

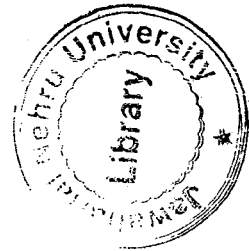
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Feminist Study of Four Australian Women Poets

*Dissertation submitted to the Jawaharlal Nehru University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the award of the Degree of*

MASTER OF PHILOSOPHY

SOON OCK, YUN



**CENTRE OF LINGUISTICS AND ENGLISH
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For
My Two Daughters

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION: DILEMMA IN THE SEARCH OF WOMEN'S LITERARY SPACE

The aim of my study is to examine the feminist consciousness in the poetry of four Australian women poets. I have chosen four pioneering women poets - Mary Gilmore (1865-1962), Judith Wright (1915-2000), Rosemary Dobson (1920-) and Gwen Harwood (1920-1995) - who have been candid and confident in their expression of the feminist voice. In their work, I have been able to discern the feminist consciousness that has been traditionally repressed by the dominant phallogentric literary tradition.

A woman's image in most traditional societies was that of an 'angel in the house'. It was a role model created by men. This role model was not just encouraged but also enforced by men. As a result, women for several centuries strictly and passively followed this role model. They thought that it was their destiny and their responsibility to follow old creeds and conventions without offering any resistance. Thus, women were subjugated in the name of virtue.

Virginia Woolf sarcastically defines women's role in traditional societies as follows:

She was intensely sympathetic, she was immensely charming. She was utterly unselfish she excelled in the difficult art of family life. She sacrificed herself daily. If there was chicken, she took the leg: if there was draught she sat in it, in short she was so constituted that she never had a mind or a wish of her own but preferred to sympathize

always with the minds and wishes of others. Above all, I need not say it, she was pure. Here purity was supposed to be her chief beauty... in those days... Every house had its angels.¹

Any woman who did not conform to the expected role model of being an 'angel in the house' was considered a deviant in the society. Given such social circumstances they had to be tolerant and were effectively silenced. Such subordination of women by men is believed to be older than civilization itself. Men created this stereotyped image of woman. It was what they wanted all women to be so that they would not be equals. They wanted women to stand behind them as docile creatures. Men established the standard of womanhood. As a result, women could not have a clear perception of themselves. Cruel patriarchy undermined women's sense of self-worth and made them believe that their inferiority was pre-ordained. A woman aspiring to selfhood and a separate identity was looked upon as a selfish and deviant object going against the norms of society where patriarchal dominance was prevalent.

Simone de Beauvoir also raised her voice and lamented about the sexual oppression in patriarchal societies.

She is simply what man decrees; thus such is called the sex, by which is meant that she appears essentially to the male as a sexual being. For him she is sex, absolute sex, no less. She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the subject, he is the Absolute, she is the Other.²

In a patriarchal society the male or the masculine is set up as the positive or the norm, whereas the female or the feminine is set up as the negative, the unessential, the abnormal, as in short, the Other.

On my part, I believe that sex is the creation of God and that sexual differences are essentially for procreation. Gender, however, is not God's creation. It is the creation of patriarchy and serves the male purposes of domination and oppression of women. Although, women have played a vital role in the creation of society and have been active agents in our history, the patriarchal set-up has always tried to relegate women to the background and the margins. Men have always asserted that they are stronger and faster than women are, and therefore, superior to women.

Mary Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), refuted Rousseau's idea:

Rousseau declares that a woman should never for a moment, feel herself independent, that she should be governed by fear to exercise her natural cunning, and made a coquettish slave in order to render her a more alluring object of desire, a sweeter companion to man.³

She continues:

Eve was, literally speaking, one of Adam's ribs, the deduction must be allowed to fall to the ground; or, only be so far admitted as it is strength to subjugate his companion and his invention to shew that ought to have her neck bent under the yoke, because the whole creation was only created for his convenience or pleasure.⁴

Throughout history, it is apparent that in patriarchal society women's weakness has not been dependent on or determined by particular physical attributes but has been a function of the position that women have been accorded by men to suit their convenience. But ironically in moral terms, women are still expected to be far better than men. Chastity and purity are compulsory attributes that are given by men to imprison women. A woman always has to sit in her cage under the pretext of being an 'angel in the house'. If women display any kind of strength, power or creativity, then they

cease to be angels and are often treated as if they were subhuman. In such situations where they hope to break out of the stereotype, they are viewed as destructive monsters.

Under these circumstances, being a woman writer was an impossible task. Being a woman writer meant being a rebel against society. They were seen as monstrous creatures escaping from and breaking out of the invisible social moral fence. Men felt uncomfortable and were scared of the consequences of this unexpected situation. Why did men feel scared of women writers? Why did they feel threatened by women?

For many centuries, women were denied the use of public language, the language of dominant discourse, and therefore were unable to express themselves, their needs and desires. They were forced to stay in a dark room where their creative talents were numbed and where they were forced to become dumb due to their exterior surroundings. These surroundings relegated women to a position of complete powerlessness. Language was an artist's tool only for male writers. For woman writers language was a man-centered restricted zone. Language was seen by women writers as depriving women of their voices and as conceptualizing her as an object. The women who were struggling to get back their speaking voices and their identities as subjects were regarded as abnormal. Monique Wittig sarcastically argues:

The women say, the language you speak poisons your glottis tongue, palate lips. They say, the language you speak is made up of words that are killing you. They say, the language you speak is made up of signs that rightly speaking designate what men have appropriated.⁵

Throughout history, women have been silenced, and it is doubtless by virtue of this silence that men have been able to speak and write without any restrictions. As long as women remain silent, they will be outside the

historical processes. They will never have a chance to be protagonists in their life. But if they begin to speak and write as men do, they will actively participate in the historical processes having been subdued and alienated for them for a long time.

In her crucial essay, *A Room of One's Own*, Virginia Woolf voices concern about the effects of women writers' material conditions on their art. She sees the past as a sort of Dark Age and a vanished Eden. She argues:

Patriarchal society imposes economic and social restrictions upon women on account of its own need for psychological support. These restrictions limit the experience upon which art depends, causing creative women to suffer and depriving creativity of their experiences.⁶

Women's education, she points out, was frequently sacrificed to that of their brothers. They lacked access to publishers and the distribution of their work was limited. They could not earn a living by writing, as men did, since they could not even retain their earnings if they were married. Relative poverty and lack of access to an artistic training meant that women encountered specific constraints on their creative work. Women's poor social and economic situation affected women's creative mind. Thus, women could not equal the men in this given society. Men wanted women to remain their supporters while they occupied the position of supremacy. Virginia Woolf criticizes this situation:

Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size. Without that power probably the earth would still swamp and jungle... For if she begins to tell the truth, the figure in the looking-glass shrinks; his fitness for life is diminished. How is he to go on giving judgment, civilizing natives, making laws, writing laws, writing books, dressing up and speechifying at

banquets, unless he can see himself at breakfast at twice the size he really is?⁷

While men are looking for succor, women are always victims. Women never get a chance to grow out of men's shadows. They are unable to sustain creative minds and become creative writers under these conditions.

Therefore, for a woman to indulge in creative writing was considered a kind of abnormality, a subversive function of imagination, a neurotic act. They had to retain their position within the house – that position which had been given to them by men. So creative writing was almost a taboo for a woman who wanted to be considered a perfect woman. Being a woman writer meant insubordination and dangerous challenge to the male-dominated society, especially male writers. Male writers were afraid of being dominated by the women writers. That's why every time women tried to express themselves and write in their own language, male writers reviled women's language as trivial, sentimental, emotional and personal. Virginia Woolf expresses her opinion about this situation.

It is probable, however, that both in life and in art the values of a woman are not the values of a man. Thus when a woman comes to write a novel she still finds that she is perpetually wishing to alter the established values - to make serious what appears insignificant to a man, and trivial what is to him important. And for that of course, she will be criticized; for the critic of the opposite sex will be genuinely puzzled and surprised by an attempt to alter the current scale of values, and will see in it not merely a different view but a view that is weak or trivial, or sentimental, because differs from his own.⁸

Virginia Woolf brought about a change in the situation by proclaiming the women's sentence. Women writers having been challenged in their search for a literary space were forced to find, develop, and use

strategies that deconstruct the hierarchic, linear, dualistic mode of phallogocentrism.

What she wanted the "woman's sentence" to signify was a break from the dominant narrative tradition in which women were not subjects but objects. Her assertion and proclamation of the "woman's sentence" offered great encouragement to other women writers, not only to those who belonged to her generation but also to those of subsequent generations. Even though she insisted that the creative mind must be 'androgynous', 'incandescent', she affirmed that the difference between the male and the female experiences would naturally emerge in the writings of women. She emphasizes:

A woman's writing is always feminine; it cannot help being feminine; it cannot help being feminine; at its best it is most feminine; the only difficulty lies in defining what we mean by feminine.⁹

Elaine Showalter while quoting Spacks mentions this feminine mode of writing.

Spacks calls the difference of women's writing a 'delicate divergency' testifying to the subtle and elusive nature of the feminine practice of writing.¹⁰

Women do not write differently but they write from a different perspective arising out of their different life experiences as women. Therefore their color of writing has to be different from that of male writers. This difference doesn't mean that their writing is in any way inferior to that of men. Women have a much more diverse and unique experience as women. Therefore their womanhood itself shapes and designates their creative mind. We can't possibly mistake a novel written by a man for a novel written by a woman. There is an obvious and outstanding difference

which is a result of their different experiences. Their difference is also the result of a man's and a woman's different views of what constitutes the importance of any subject. As Virginia Woolf had pointed out, they (both men and women writers) can choose the same plot and incidents, but their method, style and language will definitely be different. Although there are men writers whose protagonists have been women, their understanding and grasp of the feminine psyche is certainly different from that of the women writers whose instinctive knowledge and sensibility makes them analyze women from their own perspective. The woman protagonists in the male-oriented works are usually the selfless, self-effacing, submissive, passive and docile. They are prepared to internalize the idea of their own inferiority without questioning their subjugated position.

Men and women writers have different perspectives for ensuring and pursuing their literary mind. Sometimes what appears serious to a woman may appear insignificant to a man; on the contrary what is to him important may appear trivial to her. However, we can't judge which values are more important and significant. Both have their own values but this is not apparent in the use of phallogentric language. Literature written by women gives legitimacy to the values upheld by women. It is on reading such literature that many women feel themselves evolving into human beings. They have their own characteristics and methods of representation because of which women are touched, moved and begin to feel the joy and pleasure of being women. They can create female characters that have the emotions all human beings have - hate, envy, anger, lust, spite and fear as well as love, compassion and joy. Without denouncing them as 'the other', "imperfect" men and "incidental" beings, they make the protagonists grow constantly through their experience and exchange with reality come to a situation where the women finally finds her voice.

Nowadays feminist criticism has tried to rediscover the women writers who were doomed to invisibility by the male-oriented literary canon. Things have changed so much that we can now speak of a genre of feminist literature - one of the most innovative areas of contemporary literary production. Now we can find and read a lot of books written from the woman-centered perspective. In such texts, women very often occupy the subject positions, as protagonists. The shaping of women characters is influenced by the emerging view of women. The existing reality calls for a reconsideration of women's rights and their status in the society, a radical reconstruction of traditional thought. Women writers are generating new attitudes that would be relevant to the contemporary needs.

With the establishment of the feminist publishing houses, women writers now are not worried about publishing of their books, which focus on the innermost experiences of women. These publishing houses have, thus, inspired fresh hope in the women writers and they are freely critiquing the traditional system of ideas and beliefs about women and are giving an uninhibited expression to the feelings and desires of women. They are depicting determined women for whom the traditional role is inadequate; women who wish to affirm their independence and are confident about themselves. They are trying to develop their own perceptions concerning the new women whose urges and needs are on the basis of human equality and dignity. The identification of women with the regenerative principle, with survival, healing, and renewal is of primary concern of them. They write about what it means to live life as women. Some women writers purposely avoid calling this the "female experience" because the term indicates narrowness and is limiting. They want to call it as just life itself without setting up any boundaries between men and women. They are trying to

build a world that is free of patriarchal dominance and hierarchy, a world that is built on justice and equality.

With the change in the attitude to women in the society, the attitude of the critics to women writers has also undergone a radical change and women writers' portrayal of their experiences, especially the experience of sex and childbirth is no longer treated as taboo, vulgar or obscene. The society is also gradually changing and not considering creative writing by women as an abnormality or perversity.

