently humanist position provides a global perspective and Ebert's category of women emphasizes material, shared conditions

rather than textuality, Probyn's and Schweikart's emphasis on the particular prevent abstraction and romanticization. The memoirs offer a theoretical position that the critical essays, focused on debating others' claims, do not: collectivity alongside, and often arising, from emphasis on the particular details of a life.

The concept of subjectivity that I reclaimed in the process of my reading of women's memoirs is one that refuses to confuse gynocentrism with a reductive understanding of gender. Through this model, I could write about several women's memoirs together while recognizing the differences within and between them. By claiming a category of women, as I argue that Laurence and Prescott do, I was able to read the memoirs as, in part, forms of resistance. I chose to use the term patriarchy in the chapters on Laurence's, Conway's and Prescott's memoirs to emphasize that, as the memoirs illustrate, women still fight gender-based discrimination and violence. The term here connotes power that is gender-based but crosses various differences within and between women and men. It is consistent with the concept of power as a network or web as well as the hierarchical top-down practices of power by groups and individuals within that complex. As a recognition of this, this project sought a focus on women's writing that made women's work central, but did not exclude men's voices, nor allow resistance to define the women writing.

The idea of a caregiving reading is really an extension of the lessons of the memoirs themselves. Each of the seven memoirs demonstrates that caregiving is a means for the writers to resist oppression and to gather together, whether it be through child or family care, teaching, community activism, or by offering others one's life story so as to contribute to a more comprehensive picture of women's lives. Classrooms offer a practical setting for the intersubjectivity that a caregiving reading assumes. Attention to writers' lives, whether they write memoir or not, encourages attention to various forms of primary research. Rather than relying on authoritative critical voices, or reestablishing the author as authority on the text's meaning--a position many writers refuse--readers can develop critical responses in relation. As each memoir insists on the connection between writing and women's lives, it calls for a reading that is similarly caregiving. The further challenge is to continue the caregiving within and beyond the text and classroom context.

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