

SARAH BLUE

Selfhood and the Art of the Found Object. Self-Creation in Three Novels by Margaret Atwood, Colette, and Monique Wittig
(Under the Direction of RONALD BOGUE)

This study examines the problematic of selfhood in three novels by women authors: Cat's Eye by Margaret Atwood; La Maison de Claudine by Colette; and L'Opoponax by Monique Wittig. It views the project of selfhood as an essentially artistic undertaking when read through the lens of object relations theories developed by D. W. Winnicott, Marion Milner, and Jessica Benjamin. Theories and novels alike suggest that the production of both art and self are concomitant processes that insist on the primacy of the object world and the shifting relationship of the individual artist to a varying kaleidoscope of these objects. The articulation of selfhood and creativity in these works, then, constructs these concepts within the context of an intersubjective space, a space where the private notion of the self and the public sphere of artistic production coalesce in a shared discourse.

INDEX WORDS: Self, Subjectivity, Women's Studies, Margaret Atwood, Colette, Monique Wittig, D. W. Winnicott, Marion Milner, Jessica Benjamin, "Bildungsroman," "Künstlerroman," Cat's Eye, La Maison de Claudine, L'Opoponax

SELFHOOD AND THE ART OF THE FOUND OBJECT
SELF-CREATION IN THREE NOVELS BY
MARGARET ATWOOD, COLETTE, AND MONIQUE WITTIG

by

SARAH BLUE

B.A., Case Western Reserve University, 1974

M.A., Georgia State University, 1991

A Dissertation Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of

The University of Georgia

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2001

©2001

Sarah Blue

All Rights Reserved

SELFHOOD AND THE ART OF THE FOUND OBJECT
SELF-CREATION IN THREE NOVELS BY
MARGARET ATWOOD, COLETTE, AND MONIQUE WITTIG

by

SARAH BLUE

Approved:

Major Professor: Ronald Bogue

Committee: Betty Jean Craige
Catherine Jones
Tricia Lootens
Hyangsoon Yi

Electronic Version Approved:

Gordhan L. Patel
Dean of the Graduate School
The University of Georgia
May 2001

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many, many thanks are due to my major professor, Ronald Bogue, for his insight, his scholarly inspiration, and his unflagging support. I count myself very lucky not only to have completed this dissertation under his direction, but to have taken his classes, and to have been in contact with his enthusiasm for the world of thought. Other faculty members who motivated my work through their scholarship and teaching include Catherine Jones, Miranda Pollard, Tricia Lootens, Diana Ranson and Mihai I. Spariosu. I would also like to thank my committee members -- Betty Jean Craige, Catherine Jones, Tricia Lootens and Hyangsoon Yi -- for their thoughtful consideration of this project and their helpful comments. Many thanks are also due to friends who have helped me in countless ways: H. Elizabeth King, Wanda Wilcox, Laurie Astor-Dubin. And a special debt of gratitude is owed to Nick Builder, my "dissertation support team," who proved a demanding reader and meticulous editor. I also want to thank Julie Malley for the generous gift of her computer expertise.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Page

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	iv
-----------------------	----

CHAPTER

1 INTRODUCTION	1
2 THE ART OF SELF-CREATION IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S <u>CAT'S</u> <u>EYE</u>	20
3 FINDING THE FIGURE: THE SUBJECT AS EMBEDDED OBJECT IN COLETTE'S <u>LA MAISON DE CLAUDINE</u>	73
4 THE ART OF APPROXIMATION: THE SUBJECT AS COLLAGE IN MONIQUE WITTIG'S <u>L'OPOPONAX</u>	145
5 CONCLUSION	209
WORKS CITED	213

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

We live in a culture that continues to invest the found object with a particular magic. Certainly since the era of collage in the early twentieth century, bits and pieces of debris have acquired a newly revered status as potential ingredients in a work of art. A stray feather caught in the weeds, a smooth stone buffed by the light, a shell fragment impaled in the sand--these are the grist of memory, narrative, and imagination. Walter Benjamin, a dedicated analyst of modernism and its products, contributes to the object's enhanced appeal, as well as to the construction of Western childhood, by asserting that children enjoy a privileged relationship with modern debris. "They are," he claims, "irresistibly drawn by the detritus generated by building, gardening, housework, tailoring or carpentry. In waste products they recognize the face that the world of things turns directly and solely to them." This scavenged treasure, he continues, is not necessarily used to imitate the adult world; rather children "bring together, in the artifact produced in play, materials of widely differing kinds in a new, intuitive relationship. Children thus produce their own small world of things within the greater one" (69).

Benjamin's version of a playful and productive relationship in which the encounter between child and object unfolds in the creation of a small world resonates with the concepts of certain object relations theorists. Marion Milner, for example, who influenced D.W. Winnicott's ideas about play and creativity, likens the child's capacity for turning objects into symbols to the work of the poet. Citing Wordsworth and his "Preface to the Lyrical Ballads" as her authority, Milner surmises that it is the child's tendency to perceive "the familiar in the unfamiliar" that lends the work of symbol formation the status of artistic endeavor. Like Benjamin's musings, Milner's work suggests that, at some early point in their lifetimes, individuals wondrously conjure "their own small world of things":

Moments when the original "poet" in each of us created the outside world for us, by finding the familiar in the unfamiliar, are perhaps forgotten by most people; or else they are guarded in some secret place of memory because they were too much like visitations of the gods to be mixed with everyday thinking. ("Role" 87)

It is not surprising to find this quote in D. W. Winnicott's collection of papers gathered together under the title Playing and Reality, in which such moments of playful creativity are linked to an unfolding sense of self. Winnicott theorizes this self as a matter of process, a weaving together into a "personal pattern" the objects of the outside world (3). In the work of both Milner and Winnicott, the infantile illusion that one can author the universe paradoxically lends the self its conviction that it is both real and authentic.