It wasn't until the 20th century though, that they only gradually came to be noticed and acknowledged. The 1920s and the 1930s is a very crucial juncture in the sprouting of feminist literature. Women tried to speak out about women's consciousness and experiences without subduing any emotion. The twentieth century emerged to prominently start the new era for feminine literature. But the nineteenth century was an unfilled and unfulfilled space in women's literary zone. In America, Emily Dickinson was the best example of a woman poet. But she was an obscure recluse during her lifetime and has received the appropriate attention only after her death. ✓

In Australia, an acknowledged "body of female poetry" was obviously missing until the end of the 19th century. Very few poems by women were included in mainstream anthologies, and women poets were certainly inequitably represented in journals and newspapers. But women have been significant contributors to Australian writing since then, and in the middle of the period 1915-65, women writers achieved marked prominence. As Drusilla Modjeska says:

The 1930s were remarkable years in Australian cultural history. Women were producing the best fiction of the period

and they were, for the first and indeed only time, a dominant influence in Australian literature.¹¹

That historical phenomenon alleviates but does not solve the problem of how to set up a category of women writers without reinforcing the idea of women as outsiders whose activities and achievements must be on the margins of a notional mainstream. They were working within and against a deeply patriarchal tradition and they had no explicitly feminist position available to them from which to question the tradition's exclusion of women and to search for their own literary space. "Opportunities to survey and reflect upon the achievements of women writers, artists and reformers outside the columns of 'women's magazines' were rare. Ways of praising women were generally limited to the class-defined stereotypes of the lady philanthropists or the saintly bush mother (referred to by Kylie Tennant, who gently blames Henry Lawson for its predominance)."¹²

As mentioned, women's literary work though dominant during this period, seldom provided challenges and alternatives to these stereotypes. Female characters were rarely central and almost marginal within a limited notion of history as the celebration of past achievements. But the women writers were continuously searching for their place. Frances Frazer asserts :

Pioneering...still goes on. Woman has gradually made a place for herself in almost all walks of life... Not usurping man's place, she has been his mate in higher as she was in the more humble.¹³

Growing awareness also emerged with some women poets like Ada Cambridge (1844-1926) and Mary Gilmore (1865-1962). In the beginning, Australian women's poetry does not offer a tradition of intimate, introspective and private poetry in comparison to its counterpart in U.S.A. and England. The dominant mode of women's poetry, over 150 years, has usually been engaged with public and social issues and their social

circumstances. But by active publishing of women's verse, *Mother I am rooted* by Kate Jennings, *The Penguin Book of Australian Women Poets* edited by Susan Hampton and Kate Llewellyn and *Oxford Book of Australian Women's Verse* by Susan Lever, women's voices emerging without any social restrictions have gradually been heard. Their poetry tended to be less formally constructed in order to give free emotion and freer expression to the flow of the subconscious and the depiction of women's lives. As we know, women's lives flow in many different directions - children, marriage, love etc. Because of this tendency, women's poetry is likely to be regarded as inferior and insignificant to that of men. Their poetry is not taken seriously and is dismissed as being too trivial, sentimental and personal, lacking in creativity and literary scope. Thus they don't secure their literary space and concede their place to the male writers. Colleen Burke argues about this:

...and think

of my men friends who criticize my writing for being too
personal whatever that means

ah I know

and ever since I can remember I strove to be
depersonalized - did you?

... I still have my role

my invisibility

but changed elder different

I am uneasy

in these close fitting garments¹⁴

Because literary historians and critics have been male, they have focused only on the male writers while women's literary sphere has been

ignored. Their works were marginalized because there were considered too subjective and domestic in the biased view of the literary critics.

Vicki Viidikas also asserts:

I believe creating (writing poetry in this case) should be, and is, as natural and integrated a process as cooking eggs for breakfast; can see no distinction between a person wishing to express herself on the page, or getting drunk and attempting to communicate verbally in a pub. Each moment, each experience is unique, as therefore each poem is... if a poem is emotional, subjective, historical even, then chances are the form will be scattered over the page as randomly as the emotions which motivate it. I want a poetry of the spirit/of the body/ of the emotions.¹⁵

The history of Australian poetry owes some of its high points to women poets. We can't ignore them and put aside their poetry for the reason that they are women who haven't secured literary space which has so far been occupied only by male writers. The four women poets I have chosen for the purpose of my study are also very confident and proud of their experience as women. They have demanded more attention for the female experience. These women writers have gradually tried to secure literary space as women poets in Australia.

But I don't want to confine them in the category of Australian women poets. I would rather refer to them as women poets in the poetry of world. Regardless of region, nationality, colour, women's consciousness and mind are universal and should be put into the single category of women.

Judith Wright is "one of the few writers to enjoy unchallenged pre-eminence in contemporary Australian poetry. She has been recognized, both at home and abroad as a poet of great accomplishment".¹⁶ Certainly "she has heralded many approaches in subsequent women's poetry: never more so

than in the amazing title poem of her second book 'Woman to Man'.¹⁷ Mary Gilmore is a role model for women poets like Judith Wright, Douglas Stewart, Geoffrey Dutton and Rosemary Dobson. Because she "retained the power to express the intuitive poetry of womanhood. The poem like *Eve Song* is a good example of the depiction of feminine insight".¹⁸

Rosemary Dobson is a sophisticated poet using art to depict the experiences of life. For her, art and European paintings are the inspirations for poetic imagination. The poem *Cock Crow* is deeply personal and shows many feminist concerns like motherhood and childbirth. Gwen Harwood became a prominent poet in the late 1950s. "She has articulated the experiences of women since the early 1960s in ways that have anticipated the feminist movement of 1970s."¹⁹ She is now also recognized as one of the most powerful woman poets in Australian contemporary poetry.

Gwen Harwood questions, "why should people find different meaning in the text if they think the work is by the morning housewife in the broom cupboard and not the afternoon genius in romantic golden light."²⁰

She says, "We have all one human heart. You will find out what I understand (or fail to understand) by looking at the words I use."²¹

Even though their ideas and attitudes are not quite the same, the women poets agree in rejecting the male tendency to see women merely as nonbeings. They claim the right to express their own bodies, their own erotic feelings, motherhood, womanhood, love and pleasure of being women. They feel that being a woman is not a curse but bliss.

They seem to have secured literary space through their works and have triumphantly got out of the dilemma for securing literary space. Susan

Hampton and Kate Llewellyn emphasize the commitment of women writers to shift from the margins to the center.

The actual creative project of woman as subject involves betraying the oppressive mechanisms of culture in order to express herself through the break, within the gaps between the systematic spaces of artistic language...Not the project of fixing of meanings but of breaking them up and multiplying them.²²

As Harwood put it, "we are now able to say things that once were only whispered"²³, now it's the proper time to celebrate being a woman.

Through an analysis of their works, I hope my argument would be justified and convincing.

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Chapter II

WRITING THE BODY: CELEBRATING WOMANHOOD

I

For a long time women were prevented from expressing and speaking about their body in writing. As is known, traditional cultures have been based on a systematic repression of women's experiences. Women who always lived in the shadow of patriarchal systems were unable to express their emotions and experiences in public without a sense of shame. They were psychologically repressed by the dominant male social surroundings. Anne Koedt criticizes:

One of the elements of male chauvinism is the refusal or inability to see women as total, separate human beings. Rather, men have chosen to define women only in terms of how they benefited men's lives sexually, a woman was not seen as an individual wanting to share equally in the sexual act, any more than she was seen as a person with independent desires when she did anything else in society.¹

Women were and have been by nature modest and sexually passive. They have been fitted into the mould of being home loving persons and have been expected to feel happy managing their homes and giving love to their children and husband. To do that to perfection, they were to be conservative and virtuous. Women who didn't fit this mould were oddly invisible, and their lives were little noticed in their own days. Beyond doubt, they pretended to be content within the patriarchal setup for the sake of being protected. But their resistance to domestic and sexual bondage to get freedom for achieving full emotional and intellectual development has been surfacing slowly. They had maximum sympathy with the prevailing

stereotype of the feminine women - those who had an old-fashioned sense of their roles as being that of nurturing, nourishing and caring for their husbands and families. The milieu where women placed themselves has been fundamentally oppressive and phallogentric, focussing only on man who is regarded as the unified, selfcontrolled centre of the universe. The rest of world, which was then considered marginal, had meaning only in relation to man. Man was the center of everything. This claim to centrality has been supported not only by religion and philosophy but also by language. Language is another means through which man objectifies the world, reduces it to his terms and conquers his arena – everything including women. Thus female sexuality could not be discussed openly because it had meaning only when it related to male sexuality. Male sexuality has dominated and determined the nature of female sexuality.

In effect women are seen as sexually dangerous and have to be therefore trained and moulded into a meek and submissive creature. As Simone De Beauvoir has asserted, 'women is another subordinate sex.' Their own pleasure and displeasure, their contentment and discontent, their desire and abstinence, all can be designated by man's view. Because he was an absolute wielder of power, women who were reduced to being sexual objects for men could not speak out and their sexuality has always been silenced being socially a taboo subject.

Kate Millet asserts:

Sex has a frequently neglected political aspects. Coitus can scarcely be said to take place in a vacuum; although of itself it appears a biological and physical activity, it is set so deeply within the larger context of human affairs that it serves as a charged microcosm of the variety of attitudes and values to which culture subscribes²

In the patriarchal state, men dominate women in sex, as they do in other aspects of life. Patriarchal ideology is that of male supremacy forcing women to accept male-serving roles. This ideology permeates every aspect of culture and touches every aspect of the lives of men and women - even the most personal. The roles that women are expected to play also determines sexual politics in society in general.

Kristeva declares:

If women have a role to play.... it is only in assuming a negative function; reject everything finite, definite, structured, loaded with meaning in the existing state of society.³

Thus women have been caught in a world structured by male-centered concepts. It has been a great challenge for feminists to help women to break out of these stereotyped roles. They have had to continuously struggle against the limiting roles offered to women by the society.

Germaine Greer criticizes social concepts of female sexuality:

Female sexuality has always been a fascinating topic; this discussion of it attempts to show female sexuality has been masked and deformed by most observers, and never more so than in our own time... The female is considered as a sexual object for the use and appreciation of other sexual beings, men. Her sexuality is both denied and misinterpreted by being identified as passivity. The vagina is obliterated from the imaginary of femininity in the same way that the signs of independence and vigor in the rest of her body are suppressed. The characteristics that are praised and rewarded are those of the castrate-timidity, plumpness, languor, delicacy, and preciousness.⁴

Women's bodies are trapped in phallogentric society. The awakening of female consciousness is very crucial for recovering women's bodies which have been absented or misinterpreted in male discourse for a long time. To

break and get out of the dark zone of the male dominated arena, women now must celebrate their body as discourse and their resources for their writing. Their suppressed and forbidden desires and pleasures must be written and expressed without hesitation, shame and disgrace. They shouldn't be humiliated by their bodies anymore. The social taboo associated with these subjects should be removed.

Simone De Beauvoir and Shulamith Firestone lament that female subjugation was derived from women's physiology and biology. Simone De Beauvoir was hostile to the female body. She observes that women have within their bodies a "hostile element"- namely, "the species gnawing at their vitals". She makes us experience fear and weakness by asserting that "Women have ovaries, a uterus, these peculiarities imprison her in her subjectivity, circumscribe her within the limits of her own nature."⁵

Shulamith Firestone criticizes the complete dependence of female sexuality on male dominance.

Sexually, men and women were channeled into a highly ordered – time, space, procedure even dialogue – heterosexuality restricted to the genitals rather than diffused over the entire physical being.⁶

To be born a woman did not lead to any celebrations. Rather it was a curse and women lamented the fact that they had been born as women. Their differences of biology made them feel inferior and ashamed of their bodies. The womb, the uterus which otherwise could be bliss for women was only a shackle for them preventing them from being free. Their body was only symbolic of their bondage. Women were likely to be slaves to their body. To them, their body was just a burden and fetters to be borne in the male-dominated society. Women were also reduced to being the objects of sexual desire for the men.



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II

Why do women feel subjugated in their sexual activity? The answer can be found by further exploring the concepts put forth in Freud's classic essay, *Female Sexuality* (1931). This essay that Freud originally devoted to women, recapitulates and refines Freud's established theory of a girl's maturation process. It is probably the most complete statement of his theory, and the most important and a controversial one from the feminist point of view.

In his essay, Freud begins to stress the importance of the girl's pre-oedipal attachment to the mother. Indeed, he sees this as one of the most critical aspects of the girl's development. It is far more important in women than in men. The existence of this powerful "pre-oedipal" phase seems now a momentous revelation to Freud. He compares its discovery to the "discovery of the minoan – mycenaean civilization behind that of Greece".⁷ This is an interesting analogy because the minoan – mycenaean civilization was matriarchal in character. So is the pre-oedipal phase.

Freud also argues that the bisexual disposition is stronger in the female than the male. This is partly because the woman has two sexual organs; "the Vagina, the true female organ, and the clitoris, which is analogous to the male organ."⁸ The girl's development involves two phases; the early masculine stage and the later feminine one "As she changes in sex, so must the sex of her love-object change."⁹

In the girl's transformation from the little boy or the little bisexual to an adult woman, the crucial event is the rejection of the mother. This rejection

is part of the girl's transformation from an active agent to passive one, which is the essential occurrence of her maturation.

"The turning-away from the mother is the most important step in the little girl's development. It is more than a mere change of object."¹⁰ we observe a marked diminution in the active and an augmentation of the passive sexual impulses. "The turning-away from the mother is a cessation of clitoridal masturbation and very often when the little girl represses her previous masculinity, a considerable of her general sexual life is permanently injured."¹¹In other words, Freud identifies the girl's early assertive, active phase with a strong maternal bond. However the girl is forced to reject this realm of experience, to repress her "previous masculinity" which results in permanent injury. She now assumes the passivity that is considered the essence of true femininity.

This survey of Freud's ideas on feminine psychology has been criticized by major feminists. They revile his theory as "phallic worship".¹²

According to Freud, to be feminine, women must renounce the clitoris in favour of the vagina. If we depend on his theory, women must be forever passive and submissive to male sexuality. They can't be active agents and will not be capable of enjoying and experiencing sexual pleasure. Thus their bodies and feelings must be dependent on the phallus. Unassisted by the phallus they would be frigid.

By asserting that women's pleasure by clitoris would be abnormal, women are slowly forced to renounce the clitoris and accept the vagina as the location of sexual pleasure. Shifting the emphasis to the vagina makes the women sexually dependent upon the men. Hence women were reduced to being servile and subservient to men. Their autoeroticism was banned in order to reaffirm male supremacy. Thus Freud's theory implies biological

determinism which could be shackles for women. Freud declared, "Anatomy is destiny."¹³ In this situation, women can't secure their independence and exercise their free will. They are always second to men. For women, to escape from this dark, shadowy and murky zone would be a very difficult task.