This theoretical intersection of selfhood and creativity yields a playful space in which to consider three novels by women, books in which art and self coalesce. These fictional works gather together a variety of objects and everyday debris to form small worlds, reminiscent of the one evoked by Benjamin, patchworks of subjectivity.¹ This study undertakes an investigation of the ways in which one version of creative process² coincides with the process of self-creation in Margaret Atwood's Cat's Eye, Colette's La Maison de Claudine, and Monique Wittig's L'Opoponax. Each of these works is its own particular rendition of a problematic genre, the female "Bildungsroman," or novel of development, with its coming-of-age themes. In addition to these thematic preoccupations, however, all three works impress the reader by virtue of the abundant textual objects that litter their pages with the magical, narrative appeal of Hansel and Gretel's moonlit crumbs or Oz's yellow brick road. In each of these novels, objects seem to function as a lure, the promise of some final, yet-to-be-unraveled end, when instead, ultimately, it is the creation of the game-board pattern that proves to be the goal; the final aim is the work of art.

This accumulation of objects contributes to the modern flavor of these texts, illustrating in detail Benjamin's description of the child's creative encounter with the debris

of everyday life. From this perspective, it can be argued that each of the novels in question should be classified as a "Künstlerroman," a genre that focuses on the protagonist's journey to creativity. While Cat's Eye is the only one of the three novels in which a specific protagonist explicitly devotes herself to an art career, this study seeks to demonstrate that the function of the object leads to the conclusion that selfhood in all three texts is not only a matter of coming of age, but also a matter of coming to art.

The concomitant treatment of these processes is not new. Drawing on the work of Charles Taylor, Louis A. Sass, in "The Self and Its Vicissitudes," outlines a framework for an historical understanding of Western society's construction of the self. According to this model, primarily two views of the self have persisted over time since the crises and transformations of the late-sixteenth and early-seventeenth centuries disrupted the Aristotelian view of the world. From the Aristotelian perspective, humankind derived a hierarchical sense of place from the outside world, perceived to be a divinely organized order imbued with harmony and value. As scientific discoveries began to formulate and unlock the secrets of this supposedly ordained exterior perfection, alternatives to the Aristotelian vision surfaced, alternatives that had to account for a mechanical cosmos now thought to tick according to the laws of cause and effect, a cosmos that was "indifferent" to humanity's place within it (20-21).

Ultimately, Sass explains, Enlightenment thought reformulates this exterior space in two different ways. In one version, the human being loses its privileged hierarchical niche and is reduced to parity with all other objects in the exterior world, becoming just one more concrete entity, equally subject to scientific investigation. In the works of Hobbes, Hume, and Bentham, for example, mind is simply another kind of matter. The second version, usually associated with the philosophy of Descartes, renders this exterior space as one that is different from the inside space of individual consciousness. Summarizing Taylor's analysis, Sass points out that while the nature of the outside world

is perceived as deterministic, the inner realm is its antithesis, a place where there is an absence of constraint, where the individual is "free to define and control itself" (23).

This latter version, which insists on a division between inner self and outer world, eventually yields two "modern" views of the self that, according to Sass, continue to color the theories of psychologists and psychoanalysts today. One of these conceptions, elaborated in Taylor's scheme, is dubbed the "autonomous" view of selfhood in which the individual is seen to exercise a "radical freedom" unencumbered by the dictates of either the natural or the social world. It is a viewpoint most frequently associated with the philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

A second understanding of the self, called "expressivist," attenuates the thoroughgoing separation between inside and outside, between subject/self and object/world. The hallmark of this vision, then, is connection; and while its roots can be traced to the "counter-Enlightenment" thought of Vico, it gained its most ample expression in the work of the Romantics. This model seeks to overcome a variety of divisions--between feeling, will, imagination, and intellect--opting instead for a vision of individual wholeness and union with the individual's surroundings. The predominating metaphor, Sass stresses, is one of "organicism," which implies a purposeful unfolding and a teleological endpoint within a greater system of relationship, although such an unfolding may not always be the product of conscious intention (23). Art, then, is not a matter of imitating the outside world; rather, it is a vehicle for self-expression (24). Art and selfhood tend to overlap as one and the same project.

According to this view of the self, there exists within each individual the potential for this personal unfolding, but it is an unfolding within the context of connection. This perspective rejects the radical dichotomy between subject and object that derives from Cartesian thought. It is instead a process informed by a harmony or resonance with the environment that enables the process itself. To know the world is not a question of ordering its objects according to the studied perceptions of an autonomous consciousness;

rather, the individual, or "observer," must "enter empathically into the inner and emotional life of the observed" (Sass 24). Thus, the expressivist view of the self invests the object with an important role, that of furnishing a compatible context within which a measure of empathy obtains. This move, Sass points out, serves to restore a degree of meaning to an indifferent and mechanistic world. Sass further emphasizes that, within this perspective, the unfolding self is placed in peril by any society that, because of its "artificiality" or "rigidity," fails to accommodate this organic process (24-25).

Sass goes on to analyze the ways in which these two notions of selfhood continue to persist in current psychological and psychoanalytic formulations. While he does not examine object relations theory per se, his approach gives insight into the assumptions that underlie the work of Milner and Winnicott, as well as that of Jessica Benjamin, who elaborates at length on Winnicott's distinction between object relating and object use. Inasmuch as their conceptions of play, creativity, and selfhood influence this study of the three novels in question, it may be fruitful to acknowledge some of the historical underpinnings that inform their theoretical conjectures.

Several salient traits of these theories place their authors in the expressivist camp. For example, in the papers gathered together under the title Playing and Reality, Winnicott predicates the capacity for both creativity and authentic selfhood on the individual's ability to blur the boundaries between the subject and the object. Winnicott posits a kind of space, which he refers to as a place of "experiencing," where the human being's perpetual task of classifying phenomena as belonging to the interior or exterior world can be suspended; it is, he suggests, a kind of "resting-place for the individual engaged in the perpetual human task of keeping inner and outer reality separate yet interrelated" (Playing 2). This is a place of illusion and indeterminacy first visited by the individual in infancy. Thanks to a responsive care giver who provides an environment adequately attuned to the child's needs, the child can enjoy the impression of having created that outside world when desire and fulfillment come together as one. As Winnicott puts it, the child experiences

"the illusion that there is an external reality that corresponds to the infant's own capacity to create" (12).

Thus, in keeping with the expressivist point of view, Winnicott's place of "experiencing" both reduces the radical separation between interior and exterior and enables the individual to strike a harmonious resonance, albeit an illusory one, with the outside world. What is more, he accords this space a privileged status, in that it is the perpetuation of this space throughout adulthood that enables the capacity for creative endeavor. This understanding echoes the expressivist vision in which self and art overlap, in which self and self-creation coincide:

This intermediate area of experience, unchallenged in respect of its belonging to inner or external (shared) reality, constitutes the greater part of the infant's experience, and throughout life is retained in the intense experiencing that belongs to the arts and to religion and to imaginative living, and to creative scientific work. (14)

Winnicott's conception of the creating self also coincides with the expressivist view to the extent that it is an impinging or exigent environment that blocks or inhibits the unfolding of this essential illusion. In "The Capacity to Be Alone," Winnicott asserts that the initial encounter with this site of creative experiencing takes place in the presence of a reassuring and protective other. This care giver enables the child to achieve an "unintegrated" state by guaranteeing a safe environment, free from impingement or outside demands. It is under these circumstances that a playful interaction with the environment eventually leads to an accumulation of "good internal objects" through which a sense of integration, signaling an "I" with its own internal world, can be achieved. "In this setting," Winnicott explains, "the sensation or impulse will feel real and be truly a personal experience." The protective other is introjected by the child, making possible an ongoing belief in a "benign environment" that provides an enduring capacity for play and creativity, for a kind of "highly satisfactory experience" that is a variety of "ecstasy." An exigent environment or a

demanding other, who, by contrast, thwarts the unintegrated state, blocks the individual's perception of personal authenticity and capacity for creativity. Without this internalized sense of the protective other, both the individual's ongoing ability to "feel real" and the ability to realize this ecstatic experience appear compromised (Maturational 32-35).

Likewise, Milner's exploration of the connections between selfhood and creativity in On Not Being Able to Paint addresses the importance of an unimpinging environment:

I had not fully realized that the restraint of one's will imposed by authority could at times feel like a threat to one's whole existence, an attempt to separate one from the very source of one's creative relation to the world; and that to give in to this imposed restraint could at times feel like the deepest cowardice and betrayal of one's whole identity. (50)

Thus, to use these theories as part of an interpretive strategy to analyze the art of self-creation in works by Atwood, Colette and Wittig is to assert the prevalence and perpetuation of certain aspects of the expressivist vision in these texts. All three works, with their intense focus on the object environment, take up the problematics of connection between subject and object, a connection that reveals both selfhood and creativity to be a matter of what Winnicott might term "two-body relationships" (Maturational 29). Indeed, this study contemplates the possibility of applying Gerald J. Gargiulo's assessment of Winnicott's work to the novels in question; Gargiulo describes Winnicott's thought by stating: "Human beings...do not have relationships; they are relationships" (142).³ In addition, these novels also insist on the environment's potential as either obstacle to or enhancement of the self's creative project.