Firestone notes; "while men learn to sublimate their 'libido' – their sexual drive into creative works, women do not. Men can replace their need for love with a need for recognition. But women can rarely do this. Men can disconnect their sexual and emotional needs. Women can't. Because women are warm and dependent on approval, they continue to depend on men for emotional sustenance in a way that is not reciprocal. It's always one-sided. It's very submissive, subordinate and hierarchic."¹⁴

But a man's independence makes him civilized and allows him to enjoy everything he wants to. He can enjoy being a part of the various social structures that contribute to women's oppression.

Friedan criticizes the narrowness of Freud's followers:

Because Freud's followers could only see women in the image defined by Freud... with no possibility of happiness unless she adjusted to being man's passive object they wanted to help women get rid of their suppressed envy, their neurotic desire to be equal. They wanted to help women find sexual fulfillment as woman, by affirming their natural inferiority.¹⁵

But Irigaray strongly argues:

Women experience a diffuse sexuality arising from the 'two lips' of the vulva, and a multiplicity of libidinal energies that can not be expressed or understood within the assumption of phallogocentric Freudian theory.¹⁶

She continuously argues:

Woman has sex organs just about everywhere. She experiences pleasure... The geography of her pleasure is much more diversified, more multiple in its differences, more complex more subtle, than is imagined – in an imaginary [system] centered a bit too much one and same.¹⁷

Women must recognize and assert their pleasure if they are to subvert phallogentric oppression and they have to discover autoeroticism to enjoy themselves as women.

Hélène Cixous is also convinced that the women's unconscious is totally different from men's and it is their psychosexual specificity that will empower women to overthrow masculinity ideology and to create new female discourse. She criticizes psychoanalysis for its thesis of a natural anatomical determination of sexual difference, focussing on physical drives rather than the body parts for her definition of male-female contrast;

It is at the level of sexual pleasure in my opinion that the difference makes itself most clearly apparent in as far as women's libidinal economy is neither identifiable by a man nor referable to the masculine economy.¹⁸

Women's libido is cosmic and is in no way inferior to men. And libido is not masculine and is not confined to men. Women's libido, their unconscious is wide, vast and deep. As it has not been measured, it can be a vast store for women writing themselves whenever they want to. It provides them with a lot of resources for literary discourse. Therefore the woman's body is a direct source for women's writing and a powerful alternative discourse, to create a woman's world, to make women's voices heard and to make their unconscious visible. If women are to discover and express who they are, to bring to the surface what masculine history has repressed in them, they must begin with their bodies and break free from the confines of shadowy Freudianism. Being independent themselves, without depending any more

on men, without any more envy for the male genital which is the symbol of power, they can be freed from the conservative notion of inferiority of the woman's body. They have to learn to pay heed to their own senses and emotions. This would make women active agents and they would then come alive as women

Cixous displays her irresistible emotion by asking women to write herself.

Why don't you write! Write! Writing is for you. Your body is yours, take it. Woman must write herself: must write about women and bring women to writing from which they have been driven away as violently as from their bodies. By writing herself, women will return to the body which has been more than confiscated from her which has been tuned into the uncanny stranger on display – the ailing or dead figure, which so often turns out to be the nasty companion, the cause and location of inhibitions. Censor the body and you censor breath and speech at the same time.¹⁹

Women's difference from men and their superiority are located in their bodies. They can't be compared to men's. The female body is the location of creation and therefore cannot be subordinate to the male body. It is the female body and sexuality that must be the source of an authentic women's writing.

Anne Sexton celebrates her body in her poem:

Sweet weight,

In celebration of the woman I am

And of the soul of the woman I am

And of the central creature and its delight

I sing for you. I dare to live.

Hello spirit, Hello cup.

Fasten, cover. Cover that does contain.

Hello to the soil of the fields.

Welcome, roots.²⁰

Now it's the right time to celebrate the female body for what it is, in the context of women's liberation. Women should overcome the burden of Freudian ideology that has prohibited women from thinking independently and freely. The female body is not male property any more. It is the continuous source of energy and strength for women. An awareness of the female body and the ability to express emotions and feelings experienced by the female body makes women occupy the position of the 'self' rather than that of 'the other'.

III

'Love was the most ancient of all the gods, and existed before everything else, except chaos, which is held coeval therewith.... The summary or collective law of nature, or the principle of love, impressed by God upon the original particles of all things, so as to make them attract each other and come together by the repetition and multiplication where of all the variety in the universe is produced, can scarce possibly find full admittance in the thought of men though some faint notion may be had thereof.'²¹

Women poets usually appeared to be sexually inexperienced persons, transforming their desires into religious or metaphysical ecstasies, as was the case with Emily Bronte, Christina Rossetti and Emily Dickinson. These writers had to invent a lover on whom they could pour the passion of their starved hearts.

But Gwen Harwood and Judith Wright, the poets I am going to discuss in this chapter, are candid and honest in expressing their sexual desires and emotions without any sense of shame. They speak of love in a truly female voice.

“Indeed, 1930 seems to mark a sea change in Australian women’s poetry. Before that time, women poets allowed themselves to speculate about sexuality through the use of fairies and witches, or pagan goddess or ancient historical figures. After 1930 (or thereabouts) it is rare to find this kind of writing outside the poetry written for children.”²²

The meek and reluctant attitude towards sexuality began to disappear and was challenged in an active and a positive manner in women’s writing.

Gwen Harwood’s poetry shows a radical awareness of feminist issues, and takes up the question of what is a woman from a perspective that aims to deconstruct the masculine prejudices. She is unashamed to be female and wrote poetry as a woman, but as a woman who has forgotten that she is woman so that her poetry is full of that curious sexual quality.

Maturity is unquestionably one of the qualities in her verse that strikes the reader immediately; it is completely adult poetry even from the beginning, without embarrassment, indeed with quite untroubled vitality. The sexual energy of the original analogy continuously works through her poem.

And if we read her poem like *Carnal Knowledge II*, we become aware of Gwen Harwood’s openness in expressing sexual images without hesitation.

Nestling my cheek against

the hollow of your thigh
I lay cockeyed with love
in the most literal sense.

Song to melt sea and sky
apart, and lift these hills
from the shadow of what was,
and roll them back, and lie
in naked ignorance
in the hollow of your thigh.

(Gwen Harwood. *Carnal Knowledge II*. Selected Poems, p.105.)

The Wine is Drunk opens with a splendid first line, “the wine is drunk, the woman known”. She delights us by producing a set of verses that more than live up to the expectations of such an opening. The first half of the poem establishes the scene and the mood of post-coital dissatisfaction and sadness because of an inability to transcend the sense of isolation and void.

The wine is drunk, the woman known.
Someone in generous darkness dries
unmanly tears for what’s not found
in flesh or anywhere. He lies
beside his love, and still alone.

Pride is a lie. His finger follows

eye, nostril, outline of the cheek.

Mortal fatigue has humbled his

exulting flesh, and all he'd seek in a loved body's gulfs and hollows

changes to otherness: he'll never

ravish the secret of its grace.

(Gwen Harwood, *The Wine is Drunk* Selected Poems.p.4.)

In the moment of love, in that instant of complete physical union – when all is given and nothing kept – it is, ironically, incompleteness that we are most keenly aware of. The woman is at once known and unknowable: the man and his love lie together but he is still alone; his pride is a lie. His attempt at transcendence through erotic love has failed. In a patriarchal setup, the rejection of a man's love by a woman is unthinkable and impossible to imagine. He is in a commanding position and is the controller of his pleasure, whatever the circumstances. To him, rejection means losing himself. But Gwen Harwood, in her poem, creates a male protagonist who is no more the centre of his sexuality and no matter how hard he tries he can never ravish the secret of the loved body's grace. The second half of the poem consists of man's futile reflections:

I must be absent from myself,

must learn to praise love's waking face

raise this unleavened heart, and sever

from my true life this ignorant sorrow.

I must in this gross darkness cherish
more than all plentitude the hunger
that drives the spirit. Flesh must perish
yet still, tomorrow and tomorrow

be faithful to the last, an old
blind dog that knows the stairs, and stays
obedient as it climbs and suffers.
My love, the light we'll wake to praise
beats darkness to a dust of gold.

(Gwen Harwood. *The Wine is Drunk* Selected Poems,pp.4~5.)

To be absent from oneself here is to be devoid of pride and egotism which were the essential characteristics of a patriarchal man. However, here the man tries to make the loved one a source of joy not of ignorant sorrow. Moreover, it is not plentitude but hunger that he cherishes. Thus, it is through a negation of the male self that the loved one can transcend instead of him. By his sacrificing his traditional position of superiority, the other can be affirmed. This reversal of situation during sexual intercourse was a situation that male writers would neither have imagined nor permitted. It would have been a strong blow to the male confidence through snubbing him.

Before moving on, let me draw attention to one other thing – the role “darkness” plays in it. The word appears three times, in the phrases “generous darkness” and “gross darkness”, and in the concluding line, and the associations it is clearly meant to evoke are not simply those of night and absence of light but those of the physical, animal aspects of sexuality. These associations are also conjured by the word “dark” in another poem, *The*

Glass Jar which is a rather confusing piece. We can assume that darkness and physical sexuality are synonymous in Gwen Harwood's poetry. The phrase "gross darkness" reappears in the poem, *The Glass Jar*.

The Glass Jar is possibly a childhood memory and narrates the story through the protagonist, a boy.

hoping to keep, when day was done
and all the sun's disciples cloaked
in dream and darkness from his passion fled.
this host, this pulse of light beside his bed

When he wakes in the middle of the night he unwraps the jar to find, of course, that the light has gone:

Through the dark house he ran, sobbing his loss,
to the last clearing that he dared not cross:

the bedroom where his comforter
lay in his rival's fast embrace
and faithless would not turn her face
from the gross violence done to her.
Love's proud executants played from a score
No child could read or realize.

(Gwen Harwood. *The Glass Jar* Selected Poems pp.11~12)

It would be silly, of course, to attempt to label Gwen Harwood as a Freudian poet. I think that she is too much her own woman to fit comfortably under any label. But it is interesting to find what Freud called the primal scene – the witnessing by the child of the primary act of betrayal, the sexual intercourse of his parents – figuring so prominently in this poem. According

to Freud, this is the scene which all human beings having witnessed thoroughly repress. And it is significant in this poem to find the words “gross”, “dark” and “violence” used together making us put together the image of the erotic situation.

IV

Judith Wright once expressed her opinion about poetry;

I think poetry should be treated, not as a lofty art separated from life, but as a way of seeing and expressing not just the personal view, but the whole context of the writers times for me, it has been a way of searching for understanding of my own life and of what was happening to me and around me.²³

Poetry, her art, is for Judith Wright a groping, a process of finding out. She expressed her opinion about writing of poetry;

You write a poem because you don't know something. When you've finished, you do know it and again, what occupies the poet most, she wrote once in a book introduction, is not the question; why did it happen? Nor how did it happen? But rather, what does it mean to me that it happened.”²⁴

Therefore her poetry is full of joy of a woman's experiences. She offers unexhausted love to us. She makes us unafraid of looking into our naked heart that is both courageous and timid, both demanding and submissive. She is honest to herself and proud of her strong womanhood that can excite and satisfy love. First let me look into her famous poem *Woman to Man*.

In Judith Wright's second volume of poetry, *Woman to Man* (1949), the feminist mind is involved with love as a creative process. It is credited with giving a uniquely female perspective to poems dealing with love, creation and the universe. It is the poetry that “for the first time in Australian

writing treated the love relationship in a concerted way from the woman's point of view, all with the honesty, balance, economy and the depth of knowledge." ²⁵

Jennifer Strauss also expresses her opinion about *Woman to Man* in these words:

a great positive in her career representing a feminine freedom from what Lawrence had called 'the old stable ego of the character'. Certainly Wright has heralded many approaches in subsequent women's poetry: never more so than in the amazing title poem of her second book *Woman to Man*. This symbolic lyric-dense, haunting-can be read at the same time as a telling of pregnancy and birth or as a dramatization of the sexual act. ²⁶

The eyeless laborer in the night,
the selfless, shapeless seed I hold
builds for its resurrection day
silent and swift and deep from sight
foresees the unimagined light,

This is no child with a child's face
this has no name to name it by:
yet you and I have known it well.
This is our hunter and our chase,
the third who lay in our embrace.

This is the strength that your arm knows,

the arc of flesh that is my breast,
the precise crystals of our eyes.
this is the blood's wild tree that grows
the intricate and folded rose.

This is the maker and the made;
this is the question and reply;
the blind head butting at the dark
the blaze of light along the blade
Oh hold me, for I am afraid.

(Judith Wright, *Woman to Man* Collected Poems p, 27.)

Love is a recurring theme in this poem. At first it begins with the love between man and woman, later it takes on a more transcendental quality; love is seen as the moving force of life. Whether it is pain or joy, it is 'blood's red thread' which unifies all her perceptions and gives a sense of organic physical completeness. Man, woman and the child are the sap, the earth and tree, and they are united by 'blood's red thread' into an organic entity for their completeness. Terry Sturm says,

Such poem records the mind's inculcation of moods of intense receptivity – often accompanied by strongly sexual overtones – in which hidden, “dark” and timeless sources of creative energy might be released within the self, resolving the sense of self division felt at the surface level of daylight consciousness. The Eros-principle – the dark, fecund, generative force behind the cycles of nature and human sexuality- is diffused through the poem.²⁷

There is another view about *Woman to Man*.

Wright's *Woman to Man* still can cause a little ripple of shock because of its confrontation of the intimate moment of lovemaking. Yet it is considerably less explicit than Zora Cross's poems on a similar theme. Like Ada Cambridge or Mary Gilmore, Wright's intimacy is utterly logical and detached. The poet is a philosopher, a poet of control not abandon; "Oh hold me, for I am afraid" is a cry for protection from the unleashed emotions.²⁸

At first, Judith Wright was afraid of being exposed in public with her bare emotion, she needed to be more courageous to do that. But she started to show and open her womanhood in her poetry. As I mentioned in the first chapter, the working of woman poets using feminist perspectives hasn't shown full blooming yet, but it is certain that the feminist mind has been surfacing through their poetry. Furthermore it cannot be denied that this surfacing of the feminist mind owes a lot to poets like Gwen Harwood and Judith Wright.

Let's look at another poem briefly. In *Woman to Child*, the act of separation of the child from the mother is seen not as disunity but an affirmation of an abiding relationship.

You who were darkness warmed my flesh

where out of darkness rose the seed.

Then all the world I made in me;

All the world you hear and see

hung upon my dreaming blood.

I wither and you break from me:

Yet though you dance in living light

I am the earth, I am the root
I am the stem that fed the fruit
the link that joins you to the night.

(Judith Wright. *Woman to Child* Collected Poems
pp.28~29)

In the first two lines,

“You who were darkness warmed my flesh
where out of darkness rose the seed,”

We can see Wright’s indirect and a little abstract expression of sexual intercourse. As Susan Lever has commented, Wright’s expression of her feelings is not fully unleashed emotions. We can read her intention to control her emotions by her choice of metaphysical expression.

In *Conch-shell* Judith Wright glorifies this abiding relationship. After the childbirth, the house is washed clean and

The spiral passage turns upon itself
The sweet enclosing curve of pearl
shuts in the room that was the cell of birth

(Judith Wright. *Conch-shell* Collected Poems p.29.)

In *Woman’s Song* the woman longs for the birth of the child; she asks it to ‘wake in me’ for

The knife of day is bright
to cut the thread that binds you
within the flesh of night.

(Judith Wright. *Woman’s Song* Collected Poems p.27.)

The power of the poems *Woman to Man*, *Woman to Child* and of those like *Ishtar* (from *The Gateway*), lies in the frankness and truthfulness with which Judith Wright celebrates the glory of childbirth, the expression of which was taboo. For her the glory of creation, of childbirth, is the fulfillment of love and human relationship that mean organic continuity and circulation. It is only through love that the threats and terrors of existence can be overcome and removed. For love is at once unifying and a creative force. It destroys loneliness, isolation, intolerance and hatred. She seems to think that through the process of loving and being loved and eventually childbirth, a woman becomes a real woman. .

When in fear I became a woman

I first felt your hand

(Judith Wright. *Ishtar* Collected Poems p.101.)

Poems such as these obviously arise out of deeply felt personal experiences of Judith Wright but the strength of her poems comes equally from Judith Wright's realization of the necessity of love for the happiness of women. That's why she is so candid in her expression of women's experiences. But she also makes us accept another dark side of our life; death in the process of childbirth in her poem *Stillborn*.

Such women weep for love

Of one who drew no breath

and in the night they lie

Giving the breast to death

(Judith Wright. *Stillborn* Collected Poems.p.281)

Joan Willams speaks about Wright,

Her passion, anger and joy expressed in her poems had been taken to the hearts of her people. Her feminism was expressed as part the human condition in the portrayal of love, birth and death and celebration of joy in life.²⁹

Love is shown as creating life and as giving to an otherwise chaotic world some meaning and coherence in *Woman to Child*. Yet love may be mistaken and annihilate us as in *Metho Drinker* .

Under the death of winter's leaves he lies
who cried to nothing and the terrible night
to be his home and bread. "Oh take from me
the weight and waterfall of ceaseless time
that batters down my weakness; the knives of light.
whose thrust I cannot turn; the cruelty
of human eyes that dare not touch nor pity,"
under the worn leaves of the winter city
safe in the house of Nothing now he lies.

His white and burning girl, his woman of fire,
creeps to his heart and sets a candle there
to melt away the flesh that hides the bone
to eat the nerve that tethers him in Time.
He will lie warm until the bone is bore
and on a dead dark moon he wakes alone.
It was for death she took her; death is but this
and yet he is uneasy under the kiss
and wines from that acid of her desire.

(Judith Wright. *Metho Drinker* Collected poems
p.51~52)

There is a duality, apparently, in all things or in the way we see them. We desire life, love and consciousness eagerly at times but on the contrary sometimes we want to retreat from everything and want to be absorbed in sleep, death and oblivion.

This poem *Metho Drinker* can be compared with Gwen Harwood's *The Wine is Drunk* in terms of their thematic concerns.

In both, two men are seen lamenting about their failure in obtaining mundane sexual love. They can't resolve their conflicting desires and can only depend on material power like alcohol. But nothing can console their hurt soul. Both of them, the two male protagonists are losers in their attempt to acquire their worldly desires.

He lies

besides his love, and still alone

pride is a lie. (Gwen Harwood. *The Wine is Drunk*)

and on a dead dark moon, he wakes alone

and yet he is uneasy under her kiss

and winces from that acid of her desire. (Judith Wright. *The Metho Drinker*)

As I have discussed till now, the expression of the female sexual experience and childbirth earlier regarded as vulgar scenes and which were always hidden in the dark side of life begin to naturally come out of the darkness and can be recognized as a discourse in female literary space. Male

experience and language were dominant in the patriarchal society. However, some women writers have now begun to express themselves in their own terms. The transition has begun and is fully recognized by Shirley Walker;

Early (male) critics seemed amazed that a woman could step outside acceptable (to them) feminine modesty on matters sexual to write a poem which both simulated the act of intercourse and conveyed the speakers ambivalence, her fear as well as her passion.³⁰

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Chapter III

TWO SIDES OF MOTHERHOOD

I

During the early stages of the women's movement in the twentieth century, motherhood was a matter of public discourse that was to a great extent controlled by men. Some radical feminists argued that motherhood was a serious obstacle to women's liberation, a trap confining women to the home, keeping them tied to childbirth and child rearing. They considered these as the loci of women's oppression. They argued that to enjoy real freedom as women, the women needed to discard their role as mothers. Motherhood for them was a compulsory institution endowed by patriarchal society. However, another group of feminists oppose this conception of motherhood and think that motherhood is very crucial for women. It must be respected and acknowledged in order to give women a specific place in the society. In this polemical atmosphere, motherhood as a public discourse has become increasingly visible in the second half of the twentieth century. Some women writers depict motherhood as a boon and others as a curse. In this chapter, my major focus is to analyze Gwen Harwood's conception of motherhood as is evident in her poetry. Her poetry shows much concern about the turmoil of emotions that women experience in their marriage and their anguish in being mothers. In general we think that the process of mothering is tedious, domestic and trivial. It isn't regarded as high art. As already mentioned, various feminist voices have been heard contesting the space for the discourse on motherhood from the sixties. These can be seen as belonging to one of the two groups: the anti-and the pro-maternal group

In *The Dialectic of Sex*, Shulamith Firestone claimed that the subordination of women is rooted in the biological inequality of the sexes. She believed that women's liberation requires a biological revolution and that women should seize the control of the means of reproduction in order to eliminate the sexual discrimination. She demanded:

The freeing of women from the tyranny of their reproductive biology by every means available, and the diffusion of the childbearing and childrearing role to society as a whole, men as well as women.¹

Firestone wished to explode masculinity and femininity. According to her, no matter how much educational, legal, and political equality women achieved, and no matter how many women entered the public industry, nothing fundamental would change for women so long as biological reproduction remained the rule rather than the exception. To her the joy of giving birth and being a mother is a patriarchal myth and biological motherhood is the root of evil.

Another feminist who is against motherhood is Dorothy Dinnerstein. She has a conviction that the oppression of women originates in the female monopoly on mothering.

The deepest root of our acquiescence to the maiming and mutual imprisonment of men and women lies in the monolithic fact of human child; under the arrangement that now prevail, a woman is the parental who presides over the infant's first encounters with the natural surroundings and who exists for the infant as the first representative of the flesh.²

Dinnerstein speculates that we initially perceive mother "not as a person"³ but as "an awesome, all-enveloping object."⁴ She emphasizes the "absolute power of the mother's life and death control over helpless infancy; an intimately carnal control whose wrath is all potent, whose internationality

is so formidable-so terrifying and...so alluring.”⁵ This engages with the infant’s totally helpless need and dependence. As a result, according to Dinnerstein, the mother is inevitably the child’s adversary. Dinnerstein’s solution to the victimizing of women was to institutionalize dual parenting. Only when men share equally with the women the task of nurturing the infants- only when the blame and anger that traditionally went exclusively to women is distributed equally to both genders, we can possibly realize that no one, male or female, is to blame for the human condition.

Adrienne Rich is one of the feminists who supports women’s role as mothers. Even though she agrees with Firestone that biological motherhood, as it has been institutionalized under patriarchy, is definitely something from which women must be liberated, she disagrees with Firestone in arguing that female biology is necessarily limiting and that the only way to liberate women from this limitation is through technology. She argues that a woman must not give up on her body before she has had a chance to use it as she thinks best. She emphasizes,

The repossessions by women of our bodies will bring far more essential change to human society than the seizing of the means of production by workers... We need to imagine a world in which every woman is the presiding genius of her own body. In such a world, women truly create new life, bringing forth not only children (if and as we choose), but the visions and the thinking necessary to sustain, console and alter human existence-a new relationship to the universe. Sexuality, politics and intelligence, position, motherhood, work, community, intimacy will develop new meanings; thinking itself will be transformed. This is where we have to begin.⁶

For her, the solution to the impositions of child-rearing in a patriarchal society is not the renunciation of children; it is rather that each and every woman inculcates in her children feminist values.

II

Looking at Gwen Harwood's work in piecemeal fashion can lead to her work being seen variously as offering challenges or confirmations to each set of attitudes to motherhood. But in general, Harwood's work is particularly valuable for its frank and poignant statements confirming motherhood as a universal subsuming condition without relating to any specific cultural and social background. For her, the individual characteristics of maternal surroundings are irrelevant in the discussion of the issue. Harwood's poetry on motherhood is replete with both ideological and realistic tensions that are derived from the personal and mental wounds of motherhood. A quest for self-fulfillment in relation to motherhood is accompanied by extreme anxiety and anguish for personal loss and frustration. It is confronted by the fact that it can only be enjoyed through a surrender of the self to the realities.

In Harwood's poem, *I am the Captain of My Soul*, the maternal body is overtly celebrated as life-giving and nurturing.

But the Caption is drunk, and the crew
hauling hard on his windlass of fury are whipped
by his know-nothing rage. Their terror
troubles the sunlight. "Now tell me,"
the Caption says, as his drunkenness
drifts into tears, "What's to keep me
at ease in this harbor?"

"We'll tell you,"

say Hands, "in our headlong chase through a fugue

for three voices, you heard a fourth voice naming
divisions of silence. We'll summon
That voice once again, it may tell you
of marvels wrung from sorrow endured."
"We have seen," say Eyes, "how in Venice
the steps of churches open and close
like marble fans under water."

"You can rot in your sockets," the Captain cries.
"I have children," says Body, haloed
In tenderness, firm in ripeness still.
"I grew gross with their stress, I went spinning
in a vortex of pain. I gave my breast
and its beauty to nourish their heedless growth
They jump on my shadow in mischievous joy.
On their lives your astonishing sorrows
flow easy as water on marble steps."

(Gwen Harwood. *I am the Captain of My Soul*. Selected Poems p.21~22)

This poem is overall marked by a philosophical touch and "deals with the ambiguities and complexities associated with awareness of division and conflicting claims between body and spirit, mankind's old dichotomy."⁷ But amongst these we find that the stanza mentions mothering. The Captain has an egotistical will to dominate and is enraged by the limitations placed by mortality. He is determined to go to sea in the quest of the absolute. The Crew-Hands, Eyes and Body attempt to dissuade him from going to sea by

pointing out the delights associated with and deriving from the body. Hands and Eyes offer the consoling experiences of art and nature whereas the maternal Body offers the life principle put into practice. Maternal, "haloed/ in tenderness. firm in ripeness", the Body as a metaphor for a mother expresses the paradox involved in the attainment of motherhood. On the one hand, the flesh that can be exhausted and dried out is rejuvenated by the vital joy of having children. The woman concerned is really happy about being a mother and enjoys the process of rearing them. On the other, the woman feels sorrow and bitterness as "children don't see the mother's problem."⁸ There is anguish and pain arising from her rearing them. Construed as a paradoxical gain and loss, motherhood here is an ideal but less positive and bright than the exuberantly embraced empowerment of motherhood found in *The Old Wife's Tale* .

Better than love, what name for this:
our vanished childhood sealed in flesh,
the restless energy of joy
whipping a world still morning-fresh
to hum new notes a spinning toy.
All sorrow mended in a kiss.

My children grew. Like wine I poured
knowledge and skill, fought love's long war
with trivial cares. My spirit gave
a cry of hunger: "Grant me more
than this bare sustenance, I crave
some combat worthy of my sword."

(Gwen Harwood. *The Old Wife's Tale*. Selected Poems, p.10.)

This poem depicts practical maternal behavior and its significance for the children. Being a mother means shouldering the heavy responsibility of leading the children into becoming independent beings. In the line “like wine I poured knowledge and skill, fought love’s long war with trivial cares”, the mother’s commitment to educate her children is very firm and resolute. Children must be nurtured by their mothers and should absorb the nourishment in the form of the mother’s wisdom. What a bright vision of motherhood this is!

Even though Harwood recognizes the importance of a mother’s role in the rearing of children, she is constantly aware of the different pulls experienced by women. A woman is pulled in two different directions – that of discovering a separate identity for herself leading to self-fulfillment, and that of the responsibilities of domesticity.