However, to reduce theory and fiction to a reiteration of the expressivist view would be a misleading oversimplification. Neither renders selfhood solely as a matter of an organic unfolding toward some teleological end point dictated by a predetermined, innate potential. While Winnicott's understanding of selfhood may be seen to consist of an innate "kernel" or "true self" that ideally develops into a genetically predetermined and

unified whole (Marcus and Rosenberg 140-142), this interpretation must always be tempered by Winnicott's insistence that this playful self derives from interaction with the objects it encounters. Given this stipulation, the self can never be a foregone conclusion. Rather, it is a matter of process and "ad hoc" negotiation with the outside environment that must also have a determining effect.⁴ This rendition of selfhood as an ambiguous or paradoxical space, one that is neither wholly interior or exterior, resonates with the theme of self-creation in all three novels. This study proposes to demonstrate that the subject represented in each of these works is both determined and determining, a playful entity that continually engages with the objects at hand. Neither entirely the result of imposed, pre-existing categories, nor the product of preconceptual, sensory experience, the self-creating subject accesses a place where these two states--a kind of simultaneous being and becoming--are sustained. Thus, this self is never the realization of a potential configuration; it is not an end product that has evolved within the flow of time. Rather it is a process undertaken within discontinuous space, a matter of repeated individual interactions within the given context of a larger world that may enhance or diminish this interchange.

To a large extent, in these novels, as in Winnicott's theories, creating is a question of finding what is already there, but finding it for oneself (Gargiulo 152). The issue of origins and originality, as this study will show, is simply irrelevant. It is instead a matter of perpetuating a spontaneous openness to the outside world, an openness that characterizes both the object relations theory and the fictional works that come together in this study. Openness and responsiveness figure prominently in this rendition of self-creation. As Gargiulo points out, Winnicott is uninterested in formulating a systematized school of thought that can be applied to human behavior; and, Gargiulo continues, it is this very "forgetfulness" of psychological categories that provides for the kind of innovation that typifies Winnicott's work (150). As a practitioner, Gargiulo states, Winnicott engages in a

variety of "poetic listening" rather than a diagnosis that relies on psychoanalytic rubric (152).

Likewise in the novels, a dimension of forgetfulness comes into play, and while this forgetfulness unfolds in a different way in each novel, this phenomenon is consistently unleashed in the space of "experiencing," to borrow Winnicott's phrase, a place of non-integration where subject and object distinctions are blurred. Thus, the novels explore varieties of a selfhood that paradoxically necessitates a loss of self, as if the illusion of authenticity were most truly discerned when subject and object world appear to mingle. In Atwood's Cat's Eye, it is the predominating metaphor of the force field that most frequently summarizes this self-forgetting. As she recounts the formative events in her life, the protagonist-artist repeatedly reveals her attraction to all that is brilliant. Positing a loss of self from the beginning of the novel, a loss due primarily to the groundless, and therefore empty, category of female gender, the main character is perpetually drawn to the light of the shiny object, the intellectual brilliance of her brother, the creative energies of her friend Cordelia, or the malignant aura of Mrs. Smeath. Her intense engagement with these characters ultimately results in series of vibrant canvases, gathered together in a first retrospective of the artist's work. However, in the end, neither reader nor protagonist is able to locate anything other than these discontinuous points of light, evidence of an intense engagement between a creating subject and her object world. The protagonist's initial despair at this discontinuity is eventually shrugged off with the realization that it is process and playful connection that are central to a sense of self, rather than some ultimate product or comprehensive embodiment of the subject.

A variation on the theme of self-forgetting is equally apparent in Colette's La Maison de Claudine. This study will argue that the series of vignettes that constitute this work are the equivalent of the artist's bright canvases in Cat's Eye. In other words, they render in a formal rather than a narrative manner, the discontinuous points of light, the artifacts that testify to the creative process. While Atwood's story is fragmented by virtue

of its reliance on flashback, the initial impression of narrative discontinuity dissolves as the diligent reader pieces together the linear chronology. In Colette's work, however, the vignettes--like so many paintings in a retrospective--stand boldly on their own, unconnected by the convention of the narrative thread. Once again, but with even greater insistence, a systematic construction of the self has been forgotten in favor of the intense study of the artist's object. While it is possible to identify a dimension of the creating subject in each of these vignettes, the depicted self is consistently placed in relation to, but nonetheless overshadowed by, the object, as if there were a confusion between figure and ground. As in Atwood's work, each "canvas," or vignette in this case, manifests its own variety of illumination, rendered by virtue of its brilliant textual surface.

Similarly, in Wittig's novel, the text is strewn with abundant objects which, like a series of eidetic images, are rendered memorable by virtue of the density of description. In L'Opoponax, however, the author takes a further step away from constructing a unified or wholly integrated self by unhinging the objects from a traditional narrative. The focus instead becomes a kind of picture production that results from a description of the characters' intense play, a metaphoric engagement with everyday objects that captures, or doubles, the dynamic of this production process. The individual self is "forgotten" in the flow of creative endeavor. What is more, this forgetting is even more apparent when the notion of a unique protagonist is erased by the novel's focus on collective play.

A textual strategy of self-forgetting seems ironic or paradoxical at a time when a predominantly self-conscious construction of a female subjectivity persists as a contemporary literary concern. Marianne Hirsch notes that novels of development have become "the most salient genre for the literature of social outsiders, primarily women or minority groups" ("The Novel" 300). Lorna Sage identifies the connection between self and text as a dominant theme in recent works by women writers: "The re-birth of feminism inspires and/or coincides with a proliferation of first person fictions by women inventing themselves as writers. Or is it the other way around?" (qtd. in Worthington,

276). The coming-of-age/coming-to-art thematics of the novels examined in this study, then, reflect the concerns of a broad and ongoing concern, a tradition that turns on the intersection between gender and selfhood. The novels in question here were published at different historical moments--La Maison de Claudine in 1922; L'Opoponax in 1964; and Cat's Eye in 1988--yet, as has already been suggested, they share a number of similar approaches and preoccupations.