Upright; here nothing smiles; pity’s unknown.

A crippled gull I found helplessly dying

Used its last life to stab me to the bone.

Some old, lost self strikes from time’s shallows, crying

“ Beyond habit, household, children, I am I.

Who knows my original estate, my name?

Give me my atmosphere, or let me die.”

(Gwen Harwood. *Iris*. Selected Poems, p.95)

This poem, *Iris* is the “outcry of a wife who feels her identity submerged in her family, and it takes place on the boat, Iris, which, like the marriage it symbolizes, she and her husband have built together.”⁹ Burdened

by domesticity, women sometimes feel the sterility or destruction of their selves. They cry out in rebellion but are unable to find any easy solutions to this problem.

Harwood's questioning about "what is" and her affirmation of "I am I" are the major issues that need to be examined in the context of the feminist's psyche. Certainly we can recognize her notion in Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique* that was published in 1963. This book reveals that the married middle-class women were discontented and unhappy despite apparently living in an ideal and stable condition without any financial problems. However, it was not easy to explain the reasons of this discontent. There were no terms available to define and explain this unhappiness and discontent. Betty Friedan diagnoses the reasons for this phenomenon in this manner:

Experts told them how to catch a man and keep him, how to breastfeed children...how to buy a dishwasher, cook gourmet snails...how to dress, and act more feminine and make marriage more exciting; how to keep their husbands from dying young. They were taught to pity the neurotic, unfeminine, unhappy women who wanted to be poets or physicists or presidents. They learned that truly feminine women do not want careers, higher education, political rights- the independence and the opportunities that the old-fashioned feminists fought for. Some women, in their forties and fifties, still remembered painfully giving up those dreams, but most of the younger women no longer even thought about them. A thousand experts voices applauded their femininity, their adjustment, and their new maturity. All they had to do was devote their lives from earliest girlhood to finding a husband and bearing children.¹⁰

According to her, this phenomenon is primarily due to the social position given to women in a patriarchal society. The preconceived idea that women must be feminine and must always sit behind men as docile creatures is a common notion in a patriarchal society. These patriarchal creeds deprive women of opportunities to grow and discover their own

selves. Some of Gwen Harwood's poems that I am going to deal with later like *Suburban Sonnet* and *In the Park* depict a dilemma similar to that shown in Betty Friedan's *Feminine Mystique*. The woman who is trapped in domesticity and motherhood aspires for freedom and artistic fulfillment. Therefore two different voices always emanate from her poems which delineate motherhood as being simultaneously a valuable experience and as forfeiting women's freedom. Harwood clearly has the power and intelligence to delineate the situation of a stressed mother who is stretched beyond her capacity and finds herself as being incapable of continuous wholehearted giving. She also appears to have had the intention of distancing herself somewhat from the poems she wrote. Apart from the fact that the poems were originally published under pseudonyms, some of them are written in the third person or presented as first-person monologues by persons clearly distinguished from the poet.

In *The Glass Jar* which I dealt with in the second chapter, Harwood sees maternity as necessarily excluding the passion for life. No concessions of parental, especially maternal sexual privileges are made for the nightmare-ridden child.

The bedroom where his comforter
lay in his rival's fast embrace
and faithless would not turn her fact
from the gross violence done to her.
Love's proud executants played from a score
No child could read or realize... (Gwen Harwood. *The Glass Jar*
Selected poems, p.11)

Nancy Friday states, "women's goal in life is to attain sexual individuality which is in some sense, the opposite of being a mother."¹¹ She suggests that the choices available to women require them to choose between exercising their procreative capacity and expressing their sexuality. She sees a division between maternity and sexuality and opts for sexuality. In *The Glass Jar*, we witness the heart-wrenching moment when the boy finds his faith in mother betrayed. It is a sad moment in his self-development. He now realizes that maturing means the acceptance of the painful process of rejecting the mother as "an almost primal aggression in the mother-child relationship."¹²

In *Suburban Sonnet: Boxing Day*, we can read the woman's anxieties about the compatibility of maternal identity and sexual identity. We can see one of "love's proud executants" in *The Glass Jar* has become a tired "woman with a bloom", staring at a magazine heading "How to keep your husband's love".

Gold, silver, pink and blue, the globes distort her,

Framed in the doorway; woman with a bloom

Wrappings and toys lie scattered round the room.

A glossy magazine the children bought her.

lies open; how to keep your husband's love.

She stands and stares, as if in recollection

at her own staring acid-pink reflection

The simple fact is, she's too tired to move.

O where's the demon lover, the wild boy.

who kissed the future to her flesh beneath
what skies, what stars, what space! And swore to love her
through hell's own fires? A child stretches above her
and, laughing, crowns her with a tinsel wreath.
She gathers up a new, dismembered toy.

(Gwen Harwood. *Suburban Sonnet: Boxing Day*
the Penguin Book of Australian women poets, p. 101)

In *Suburban Sonnet*, Gwen Harwood deals with the issue of motherhood thwarting the artistic talent and self-fulfillment of a woman. Marriage is seen as an oppressive institution that deprives women of the chance of self-fulfillment.

She practices a fugue, though it can matter
to no one now if she plays well or not
beside her on the floor two children chatter
then scream and fight. She hushes them. A pot
boils over. As she rushes to the stove
too late, a wave of nausea overpowers
subject and counter-subject. Zest and love
drained out with soapy water as she scours.
the crusted milk. Her veins ache. Once she played
for Rubinstein, who yawned. The children caper
round a sprung mouth trap where a mouse lies dead.
When the soft corpse won't move they seem afraid.

She comfort them; and wraps it in a paper

featuring; *Tasty dishes from stale bread*

(Gwen Harwood. *Suburban Sonnet* Selected Poems, p.59)

This poem evokes sympathy for the women who sacrifice artistic talent and personal fulfillment for the sake of domesticity. On the one hand, Harwood describes marriage, in what is often cited as the most depressing passage, as the site where "Zest and love/ drain out with soapy water as she scours / the crusted milk." On the other, she confesses, "I like the domestic scene because it springs from early childhood. I love cooking and reading and just caring for family."¹³ In this poem the episode is reduced to the sympathetic situation in which the musician, Rubinstein's yawn, suggests the illusory nature of the woman's grand musical ambition, which is shattered by the imprisoning that marriage signifies for the woman. If that is granted, then the opening "She practices a fugue, though it can matter/to no one now if she plays well or not" is more courageous under her given circumstances. Her practicing music becomes an act of choice, not as the means to an end but the end itself. She just wants to fulfill her desire of becoming a musician and does not want her hope to be shattered. But the situation is cruel and there are no signs of her dream being fulfilled. The only thing the woman can do is follow the frugal wisdom of making *Tasty dishes from stale bread*, even if it offers itself to her from the paper in which she wraps the corpse of the mouse taken from a sprung mousetrap, a tempting analogue to her situation in marriage. But the last phrase "add a degree of hope to the poem, saying that although the life she is living may not be her ideal, she can still derive some pleasure from it. She just has to work for it, just like she worked for everything else in her life."¹⁴

III

Here I want to compare Rosemary Dobson's *Cock Crow* with *Suburban Sonnet*. Both the poems show the same rebellious psyche which exists in the mind of a married woman.

Wanting to be myself, alone,
Between the lit house and town
I took the road, and at the bridge
Turned back and walked the way I'd come

Three time I took that lonely stretch,
Three times the dark trees closed me round,
The night absolved me of my bonds;
Only my footsteps held the ground.

My mother and my daughter slept,
One life behind and one before,
And I that stood between denied
Their needs in shutting-to the door.

And walking up and down the road
Knew myself, separate and alone,
Cut off from human cries, from pain,
And love that grows about the bone.

Too brief illusion! Thrice for me

I heard the cock crow on the hill

And turned the handle of the door

Thinking I knew his meaning well. (Rosemary Dobson. *Cock Crow*
Selected Poems, p.83-84)

These two poems have the same theme. They indicate that after marriage women cannot follow their artistic talents. In *Cock Crow* the artist 'I' is identified as one who moves between the house that exists and the life that does not exist, on the other side of bridge. The protagonist 'I', as it were, is trapped between two selves; a self which wants to be separate and alone and another which feels bound by domestic and emotional responsibilities. The state of being suspended is conveyed through the poem's geographical images – for instance, a bridge, which is itself situated 'Between the lit house and the town'. We can notice how the words, 'Too brief illusion' balance the protagonist's perspective between regret and acceptance. In many ways *Cock Crow* holds itself in an intermediate position, unable to deny the desire to be alone, and simultaneously unable to deny the responsibilities of love. The final line, 'Thinking I knew his meaning well' can be interpreted as meaning that the protagonist realizes how close she has come to denying her mother and her daughter.

And I that stood between denied

Their needs in shutting-to the door.

These lines were interpreted using biblical quotation;

We identify a biblical allusion early in the poem that continues even in the closing stanza. The poet feels that she knew the pain that Peter felt when he denied Jesus three times before the cock crowed. However the poet denies three people: her mother, her child, and

herself. The poem describes the sacrifice that a poet must make for the ones that she loves just as we have obligations and restrictions in our lives. Dobson seems to use this poem as a way of unburdening herself of the guilt and pain that she felt during this period in her own life.¹⁵

The protagonist of this poem feels her creativity is constrained and is anguished at not having the freedom to get her artistic creation. In this poem, being a mother means giving up her creativity and being bound by domestic responsibilities. Being an artist along with being a mother means being in a dilemma and staying suspended between tension and freedom. The responsibility of keeping home as a mother and staying as an artist are viewed as incompatible tasks for a woman. A woman has to choose between one or the other aspects of her life. Her freedom and desires cannot be fulfilled at the same time. If she doesn't renounce her individual desire to be alone and have her own space, as a mother she will be a failure. She will be always questioned by her conscience without getting any resolutions to her problem. For her "the personal becomes the political."¹⁶ Women's private and individual consciousness constitute feminists' policies and theories to be used for solving their problems. Both Gwen Harwood and Rosemary Dobson place considerable emphasis on awareness of women's achievements in their arts and the difficulties in simultaneously devoting attention to domesticity and to creativity. The society decides the fate of women. Both the poets show immense concern about women who are the victims of marriage and social practices.

IV

Another poem which not only produced this reaction, but also caused her to be identified with the woman in the poem in a way she found positively exasperating was *In the Park*. It was first published under the pseudonym, Walter Lehmann, in the *Bulletin*.

she sits in the park. Her clothes are out of date.

Two children whine and bicker, tug her skirt.

A third draws aimless patterns in the dirt.

Someone she loved once passes by- too late

To feign indifference to that casual nod.

“How nice,” et cetera “Time holds great surprise.”

From his neat head unquestionably rises

a small balloon... “but for the grace of God...”

They stand a while in flickering light, rehearsing

the children’s names and birthdays. “It’s so sweet

to hear their chatter, watch them grow and thrive,”

She says to his departing smile. Then, nursing

the youngest child, sits staring at her feet

To the winds she says, “They have eaten me alive.”

(Gwen Harwood. *In the Park* Selected Poems p.27.)

The last line has commonly been taken as a savage closure to the humiliating episode in which the woman, encumbered by dowdiness and three ordinarily unangelic small children, encounters an ex-lover to whom she praises the joy of motherhood. "It's so sweet to hear their chatter, watch them grow and thrive." Then, his relieved departure, "to the wind she says. 'They have eaten me alive'". The line may also be seen as depicting anti-materialism; "The children have taken her spirit, taken her freedom."¹⁷ seems to indicate cannibalism. Having been "eaten ... alive" by her children,

whatever independent existence she might have had has been dispersed among her children. Her life has been sacrificed for her children: she has been broken, eaten, made part of them, and become less of herself. She may be enriched by her sacrifice, or her immolation may be enriching them. We don't know exactly what is the correct answer. A woman's identity is constituted by its non-existence. But the pathos is generated in us because the woman still has individuality, personality, and identity which can comprehend its own non-existence.

The more one looks at *In the Park* the more one becomes aware of its double discourse: it can be read as simultaneously truth and counter-truth. Those platitudes about the sweetness of motherhood could not function as truisms if there were not truth as well as bad faith in them. We are in a sense lured into the ex-lover's polite disbelief. Insinuation of "his neat head" assumes that he has indeed had the lucky escape in this embarrassing situation in which he credits himself when:

From his neat head unquestionably rises
a small balloon ... "but for the grace of God..."

Once, however, any positive reading of sacrificial motherhood is entertained, then there must be a retrospective flow of irony that there is a grace in having avoided involvement. The woman's untidiness in personal situation may seem to bestow a value on his "neat head" as a result of contrast, and when his thoughts rise in the small balloon of comic books and caricatures, we may wonder if his departing smile indicates disbelief in the maternity "so sweet". There is yet another point of doubt whether the very last phrase is a lament for the annihilation of individuality, or a manifesto of sacramental motherhood. The poem creates an overall impression that Harwood as a "wife-and-mother" is looking at her situation with the

detached and curious eye of the artist and finds means of giving dramatic release to the voice of negation. Even though she uses the third person in this poem, she was frequently asked if the person in this poem was really herself. But she protests,

I have never been a confessional poets, and would not want to be; but it is difficult to persuade people that the "I" of some of my poems is not their friendly neighbour who seems so happy making jams, jellies, pickles, and chutneys... they don't believe I am not the dowdy housewife in the park.¹⁸

For us it doesn't matter whether the person in this poem is Harwood herself or not. The more important thing is that through this poem she raises a much-debated issue in feminism about mothering forcing us to think from both perspectives - mothering as a sacrifice or as a sublime task. Also she shows no favored and apparent position and does not give any solutions to the problem. Instead she dexterously avoids an answer making us have our own interpretations of it.