The degree to which the proliferation of these genres among women writers over time is the result of actual social relations, complete with concrete referent, or a discursive social construct, a product of language, is a complex question that exceeds the boundaries of these pages. While this essay deals with works by white women from Western traditions, Ruth O. Saxton's anthology of articles concerning the construction of girlhood makes it clear that, while recent fiction explores narrative themes and patterns which include race, ethnicity, class and sexual orientation, "contemporary literary investigations into the Girl continue to envision girlhood according to tropes and plots familiar since the dawn of novelistic fiction" (xi).

Some insight into the recurrence of such textual preoccupations might be gained from Michel Foucault's discussion of "erotics" in The Uses of Pleasure. Why, he wonders, is there an abundance of prescriptive texts concerning erotic relations between the free men and boys of classical Greece in a social context where there seems to be no specific proscriptive code concerning sexual behavior? Why this discursive focus, this intense textual concern? Foucault responds by isolating a central contradiction. In the texts studied by Foucault, free born men are designated as active sexual players, and it is this role that is held to be "intrinsically honorable and valorized without question..." (215). As objects of pleasure, slaves were relegated to the passive role by virtue of their social position, as were women, who were, moreover, designated as passive by "nature." However, the position of free born male adolescents was more problematic, in that they were destined to become the future "active" citizens of the state. In other words, how

could a passive love object assume a position of power and privilege in a society where male passivity was seen to be nothing short of immoral (46-47).⁵ Foucault concludes that this contradiction gives rise to a good deal of discursive concern: "When one played the role of subordinate partner in the game of pleasure relations, one could not be truly dominant in the game of civic and political activity" (220).

Consequently, prescriptive texts of the period elaborate socially viable performances, including refusal, resistance, flight and escape, that negotiate an acceptable escape hatch between culturally clashing polarities of subject and object (224). Moreover, Foucault astutely points out a parallel between this contradiction, with its concomitant outpouring of "concern" and the discursive preoccupation with girls' virginity, pre-marital conduct and matrimony in the Christian and modern periods:

No matter what inferior position may have been reserved for them in the family or in society, there would be an accentuation, a valorization, of the "problem" of women. Their nature, their conduct, the feelings they inspired or experienced, the permitted or forbidden relationship that one might have with them were to become themes of reflection, knowledge, analysis, and prescription. (213)

Given this extrapolation, it seems possible to extend Foucault's argument to the present period, to see the recurring theme of subjectivity among women writers as an attempt to negotiate an escape hatch between the contradictions that derive from a clash between gender and selfhood, between the continuing social construction of women as objects and the persistent liberal and feminist assertions, which derive from the Enlightenment's articulation of individual rights, and champion women's agency.

With the insights of object relations theory regarding play and creativity, this essay, then, proposes to examine these three novels as narrative strategies that locate the self in a space between the poles of subject and object. In doing so, it draws on the possibilities of a hypothetical space where a blurring between these contradictory positions can be

sustained and explored. Of course, this choice draws with it some assumptions that inform this theoretical perspective, assumptions that need to be addressed and clarified.

As pointed out earlier, Winnicott's work can be seen to affirm a fundamental "kernel" of subjectivity that is encompassed within the individual's capacity for creative play, play that is vital to achieving authentic selfhood. In this way, these concepts appear to contribute to the definition of an essential core that grounds a universal human nature. What is more, these assumptions resonate with certain feminist formulations concerning the self, efforts in the Anglo-American tradition of the 1970's and 80's, that envision retrieving a core self, a self diverted from its true nature by obscuring patriarchal constructions of femininity. Selfhood is consequently projected as a process of recovery that can be achieved by stripping away false layers until an authentic self emerges untainted. One of the clear drawbacks of this approach is the intimation that there exists a normative "feminine" self (Grimshaw 101-102), one that is not only fashioned in opposition to patriarchy's object, but is also tinged with the implication that it constitutes a natural and universal feminine core.

In contrast, this study turns away from the assertion that the version of subjectivity explored in these chapters has universal implications that extend beyond the individual texts at hand. It is simply one interpretive strategy among many, one that uses object relations theory as a promising toolbox for reading specific narratives, stories that approach the object world in a particular way. In addition, it is helpful to bear in mind that the notion of authenticity here, in both theory and text, is clearly and paradoxically illusory. It is one where the perception of creating both self and world balances tenuously on the thin edge of the ludic "as if" principle, bounded on one side by internal dream and by external reality on the other. Finally, while all three novels, as books that return to the content of childhood, appear to constitute missions of recovery--attempts to locate a self that reaches beyond the unique category of gender--this study proposes that each ultimately constitutes an intense quest for process rather than product.

This investigation shares a number of concerns with Kathi Weeks's Constituting Feminist Subjects, which also seeks an understanding of subjectivity that does not rely on some notion of either a "natural core" or an "authentic humanity." While acknowledging the various critiques that have focused on humanist, essentialist, and determinist conceptions of the subject, she nonetheless hopes to retain the subject's capacity for agency (1). She also strives to step aside from participation in the modernist-postmodernist opposition, an orientation that would obligate a choice between a reworking of the humanist subject or an elimination of the subject altogether. Instead, Weeks proposes the strategy of drawing selectively, in toolbox fashion, on earlier, modernist conceptions--in her case, on feminist standpoint theory--in order to adapt useful elements to ongoing concerns.

One move made by Weeks, in order to provide for the subject's agency, involves an explication of Nietzsche's eternal return, which she reads through the lens of Gilles Deleuze's interpretation of Nietzsche's work. The eternal return, she explains, is separated into two moments. In the first, "...we are presented with the determined, constituted quality of our identity." The second moment consists in a realization that "...we must 'will the past'," an act that involves choice. Weeks continues: "It is not the eternal return of the same that Nietzsche invites us to affirm. The eternal return is instead a selective principle: it teaches us to select those aspects that are the product of an active will and thus constitutive of a life-affirming stance...." To elaborate, she quotes Deleuze's Nietzsche and Philosophy, in which he asserts that, through such an affirmation, one does not assume the responsibility for what is; rather, it is "to release, to set free what lives." Thus, according to Deleuze, the eternal return entails "not affirmation as acceptance, but as creation" (qtd. in Weeks, 41). This reading, Weeks points out, views this affirmation, this expression of the will to power, as a "creative, evaluative will" with the possibility of both accepting and rejecting elements of one's determined existence (41). Consequently,

she concludes, it is possible to understand the will to power as "a will to create the self and the world" (46).

The point of this brief digression is to show a parallel between Weeks's efforts to formulate a feminist subjectivity that provides for agency and this project, which views subjectivity through a different theoretical glass, but one that casts a decidedly similar hue. Read in light of object relations theory, the self-creating subjects of these novels confront the determined and gender-laden objects of their environments with a sense of selective affirmation which is not an act of resigned acceptance; neither is it simply a reactive negation, which is to say, an affirmation of what the object is not. Instead, embraced objects constitute a paradoxically shifting ground that is their art, a temporary treasure to be increased, reiterated, re-fashioned, dismissed, or simply forgotten in the flood of new contingencies. To borrow from Weeks's reading of Nietzsche via Deleuze, one might say that these subjects seek an accommodation between being and becoming.

However, while this study stresses a shared preoccupation with subject-object relationships in all three novels, these encounters run the gamut from the intrasubjective to the intersubjective. The use of these terms here derives from Winnicott's distinction between object relating and object use, a distinction explored at length in the theories of psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin. An intrasubjective approach to the object is closely linked to the phenomenon of "projective identification" where the object seems to "embody part of self" (Benjamin, "Shadow" 91). This study suggests that Elaine Risley, the main character of Cat's Eye, ultimately remains within the intrasubjective realm. While as a child she discovers the delight of creative play through her engagement with brilliant everyday objects, her ability to sustain a creative "two-body relationship" is undermined by the problematic of gender. The ensuing "two-body" difficulties are explored through Elaine's relationship to her "twin," her childhood friend Cordelia. The promise of creative play between them is often reduced to a sheer power struggle between subject and object with Elaine and Cordelia alternating between the roles of victim and victimizer. In the

end, the conflict can only be resolved through a gesture of empathy, a move that relies on perceiving sameness in the other. From the perspective of Benjamin's theories, then, Cordelia is neither truly other, nor is she a subject in her own right. Elaine's empathy can be read as a form of guilt, or to borrow from Benjamin, as "a projection of one's own injured narcissism on to the other" ("Shadow" 98). Atwood's novel concludes with the intimation of a different kind of "two-body" relationship, but it is one that remains unrealized within the narrative.

Less programmatic than Atwood's novel in its treatment of subject-object relations, La Maison de Claudine imagines a middle ground between the intra- and intersubjective conceptions of this dyad. While both novels share the narrative strategy of the backward glance or retrospective, Colette opts for a series of vignettes rather than a continuous narrative that might invest these parts with the promise of a greater unified meaning. The house, or metaphorical safe space of creative play, stands in contrast to Atwood's version of this space as a dangerous but exciting edge that implies falling or falling apart. While the protagonist's mother, Sido, features as a predominant character in the vignettes, she also serves as a boundary figure, a present absence, that guarantees the extension and perpetuation of safe creative space. Thus the frustrating antithesis between subject and object in Cat's Eye, articulated as a power relationship, is configured differently in La Maison de Claudine. Typically, Jessica Benjamin asserts, selfhood has been understood as a picture in which "relationship is the ground and separation is the figure" (Bonds 25). However, in Colette's novel, separation between subject-daughter and object-mother is interminably postponed. I would argue that, as Winnicott proposes, "separation is avoided by the filling in of the potential space with creative playing, with the use of symbols, and with all that eventually adds up to a cultural life" (Playing 109). Thus each vignette has the quality of a canvas, a space that has been filled with symbols and artifacts of creative play that forever defer separation. As symbols in transitional space,

then, they share the ambiguous status of the transitional object. They are neither entirely projections of the self, nor incorporations of the outside world, but paradoxically both.