The artistic consummation of this process is reached with *An Impromptu for Ann Jennings*. The reference to the musical form of the impromptu points towards spontaneity and inspiration arising from an occasion. That this triumph at the completion of mothering is shared with a friend is an important element in its emotional sympathy. Gwen Harwood says,

"An impromptu for Ann Jennings", which was truly impromptu
Written on the plane to Sydney where I was going to see Ann after a long absence. My life is linked together by long friendships. It is good, in your sixtieth year, to have friends from youth who loves you still in spite of your faults and shortcomings. When they die, part of you dies with them (as part of them will die with you).¹⁹

Keeping our balance somehow through the squalling

disorder, or with anguish running wild

When sickness, a sick joke from some appalling
orifice of the nightwatch, touched a child;

Think of it, woman; each of us gave birth to
Four children, our new lords whose beautiful
Tyrannic kingdom might restore the earth to
That fullness we thought lost beyond recall

when, In the midst of life, we could not name it,
when spirit cried in darkness, "I will have..."
but what? have what? There was no word to frame it,
though spirit beat at flesh as in a grave

from which it could not rise. But we have risen.
Caesar's we were, and wild, though we seemed tame.
Now we move where we will. Age is no prison
to hinder those whose joy has found its name

We are our own. All Caesar's debts are rendered
in full to Caesar. Time has given again
a hundredfold those lives that we surrendered,
the love, the fruitfulness; but not the pain

Before the last great fires we two went climbing
like gods or blessed spirits in summer light
with the quiet pulse of mountain water chiming
as if twenty years were one long dreaming night

above the leafy dazzle of the streams
to fractured rock, where water had its birth,
and stood in silence, at the roots of dream,
content to know; our children walk the earth
(Gwen Harwood. *Impromptu for Ann Jennings* Selected

pp.81~82)

What is celebrated is not mere survival, the creditable performance of
"keeping our balance somehow through the squalling/disorder". The poem

celebrates motherhood as being a situation in which endless sacrificial process of selfhood is regarded as virtue. If, however, the end of mothering properly sets children free, it also sets mothers free. This freedom is embodied in the poem in the freedom of independent movement: if the children "walk the earth", the mothers also now "move where we will". Motherhood figures almost as a religiously sanctioned obligation to serve one's time with the flesh and world. The last two stanzas provide an ecstatic glimpse of what it might be to be a transcendent being. The talismanic charm of knowing that one's lineage goes forward is firmly established in this poem. This is turned into an examination of what had preceded her occupying a place in the line of motherhood - that is of her childhood, of her parents, and especially of her role as a mother's daughter. In her essay, *Lampit Presences*, Gwen Harwood says,

From early childhood I have felt that there was a line of independent, energetic Australian women in which I had my place. There was no question of equality in our household; the women knew themselves to be stronger, wiser, longer-lives. My grandmother earned her own living until she was eighty. I have a photograph of myself, chubby, fresh from the curling papers, standing at her knees; one of the my daughter, taken thirty years later, standing at my grandmothers knee.²⁰

Harwood's own memory of the perfect family moment that makes her maintain and cherish her notion of motherhood as a valuable thing is to be found in her poem *The Violet*.

Years cannot move
nor death's disorienting scale
distort those lamplit presences;
A child with milk and story book;
my father bending to inhale

the gathered flowers, with tenderness
stroking my mother's gold brown hair.

Stone-curlews call from Kedron Blook

Faint scent of violets drifts in air.

(Gwen Harwood. *The Violet* Selected Poems p.92.)

Through this poem, we can know how her construction of a sweet maternal image affected her vision of her childhood. Picking violets, she recalls being comforted by her mother and father, when she awoke, disoriented and frightened "from the fearful/half-sleep of a hot afternoon". She is taken to see the new spring violets, and later, reassured, given her supper and "sent/to innocent sleep". This poem is in contrast with the *The Glass Jar* in which we witness a heart-wrenching little boy.

Another poem, *Reed Voices*, postulates repeated patterns of comforting between parents and children, especially between daughter and mother:

"Mother," it is a daughter.

Great with another child

She rises clumsily.

"My dear, I am close by.

Shall we look from the window?"

"There are flowers in the sky."

We call them stars, night's flowers.

Sleep, sleep, and I will stay

Close to your cot until the break of day." (*Reed Voices*, p.84)

Mother as a person who is comforting her child is the most beautiful scene and a positive image of motherhood. It reminds us of Harwood's mentioning of her sweet memories of childhood: " After tea, by lamplight, my mother and father would play the piano and sing. Sometimes friends come for the evening; we did not have dinner parties in those days- you came for the evening and had a splendid late supper after the music;

And dreams of delight shall on thee break

And rainbow visions rise..."²¹

Here we can not find Gwen Harwood as the daughter who feels guilty as we do in her matrilineal elegy, *Mother Who Gave Me Life* confessing "Forgive me the wisdom/ I would not learn from you", although this may seem a common guilt that children experience on the loss of a parent.

In *Mother Who Gave Me Life* , we can discern that there were conflicts between mother and daughter. However, that is not the important point. The more important point is the consolation after anguish and the grief she feels for her mother. Her grief comes from not having understood her mother's existence fully as a daughter. Now Gwen Harwood understands that her being is not for her children but for her mother.

Mother who gave me my life

I think of women bearing

women. Forgive me the wisdom

I would not learn from you

It is not for my children I walk

on earth in the light of the living.

It is for you, for the wild
daughters becoming women,

At our last meeting I closed
the ward door of heavy glass
between us, and saw your face
crumple, fine threadbare linen
worn, still good to the last,
then, somehow, smooth to a smile
so I should not see your tears.

Anguish:remembering hours:

(Gwen Harwood. *Mother who Gave Me Life Selected Poems* pp.
161-62)

The process of completion and continuity in which the two women participate is part of a fabric, which binds individual human lives to the mysteries of the universe.

The Sister said, when she died
she was folding a little towel.

You left the world so, having lived
nearly thirty thousands days;
a fabric of marvels folded
down to a small space.

What does “she was a folding a little towel when she died” mean? “It typifies the mother’s life. She was a person who required cleanliness, and

stood by value and habits she held for her entire life, like every towel should be folded. And her inner life, as with the folded towel, is much longer than it is initially perceived to be²² The mother's heritage of life has passed to her and she is now main protagonist in her life instead of her mother. The tight bonding between them is the evidence of the life itself. As a result, the mother's existence will be forever placed within a large-scale "fabric of marvels" as the daughter evokes

anguish of seasons burning
backward in time to those other
bodies, your mother, and hers
and beyond, speech growing stranger
on thresholds of ice, rock, fire,
bones changing, heads inclining
to monkey bosom, lemur breast,
guileless milk of the word.

Mother Who Gave Me Life celebrates not merely the gift of flesh, but the gift of language, traceable in its transmission from mother to child through generation after generation, until its origins are reached in the "guileless milk of the word". And its development in *Mother Who Gave Me Life* finally connects Harwood's poetic explorations of motherhood to another of her abiding themes, the worldliness of language. Language is the gift of the mother rather than the father for her. It must be a fresh shock to us. Because we cannot imagine this in the patriarchal conception of the society. Hélène Cixous states,

first music from the first voice of love which is alive in every woman. Why this privileged relationship with the voice? Because no woman stockpiles as many defenses for

countering the drives as does a man. Even if phallic mystification has generally contaminated good relationships, a woman is never far from “mother” There is always within her at least a little of that good mother’s milk. She writes in white ink.²³

The mother as supreme being comes into the world and she nourishes and nurtures her children with her flesh. Through her nourishment, they taste the wisdom of the world. This poem which is at one level a personal tribute to her mother can also be seen as showing Gwen Harwood’s definition of motherhood as being the most sublime thing in the universe. We cannot deny that this valuable lesson comes from mothering her own children both through her anguish and through her own revelation of herself as a mother.

As I have discussed, Gwen Harwood’s view of motherhood is not simple as we have seen in her poetry. Her poetry shows her ambiguous and polarized attitude towards motherhood - motherhood as a celebration and motherhood as an imprisonment of women. But her attitude is quite different from that of radical feminists who are totally against motherhood and see motherhood as evil which should be eliminated in order to bring about the liberation of women. She frequently shows her anguish and frustration at being a mother. Mothering may result in women forfeiting their individual freedom and selfhood. But Harwood doesn’t deny motherhood. Instead she skillfully insists through her poetry that even though it sometimes gives us the feeling of self-annihilation, motherhood and mothering are essential for being real women and being happy at being women.

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Chapter IV

EVE'S NEW IMAGE

I

For a long time Eve has been a metaphor for women's weakness and susceptibility. In the Garden of Eden when the crafty and sly serpent tempted Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, the voice in the garden is supposed to have said, "I will greatly multiply thy sorrow!"¹ The sorrow multiplied manifold and Eve took it to be the outcome of her unpardonable sin and felt that she was still paying for it. The serpent tempted Eve and Eve tempted Adam, but if Eve was credulous, wasn't Adam also easily beguiled? Yet the sin committed in complete innocence and ignorance has to be paid for by Eve alone. The descendants of Eve continue to do so to this day. Patriarchal tradition has imposed self-abnegation and tolerance on women as their way of expiating their sin.

Now it is necessary to examine how the susceptibility and weakness of Eve, be it in any culture, was used by mankind in general. How can one dismiss women's complete existence sticking labels such as meek, submissive or cursed on them? Of course history might be responsible for the status of women but women are also responsible for responding to their lives in the pre-ordained, destructive manner without offering any resistance. They have accepted their destiny as preordained - one given by their predecessor, Eve.

Sandra M. Gilbert described Milton's *Paradise Lost* as "the story of woman's secondness, her otherness and how that otherness leads inexorably to her demonic anger, her sin, her fall and her exclusion from that garden of the Gods."² Gilbert was not the first reader to reach the conclusion that *Paradise Lost* narrates the story of women's secondness and exclusion. As early as the eighteenth century, Samuel

Johnson refers to Milton's *Paradise Lost* as being contemptuous of females. Mary Wollstonecraft also criticized Milton,

Milton describes our first frail mother; though when he tells us that women are formed for softness and sweet attractive grace, I cannot comprehend his meaning, unless, in the true Mahometan strain, he meant to deprive us of souls, and insinuate that we were being only designed by sweet attractive grace, and docile blind obedience, to gratify the senses of man when he can no longer soar on the wings of contemplation.³

Eve's otherness often becomes a central issue in all discussions of the epic. There are those who think that Milton places Eve in a secondary position of otherness and those who see Milton as being ahead of his time "in granting women a dignity and responsibility rarely conceded in the seventeenth century"⁴. But in traditional thought, Eve's image is still that of a submissive woman. Milton wrote the epic using biblical myth from the *Genesis*, which we know is contemptuous of women right from the beginning of the history of mankind. When we read the story of Adam and Eve as told in *Genesis* 3:6-16, we come to know that women's destiny was ordained by God.

And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof and did eat and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.

And the eyes of them both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons. ...And the Lord God called unto Adam and said to him, where are thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself,

And he said, who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat?

And the man said, the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree and I did eat.

After a few sharp words to the serpent, the Lord God says to Eve: I will greatly multiply thy sorrow and thy conception; in sorrow thou

shalt bring forth children; and thy desire shall be to thy husband, and he shall rule over thee.⁵

There are two things that we find interesting in this story. First, Adam and Eve become aware of being naked since, as a result of eating the apple, each sees the other with fresh eyes. Nakedness in this story creates shame and guilt in their minds. Second, the more important thing from the feminist point of view is that the woman, Eve, is only blamed and punished by being made subservient to man. In relation to the woman, the man becomes the agent of God and the instrument of His punishment. This part of *Genesis* is undeniably anti-feminist. Thus, from the beginning of history, women are supposed to be not equal but second to men. They have been rendered weak and insecure against the vast source of power. Simon De Beauvoir asserts,

Women is always prepared to take an attitude of frustration towards the world because she never accepted it...it takes only a real trouble to remind woman of the hostility of the universe and injustice of her lot. Then she hastily retires of her surest refuge; herself.⁶

II

Many Australian women poets wrote poems about Eve. *Genesis/take2* by Elaine Golding, *Eve* by Kate Llewellyn, *Stranded in Paradise* by Susan Hampton, and *This Time* by Dorothy Hewett are some of the poems related to Eve. Among these writers there are others like Judith Wright, Mary Gilmore and Gwen Harwood whose poems I am going to analyze. In their poems the image of Eve is gradually transformed from that of a submissive person to that of an active agent living in contemporary society.

First, let's look at Mary Gilmore's poem *Eve song*.

I span and Eve span.
A thread to bind the heart of man;

But the heart of man was a wandering thing
That came and went with little to bring;
Nothing he minded what we made,
As here he loitered, and there he stayed.

I span and Eve span
A thread to bind the heart of man;
But the more we span the more we found.
It wasn't his heart but ours we bound.
For children gathered about our knees;
The thread was a chain that stole our base.

A root of loss and hidden dismay.
And one of us learned in our children's eyes
That more than man was love and prize.
But deep in the heart of one of us lay

He said he was strong. He had no strength
But that which comes of breath and length.
He said he was fond. But his fondness proved
The flame of an hour when he was moved.
He said he was true. His truth was but
A door that winds could open and shut

And yet, and yet, as he came back,
Wandering in from the outward track,
We held our arms, and gave him our breast,
As a pillowing place for his head to rest.
I span and Eve span,
A thread to bind the heart of man! (
Mary Guilmore. *Eve song* The penguin book of Australian Verse. p. 86.)