In contrast to the other two works, L'Opoponax embraces self-creation in a decidedly intersubjective dimension. The notion of intersubjectivity, as it is elaborated in the work of psychoanalyst Jessica Benjamin, involves relationship between two equal subjects with the capacity to recognize one another as such, rather than relationship between subject and object, a binary that of necessity implies the dominance of one element.⁶ In L'Opoponax, Catherine Legrand achieves a sense of her creating self through her relationship, both playful and erotic, with her classmate Valerie Borge. Within their shared arena of language and poetry, Catherine Legrand discovers she can do more than simply incorporate and then replicate the found objects presented by her culture--in this case, the revered and anthologized works of the patriarchal canon. By gathering, cutting apart, and refashioning her trove of cultural debris, the aspiring author arrives at a unique collage that both is and is not her own creation.

It might be argued that the lesbian relationship is the keystone that enables the construction of an intersubjective story. While one might view the protagonists of the other novels as simply turning away from the issue of explicit sexuality to explore other, although frequently tangential themes, one might also conclude that Catherine Legrand is the only protagonist who attains the status of a fully desiring subject. By the same token, it might also be suggested that the intersubjective dimension of L'Opoponax prevents the story of the lesbian couple from retracing the active subject/passive love object pattern that is characteristic of the heterosexual plot.⁷ One need not resolve this chicken-and-egg argument to appreciate that L'Opoponax explores a variety of subjectivity that Atwood can only intimate in her novel's conclusion.

END NOTES

1. While it might be argued that the modern art of collage tends to flatten meaning, calling attention instead to the objects' surfaces or formal properties, one might also assert that collage can potentially invest its objects with new meaning. I suggest that the novels in this study at times reduce and at other times expand or alter the meanings of their textual debris. Part of the pleasure of these works, then, consists in discovering and enjoying the tension sustained between these different treatments.
2. The concepts of play and creativity proffered by object relations theorists share the field with competing theories. The notion of creative process has been constructed in a wide variety of ways over time. The Creativity Question, edited by Albert Rothenberg and Carl R. Hausman, which anthologizes a number of differing approaches to creativity--ranging from Greek philosophy to modern empirical studies--clearly illustrates this abundance.
3. Carol Gilligan's examination of women's moral development, discussed in her book, In a Different Voice, has been instrumental in encouraging the understanding that women are more likely than men to give priority to sustaining interpersonal connections rather than to asserting universal principles when they make ethical choices. Her work stands in contrast to Lawrence Kohlberg's stages of moral development, which rank the process of making ethical decisions based on interpersonal terms as hierarchically inferior to those that draw primarily on general moral principles. Gilligan concludes that such socially-determined variations in decision-making criteria between men and women are a matter of difference, rather than one of hierarchical moral sophistication that implies inferior moral development in women. In brief, Gilligan's research has led to the conclusion that a female self is one that is based on relationship.

While Gilligan's work associates women's socialization in a particular cultural context with an ensuing emphasis on maintaining connections, this study approaches connection from a different perspective, that of object relations. It is not asserted here that self-creation through relationship is the unique purview of women. However, neither does it find Gilligan's theories wholly incompatible with some of its arguments. To explore connection in these novels through the lens of Gilligan's work might yield interesting results.
4. Indeed, as I show in the chapter devoted to L'OpoPONax, examined alongside the companion piece of Jessica Benjamin's recent theories, object relations provides for the possibility of a sustained, although attenuated, notion of agency in response to the "prison house" view of the thoroughly constructed postmodern subject.
5. In The Use of Pleasure, Foucault analyzes the Greek concept of the "aphrodisia," which he defines as "the acts, gestures and contacts that produce a certain form of pleasure" (40). He specifies: "For a man, excess and passivity were the two main forms of immorality in the practice of the 'aphrodisia'" (47).

6. In Sacrificial Logics, Allison Weir critiques Benjamin's version of intersubjectivity, asserting that Benjamin's formulation of mutual recognition is "unmediated." Such intersubjectivity is a matter of what Benjamin calls "emotional attunement," an interaction initially experienced between mother and child that consists of a spontaneous awareness of shared emotion or feeling. Weir goes on to object that Benjamin's understanding of mutual recognition is restricted to the affective domain (75).

Without assessing the merits or weaknesses of Weir's argument, I hope to point out in this study that, by reading Benjamin's work in tandem with Wittig's fiction, one can see that mutual recognition can be a tenuous game involving the negotiation of a battery of shared symbols that are the substance of mediation between equal subjects. What is more, the arena of shared symbols in Wittig's novel is a site where boundaries between the cognitive, affective and erotic domains are appealingly blurred.

7. In Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives, Marilyn Farwell points out the difficulties of combining the qualities of agency and desire in a female protagonist, using the film Aliens and its heroine Ripley as a case in point: "The film refuses Ripley a love affair because that would immediately position her as the object of desire, against which the character would have to struggle to maintain her autonomy" (58).