This poem which is overflowing with 'feminine insight' expresses Eve as an active agent for her life. She is not a docile person waiting for man's love but one who is working towards tapping her love. She chooses to face the challenges in her life even though she felt that it was not easy to conquer Adam's mind and make him

agree to her terms. But she doesn't give up her life and tries to build her own life with her children. Of course this is outside Eden and after the Fall. This is second to Eden and she is not in Paradise anymore. But she doesn't complain about her fate and it's seen to be the result of her choice and her will. Even though she was reproached so much by her patriarchal surroundings, she tries to make her life more prosperous in the Eden she had betrayed. Therefore Mary Gilmore's poem *Eve Song* opens a new chapter in feminism by giving voice to women subdued in patriarchal society.

The next poem that I've chosen for analysis is one of Judith Wright poems, *Eve to her daughter*, which was published in 1966.

It was not what began it.
Turned out into draughty caves,
Hungry so often, having to work for our bread
I was nevertheless not unhappy.
Where Adam went I was fairly contented to go.
I adapted myself to the punishment; it was my life.

But Adam, you know...!
He kept on brooding over the insult,
Over the trick they had played on us, over the scolding.
He had discovered a flaw in himself
And he had to make up for it.

Outside Eden the earth was imperfect,
The seasons changed, the game was fleet-footed,
He had to work for our living, and he didn't like it.
He even complained of my cooking
(it was hard to compete with Heaven)

so he set to work.
The earth must be made a new Eden
With central heating, domesticated animals,
Mechanical harvesters, combustion engines,
Escalators, refrigerators,
And modern means of communication

And multiplied opportunities for safe investment
And higher education for Abel and Cain
And the rest of the family.
You can see now his pride had been hurt.

In the process he had to unravel everything,
Because he believed that mechanism
Was the whole secret- he was always mechanical-minded.
He got to the very inside of the whole machine
Exclaiming as he went, so this is how it works!
And now that I know how it works, why, I must have
 Invented it,
As for God and the other, they cannot be demonstrated,
And what cannot be demonstrated
Doesn't exist.
You see, he had always been jealous.

Yes, he got to the center
Where nothing at all can be demonstrated.
And clearly he doesn't exist; but he refuses
To accept the conclusion.
You see, he was always an egoist

It was warmer than this in the cave;
There was none of this fall out.
I would suggest, for the sake of the children,
That it's time you took over.

But you are my daughters; you inherit my own faults of
 Character;
You are submissive, following Adam
Even beyond existence.
Faults of character have their own logic
And it always works out.
I observed this with Abel and Cain.

Perhaps the whole elaborate fable
Right from the beginning
it meant to demonstrate this; perhaps it's the whole secret

Perhaps nothing exists but our faults?
At least they can be demonstrated.

But it's useless to make
Such a suggestion to Adam.
He has turned himself into God,
Who is faultless, and doesn't exist. (Judith Wright. *Eve to her
daughter* Collected Poems, pp.
232-234)

In this 61-line free verse poem, Judith Wright has certainly been faithful to the basic story of man's fall. For a long time Eve has been forced to abide by the patriarchal belief that the knowledge of good and evil resulted from eating of the forbidden fruit. We know that she steered herself to accept the legacy of guilt. In this poem, the image of Eve is seen to be changing gradually. She retains the illusion of free will and takes the risk of imagining herself in charge of her own fate. Judith Wright's voice is unmistakably feminist. She doesn't make her Eve completely detached from Adam. She still gives Eve room for reconciliation with Adam who is self-centered. She tries to make her Eve a suitable mate for Adam in the Garden of Eden. Eve knows that Adam is an 'egoist' and it will take some time to make him live in harmony with her. Eve tries very hard not to break up her relationship with Adam and wants to cherish her Eden. This is the depiction of Eve's love in Judith's Wright's poem *Eden*.

This the grief of the heart-
That it can never be
Closed in one flesh with its love,
Like the fruit hung on Eve's tree

This is the lament of the flesh-
That it must always contain
The uncompleted heart,

Greedy of love and pain.

__This is not what I desired__
the flesh in anguish cries;
__the gift that was made to me
in my lost Paradise

where in predestine joy
and with a shock like death,
two halves of my being
met to make one truth

Yet where the circle was joined
The desperate chase began;
Where love in love dissolved
Sprang up the woman and man,

And locked in the pangs of life
Sway those unwilling selves
Till the circle join again

And love in love dissolves (Judith Wright. *Eden* Collected Poems,
P.90)

The story of Adam and Eve, as told in *Genesis*, generates anxiety in men and women, though especially in women. It has also a great deal to do with the act of seeing itself. The issue is not only of who is seeing but what is seen by both concerned. Both open their eyes to their sexuality in the moment following the loss of innocence. From that moment Eve is seen as a sexual object .

Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* spoke of the ways in which women are “reduced by men to the confines of their bodies.”⁷ About the way in which women rebel against “the thought of being transformed into fleshly prey,” she went on to say,

....many women do not regard as passive flesh a body that denotes muscle, activity, reactivity, dash: it does not magically inspire caresses, it is a means for dealing with the world, not a mere objective thing in the world: the gulf existing between the body-for-the-self and the body-for-others seems to be impassable ... But this reconciliation between the active personality and the sexual role is, in spite of any favorable circumstances, much more difficult for woman than for man⁸

Eve in Eden is regarded also as the seductive temptress, the conniver at her own fall. A.D. Hope expresses Eve's sexuality on his poem *Imperial Adam* :

The pawpaw drooped its golden breasts above
Less generous than the honey of her flesh;
The innocent sunlight showed the place of love;
The dew on its dark hairs winked crisp and fresh.

This plump gourd severed from his virile root,
She promised on the turf of Paradise
Delicious pulp of the forbidden fruit;
Sly as the snake she loosed her sinuous thighs,
(A.D. Hope. *Imperial Adam. the Penguin Book of Australian Verse* p.19.)

Like Narcissus, she's a reflection of her reflection. Adam becomes haunted by what he can never possess and her ripening sexuality is based on an imagined reflection of his desire. From early childhood, the female child is taught and persuaded to keep a close watch on herself. She has to do so. How she appears to others, and, most particularly, how she appears to men defines her self-esteem and her position in this world. Eve's body is also related to the image of apple. The apple in the Garden of Eden was attractive because it was a forbidden fruit - the thing desired but not permitted.

Even though Judith Wright is called a 'metaphysical poet', she seems to start with the fact that we have bodies and seems to be concerned about the fundamental

love of a human being. This is the crucial factor in constituting our life. Judith Wright's tone in her poem *Eve to her daughter* is mixed with aggrieved irritation, satirical contempt when speaking of male ineptitude and anger directed at God himself. Adam as the founder of the whole empire of man upon the earth, his action passed on to the whole of mankind, he possessed, ruled and directed them before they were born. Judith Wright seeks to restore the balance by focusing on the female principle, invoking the nurturing aspect, and complaining about notions of perfection inculcated in the female through male expectations:

He even complained of my cooking

It was hard to compete with heaven

The imperfections of life exiled from bounteous Paradise are bitter, and she blames Adam and God, managing a didactic crack at twentieth-century technology, man's ruthless push towards progress, and a mechanistic view of the universe. She builds her case against God, by showing his masculine creation's reliance on literal demonstration of the truth, the certainties of logic, and the failure of the imagination.

Her nostalgia for the security of Eden centres around the warmth of the cave, the female nurturing place. Submission to the patriarchal ethic is interpreted as a fault of character, and she uses the fable to comment as a modern woman whose anger and frustration about male destructive competitiveness surges up. And cynically she concludes,

But it's useless to make

Such a suggestion to Adam.

He has turned himself into god,

Who is faultless, and doesn't exist.

"Adam and his descendants would forever fail to resist this temptation to pursue egotism."⁹ She discovers that there are only two roads to take—"man's way; to be self centered, self-contained, utterly free and so foolish like Adam had become

or woman's way; to take stock of one's reality and to terms with it; to submit honestly and realistically to life's circumstances in all its complexity and uncertainty"¹⁰. Judith Wright shows that women's wisdom about life is better than men's. Women can do a better job than men of leading their lives into a bright future. Men are still stuck in their illusion of being dominant and supreme - as an acting God. But Judith Wright's Eve doesn't exclude Adam as she possibly could. Instead she accepts her life as challenging, one which had to be tackled. That's the reason why we find her feminist intuition in this poem tantalizing. Thus, we cannot but agree with Strauss,

The Eve of Wright's Eve poems is thoroughly Jungian, an intuitive earthmother who sees herself as inextricably bonded to Adam, however many sharp things she has to say about his appetite for rational argument and technological progress, his conviction that mechanism is 'the whole secret'.¹¹

In the next poem in *Eve Songs*, Eve proclaims her commitment to distribute the forbidden apple that would let her descendants know evil and good as a paradoxical wisdom about human life.

These human words, this apple-song,
I take from our green world that dies,
I give them into your human hands
I look into humane eyes

Can it be we who grow so old
Or is it the world? Poor world-
The worms in your apple foul and water
The apple and the apple-taste.

Your second-Eden promises
Fail like the first, though still we love.
Strain for one more essential kiss-
Such a greed and joy it's been to live

To the end of the earth and all it was.

The knowledge was of evil and good.
We learn it deeper, growing old,
But cannot change our human mould
Or nay the word the serpent said.

The apple's bitter to the mouth,
Our last windfall from green earth.
The sword turns all ways and the tree
Drops one last fruit for you and me.
I gather it for your human hands
I look into your human eyes. (Judith Wright. *Eve Songs* Collected
Poems p.358.)

The second-Eden, the earth is not a paradise anymore, and even worse than what she had expected. Even though it is based on human love, Eve faces anxieties and frustration which makes her life full of hardships. But she continues to do her duty as a pioneer for mankind's mundane and worldly life. To know and make a distinction between evil and good is a sort of wisdom for mankind, though it gives them suffering and pain. We have inherited Eve's wisdom as a legacy in our lives.

In *Eve Scolds*, Eve really scolds God by whom she was banished from the Eden. She scolds Adam and God who imprints his maleness on Adam.

Still so entrepreneurial, vulgarly moreish,
Plunging on and exploring where there's nothing
Left to explore, exhausting the last of our flesh.
poor Natura; poor Eve.

Sungods are parvenu. I never could believe
That old rib-story you told.
You, to come first? It was Night, Water,
Earth, Love, I,
You Adam, son of the Sun-
You thought his maleness chose
You out of the unshaped clay
(his huge masculine beard, his dictator-hand
giving you strength). But I-

I was the clay. Little boys
Have to invent such tales.
It's insecurity-always your trouble. You say
I nag you, bag of the night
Drawing attention to your weakness.

But my trouble was love-
wanting to share my apples. You
called that temptation, put us both in with Him.
Not fair; I should run home to Mother.
Now, it's too late. I could never decide to leave.
Wholly bewizarded,
Bullied, used as you use us, I rather liked it-
Asked for it, no doubt.
But you and I, at heart, never got on.
Each of us wants to own-
You, to own me, but even more, the world;
I, to own you.

Lover, we've made, between us,
One hell of a world. And yet-
Still at your touch I melt. How can there be
Any way out of this?
As always, I go overboard for you,
Here at the world's last edge.
Ravage us still; the very last green's our kiss.

(Judith Wright. *Eve Scolds* Collected Poems p.359.)

She fell on earth because of the designs of patriarchal God. She protests that she couldn't give up Adam's love. Her choice of eating the forbidden fruit and tempting Adam to eat it was reproachable; but she could not help it. It was her destiny. Eden without Adam would be meaningless for Eve. Eve chose her life herself. Eve chose to eat the apple and wanted to share it with Adam. She would be responsible for making her own decisions no matter what. She is ready for her life. And she needs love whatever the uncertain circumstances. She will bear any burdens in her life if she can hold on to Adam's love. Judith Wright does not deny Adam's

existence. Eve knows that Adam is imperfect and that makes her more attached to him. That doesn't mean that she is subservient to Adam. It means that she shifts her role from being meek and docile to that of being a protagonist. Judith Wright's Eve is certainly in charge of her life and not submissive as we have learnt to believe. This image is very different from the old, traditional one. It reminds us of Eve in Kate Llewellyn's poem *Eve*.

Eve showed she was bright one
They say the snake tempted her to it
Don't believe it
She bit because she hungered
To know
The clever thing
She wasn't kicked out
She walked out ¹² (Kate Llewellyn *Eve* Australian Women's Verse p.159.)

But because her Eve is too attached to Adam, Judith Wright has received this response:

Her feminism is both universalism and essentialism; the high value she placed on maternity and her attachment to Jungian psychology, which was more interested in defining essential and universal principles of the feminine than in defining the historical situations of particular women.¹³

III

Finally, in Gwen Harwood's poem, we can enjoy triumph of Eve as a real woman engendering her own identity. Downtrodden Eve is standing out from her shadowy place to reclaim herself.

Adam came in from his bird watching,
Flopped on the grass, said, "Where's my dinner?"
Get it yourself, I said. There's plenty

Of everything, just go and pick it.

“What’s that you’re reading,” he said. I said

I’ve bought this set, the Book of Knowledge.

It will help me to get ahead.

Such a nice salesman. Try this apple. (Gwen Harwood. *Songs of Eve II*)

This poem ‘ dedicated to James Penberthy makes Eve contemporary, cool as a cucumber’¹⁴. In this poem, Eve is depicted as an active agent in contemporary society. She is a positive agent who is capable of being Adam's equal partner. Till now, women have been considered as “the Other” and men as the “Subject”. Simone De Beauvoir in her book *The Second Sex* mentions,

“The female is a female by virtue of a certain lack of qualities,” said Aristotle; “We should regard the female nature as afflicted with a natural defectiveness.” This is symbolized in Genesis where Eve depicted as made from what Bossuet called “a supernumerary bone” of Adam.¹⁵

At this juncture we have to reinterpret the relationship between Adam and Eve in *Paradise Lost* taking Eve's singularity into account, without reducing her to an other, and without turning the difference between Adam and Eve into an otherness.

Modern ethics emphasises the similarity between one and the other. In other words, in the modern conception, particularity is removed, as we all participate in a commonality. By contrast, postmodern ethics emphasises difference. In this postmodern conception of the other, in Levinas’s terms, “there is no fusion: the relation to the other is envisaged as alterity.”¹⁶

By redirecting otherness away from a form of commonality and towards a form of difference, Levinas articulates “a most dramatic reversal of the principles of modern ethics.”¹⁷ Emmanuel Levinas, in his best known work, *Totality and Infinity*

, “argues for the ethical necessity to affirm the absolute otherness of another person (sometimes referred to as the Stranger or simply the Other). Western philosophical (and ontological) systems that reach after a dialectical unity are seen by Levinas as totalizing systems which end up subordinating people to impersonal social organizations. By contrast, what he calls metaphysics allows for an infinitely open procedure that resists ordered systems of control and which turns one towards the other. This Other cannot properly be reduced to oneself, to the Same, but should be affirmed in its difference or alterity. Indeed, one’s true individual freedom comes about when the other is elevated above oneself. In the modern conception of otherness, the other is there to serve the self. In Levinas’s version, by contrast, it is the reverse: the self is there to serve the other”.¹⁸

In the beginning, Eve’s otherness is the result of Adam’s seeing Eve as a part of himself, which is to say, the same as himself. Adam treats Eve as if she were there to fulfill his process of self-fulfillment. By the very end of *Paradise Lost*, as “they hand in hand. ...took their solitary way,”¹⁹ Adam and Eve have moved to a more Levinasian understanding of otherness, their differences are part of what bind them. This focuses on a few scenes that testify either to the status of Adam and Eve’s relationship or to their understanding of each other - specifically, their accounts of their first moments together (book 4), their separation (book 9), and their relationship at the end of the poem (book 12). There are of course other important scenes that also relate to their eating the fruit. But the focus here is on the relationship between Adam and Eve, for it is in their relationship that the othering occurs, and, insofar as they are to be taken as representative human beings, where othering matters most. Eve makes such a choice in eating the fruit that it changes the situation and it is in this situation that the subject finds herself. It could be seen as her response to the otherness to which Adam had consigned her.

In her recounting of their first meeting, Eve reports that Adam's last words as he chased after her were: "part of my soul I seek thee, and thee claim / my other half".²⁰ In this, Adam conceives Eve as an other similar to himself. As far as Adam is concerned, Eve is actually his other, his "other half." An other version of himself, he believes that Eve is there to complete him, to make him whole. Of course, it is, he believes, "his flesh, his bone"²¹ that makes Eve possible. Not only does Adam say that he gave Eve being but he also claims that his rib was loaned to her. Adam has been expecting Eve to complete him as well. It is significant that Adam believes it is he who is "defective",²² that it is he who has a lack. Adam's declaration of imperfection counters the traditional presumption of his Edenic authority and dominance. Even though Adam is presumably the first man made by patriarchal God, he emphasises his defects, and believes that a new being would compensate for his imperfection. But even where Adam seems to imply that there is a difference between them, he basically claims that Eve is a better version of himself. Adam furthermore assumes that Eve is there to help make him better too. Adam believes that the other is there for his own fulfillment and a compensation for his weaknesses. Here we can see his belief in male supremacy. Moreover, Adam's repeated insistence that Eve is "perfect"²³ is part of the othering in the relationship between Adam and Eve. It is Adam not Eve who claims that Eve is perfect. She has been placed in the position reserved for perfection. After the Fall, Adam goes so far as to blame Eve's perfection for their sin. Adam ate the fruit because Eve was the "perfect gift."²⁴ Despite Adam's insistence that Eve is a better version of himself and that she will help him improve, Eve's experience in her first moments, by contrast, emphasises a profound difference in their perceptions. Whereas Adam saw Eve as similar to himself, Eve sees him as different. But Adam tries to incorporate Eve into the similarity that he believes governs their relationship. Presumably Adam believes

he can understand Eve in the same way that he understands everything else, neglecting Eve's being and singularity.

By turning Eve into an other with his repeated insistence that she is like him, but perfect, Adam tries to understand Eve only in his own terms. In order to break through this otherness, Eve would need to show Adam that she is neither like him nor perfect. Eating the fruit from the Tree of knowledge show that she is neither like Adam nor perfect. In this sense, Eve's choice to separate and eat the fruit represents not "sin," but her rejection of the otherness and of perfection. It is indicative of her rejection of the pedestal.

Adam overlooks the difference between his own and Eve's perceptions of their relationship. We can see that Adam fails to see the reality of Eve as an individual – her singularity, whatever makes her unique or different, without being perfect. Finally he chooses to be with Eve because there is something unique about her that could not be replaced. It means that he begins to recognize her uniqueness, or the uniqueness of his relationship with her when he chooses to be with her despite her succumbing to temptation. In that moment, Adam realizes that there is something about Eve that could not be replaced: she is no longer simply the only other. Adam begins to see Eve as herself.

Eve's decision to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge is a response to the condition of otherness in which Adam had placed her. Therefore we do not think that there is "A Fall." There is, however, a change, in both Adam and Eve, after they eat the forbidden fruit. In short, by the end Eve speaks more, and Adam listens more. After the Fall, Eve's previously underestimated intellectual capacity becomes apparent.

Eve says, "I know" before Adam and Michael can say anything. In this remarkable moment, not only is Eve not what either Michael or Adam had thought her to be, but much more than what they had thought she would be. She is not the

same as Adam had expected her to be. The moment could then also represent the beginning of a new relationship between Adam and Eve. Now, Adam must be prepared to respond to her as a different being. Moreover, her challenge to her “otherness” in this case recapitulates the central terms of the narrative: she knows. She has eaten the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge, and now she says to Adam what she had not said before: “I know.”

She has learned that her singularity need not be otherness. By the end, Adam has learned to listen. Adam has learned to enjoy what other people say. Thus simply accepting what Eve has said, Adam adopts the position of careful attendance that the other is not there for the self but the self is there to serve the other as Levinas has stated.

Eden is no longer a paradise. But her claim that to go is to stay and to stay to go means that life in Paradise without Adam would be like an exile. It also implies that their relationship can start all over again. “They hand in hand with wandering steps and slow, / Through Eden took their solitary way.”²⁵ In its combination of the “solitary” and the “hand in hand,” the conclusion indicates the new found recognition of singularity that attends their relationship. It means that even if they are together, each must depend solely on his or her own effort and strength. Their relationship will be a combination of two independent people, rather than one person telling the other what to do.

Adam had decided to treat equality with Eve as if it were a similarity, and to treat their difference as inequality. But it is the difference between them that makes their harmony possible. What is required for harmony then is for each of them to be aware of their similarities and differences, including those which are important to each of them. Eve begins to develop an identity and a subjectivity. In this play of similarity and difference, what Adam and Eve develop is subjectivity. In other words, subjectivity requires difference not similarity.

It is possible to read *Paradise Lost* by seeing Eve's otherness not only as her exclusion from Paradise, but also as the condition to which Adam responds positively. After eating the fruit, Adam and Eve are more equal than they had been; now, Adam is well pleased and he understood her as well as her situation and Eve becomes more knowledgeable than before. In itself, this is a role reversal, as it has previously been Adam who proclaims he knew better than Eve and Eve who responded without her will. But now Eve's choices are between a response to her otherness, and a decision to go her own way representing her willingness to be independent. Eve's decision to separate and eat the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge represents her inclusion rather than exclusion from the garden.

In the end, Eve does teach Adam; he learns to listen. Eve emerges as an essentialist vision of woman. She asserts her difference, paradoxically, as Adam sees that he is the same as her. They both eat the fruit and they both break God's rule. It is not that otherness is obliterated by Eve's decision or Adam's response. And in the end Adam and Eve have achieved this recognition of shared otherness. Eve's irreducible otherness is made more visible in terms of their relationship with each other. It does not remove the condition of otherness, but it does mean that the particular condition of the other's otherness might be more audible and visible with the beginning of a new relationship.

The relationship of Eve and Adam has been viewed anew. New versions of the relationship are available as are new images of Eve. Like Gwen Harwood's Eve, it is the right time for Eve to start her life again outside Eden as a protagonist of her own life. From the beginning of history, Eve has realized that love does not consist of gazing at each other but in looking outward together in the same direction.

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8. Ibid p.148~149
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20. Ibid. (Book IV 487~88)
21. Ibid. (Book IV 483~64)
22. Ibid. (Book VIII 425)
23. Ibid. (Book X 138)
24. Ibid. (Book X 138)
25. Ibid. (Book XII 648~649)

V

Conclusion

A world still to be made. I must
Suffer, and change, and question all,
Wrestle with thought and word, and bind
My speech to earth's own laws to win
The heart's true life at last (Gwen Harwood, *Littoral*)

From the feminist point of view, certain concepts about life and poetry in Australian literature have undergone great change and reassessment. This has been irrespective of the differences in the ways men and women write as well as read poetry. Women did not have a voice in Australian history and literature until some prominent women writers emerged from the male-dominated literary zone. Among them, the women poets I have referred to - Mary Guilmore, Judith Wright, Rosemary Dobson and Gwen Harwood - have played a crucial role in making the women's voice heard through their works. Due to them, some of the important issues in feminism have been passed on to other feminist poets. Nowadays women writers do not seem to risk the exposure of their personal voices anymore. They are turning away from the patriarchal discourse towards the form that permits women's voices to construct and reveal their identities. The gap between the male and the female experiences, the different ways in which boys and girls grow up, and the consequent possibilities for misunderstanding when they meet, need to be considered when we are looking at poems. We have the simplistic notion that maleness is associated with aggressive weapons and technology and femaleness with caring and nurturing. Some argue that androgynous minds are required in contemporary literature to break this gender divide. There is more a lot of common ground in the way that educated men and women think and feel than is allowed for.

They want no distinction of gender in literature. But others argue that the distinction allows for the intrinsic characteristic tastes of both male and female without there being any hierarchical organisation.

The effects of several decades of feminism, the subsequent revisions of sexual stereotyping and its effects on women writers and readers, the changing perceptions of the relationships between men and women, the changing nature of men's perceptions of women and women's perceptions of men, have made us break biased concepts. It has to be said that any critic who writes an essay on the topic of male and female identity and sexuality these days, does not have the one-sided preconception that women writers' works are not worthy of being read. The preoccupation with the differences between the male and the female experiences isn't by any means new.

After naming Judith Wright "the most truly metaphysical of our poets", Hope explains what he means by this:

She does not describe experience or interpret it in the light of some philosophy or belief. When she tries to be philosophical, in fact she is often commonplace. Her gift is not philosophical but metaphysical; that is to say, she has the power of cracking open the stuff of experience, of opening new powers of seeing, new modes of experience, of providing in short not philosophy but the stuff from which philosophy is made.²

This is tantamount to saying that she's not much of a thinker but touches on the abstract plane of thought which usually makes her engage with her experiences. He goes on to say that nowadays women poets have had much to say about the act of love, those areas of common human experience like marriage, gestation, birth which were denied till some time ago.

This is something that only women can deal with, and women poets have on the whole avoided it except in a domestic, cozy and trivial way. But this is what Judith Wright deals with as a woman and a poet of the deepest insight and remarkable revelatory power. The essential difference between men and women, perhaps, is the fact that the experience on men is that of a creature

ephemeral, temporary and incidental in the biological process. It is this awareness of the process from generation to generation which is fundamental to Judith Wright's vision of the world – the masculine view that prevails in poetry of life stretching from the cradle to the grave is replaced in hers by the experience of life stretching from seed time to harvest, from the act of birth to quickening of the womb.³

Implicit in this is a yearning for her to be a more significant contributor to the open creative process. Traditionally, the works by women writers were considered as inferior. However, such expectations make these works emerge from the shadow of male writing and secure space within the male-dominated literary space. It seems to throw open possibilities for the future.

Regarding the issue of writing about women's experience, Dorothy Hewett says,

This came quite naturally to me. I didn't sit down and say, well, now I am going to explore those areas of female experience, female sexuality. It didn't occur to me. But I know it's true after the event⁴

Judith Wright was asked in an interview in 1967 whether she believed that there was any intrinsic difference between men and women, a sort of difference which would always colour male and female poetry. To this she replied:

I think that's necessarily so, because women are much more inclined to rely on their basic experience. They're more in touch as it were with life in the raw. They're not dealing with it in the same way that men are. They're coping more day-to-day, and I think that women have to rely and should rely a good deal on their emotional reaction to life, rather than their intellectual reaction.⁵

Judith Wright is saying that women are less rational and more dependent on feeling than men, and that this has little or nothing to do with education. Women, she implies, are really so by nature and much the better for it. Rationality, like other things male, is something women are better without. Contemporary women's poetry

should, without despising women's peculiarities and characters in literary space, express all voices that have been silenced and subdued for a long time. In the end, I would like to quote a few lines from Gwen Harwood's ode, *On Poetry*. This is an impressive poem offering a sharp comment about the seriousness of literature.

Poetry isn't propaganda,
Nor is a poem an act of will.
Though it may help us understand a
Poet, it says a mystery still.
We're caught, as Wittgenstein reminds us,
In the net of language. Language finds us,
Chirruping at our mother's knee,
Captures us in the nursery.
Everyone's called, but few are chosen
To wrestle, from our common speech,
The brightness of the word, to reach
The life that lies beyond our frozen
Habits of thought, to show with love
Much that cannot be spoken of.⁶

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