CHAPTER 2

THE ART OF SELF-CREATION IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S CAT'S EYE

"I have made something of myself, something or other, after all." Painter Elaine Risley, protagonist of Margaret Atwood's novel Cat's Eye, draws this conclusion as she contemplates a flyer announcing the first retrospective of her work (20). The flyer, posted on the fence of a demolition site, includes her photograph to which some passerby has added a moustache. Her assessment alludes to a process of self-creation, while its irony, along with the flyer's altered representation of the artist, seems to problematize that very process. Coral Howells, who views the novel as "Atwood's version of life-writing in the feminine" (204), reads the defacement as characteristic of the "inherent instability" and "incompleteness" of the "narrating subject" (216).¹ Indeed, Howells' analysis speaks to the deprecating tone of the artist's remark, a tone that subverts the satisfaction and repleteness associated with the dream of the self-made man. Atwood's rendering of the self-made individual invites a closer look.

The flyer, in fact, accords Elaine's success a somewhat dubious public recognition. The flyer refers to her by her last name only--"like a boy"--she notes, while the moustache prompts her to remember her own similar acts of defacement, where adding a moustache derived from "the desire to ridicule, to deflate, and the feeling of power" (20). However, from her mid-life perspective, Elaine now sees the benefits of the moustache as "disguise," one of a series the protagonist will assume throughout the novel. At present, dressed in a pastel sweatsuit, she is hoping to hide her painter's identity as she heads for the gallery where her retrospective will take place. Perhaps she will be taken for "a housewife, a tourist, someone window-shopping" (19), rather than an artist whose self/creation will be

closely scrutinized and judged. If the flyer proffers social recognition of Elaine's status as subject, that version is only another disguise, as the added moustache seems to suggest. It is merely "a face worth defacing," a front that masks the disintegration, the demolition site behind the fence (20). A different, more elaborate and authentic version of subjectivity--the "something or other" contained in the protagonist's remarks--eludes this public representation.

As a *Künstlerroman*, or novel of development in which the protagonist's growth involves the grasp of his or her "creative mission" (Holman and Harman 265), *Cat's Eye* invites the reader to focus on the act of self-creation. Toronto, where the protagonist's retrospective will take place, is also a site of childhood events; therefore, place provokes a different kind of retrospective that involves a plunge into memory. One of Elaine's earliest flashbacks recalls her nomadic existence when her entomologist father traveled through the Canadian bush, family in tow, in order to pursue his research. She remembers sitting in the rear seat--with the baggage--staring ahead at the shapes of the other family members: father, mother, and older brother Stephen, who is obliged to sit in the front because he gets carsick. Her position suggests the dilemma of the daughter, who is typically left out of the traditional family romance and is consequently without a ready-made story of her own.² The first picture taken with her Brownie box-camera is not taken by Elaine; rather it is a picture of Elaine taken in front of a blank white motel door bearing the number nine, an image that coincides with anonymity and the blank page. What is more, the number nine proves prophetic. It resonates with the repressed memory of her ninth birthday, a time when her Toronto playmate, Cordelia, succeeded in convincing Elaine that she was "nothing."

Elaine's girlhood apprenticeship does not begin in earnest until her family moves to Toronto. During the family's travels up north, Elaine comes under the tutelage of her brother Stephen, who teaches her to skip stones, to play war and to see in the dark. Dressed in her brother's hand-me-downs, she learns more about being a boy than a girl,

although in most of their contests Elaine relates that she is "more like an audience" than an equal participant (68).

Consequently, when she moves to the city, Elaine knows very little about the behavior of girls. She is taken in hand by Cordelia and two other girl companions who persecute her, intimating that her ignorance qualifies her as a disgrace and a misfit. The persecution culminates in a sense of lost selfhood with which the protagonist is compelled to grapple by means of her art.

According to Stephen Ahern's reading of the novel, Elaine arrives in Toronto as something of "a cultural tabula rasa," because, he asserts, Elaine's experiences in the bush coincide with a "traditional romantic discourse of nature equaling innocence" (9). This interpretation is supported by details highlighted above, such as the absence of a daughter's story and the white motel door. However, the seemingly innocent and so-called natural environment is belied by Elaine's clothes, activities and lack of agency, all of which bear the unmistakable mark of gender.³ What is more, if Elaine arrives in the city with a not altogether blank canvas, the surfaces on which she must eventually paint are complicated by her feelings of nothingness. These are best illustrated by the black hole--remembered as a "black square" or "door"--into which Elaine is thrown by her little girl playmates during a game of make-believe in which Elaine is assigned the role of a beheaded Mary Queen of Scots. Ultimately, her expression of selfhood must alternate between the intensities of both light and dark.

The quest for selfhood is a central theme in many an Atwood novel and was identified by critics as a major concern early on in Atwood's career (Piercy 53; Rubenstein 259). Subjectivity for Atwood lies somewhere beyond the realm of victimhood, outside of what she calls the "basic game" of "Victor/Victim." In her 1972 work of criticism entitled Survival. A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature, Atwood deems this dynamic characteristic of Canada's artistic production (36-39). While readers may differ with Atwood's perception of collective victimhood in Canadian texts, Marge Piercy argues that

Survival provides useful insights into Atwood's own work (53). In Survival, Atwood identifies four "Basic Victim Positions" in Canadian literature of which only one provides any escape from the vicious victor/victim circle; it is the position of the "creative non-victim":

In Position Four, creative activity of all kinds becomes possible. Energy is no longer being suppressed (as in Position One) or used up for displacement of the cause, or for passing your victimization along to others (Man kicks Child, Child kicks Dog) as in Position Two; nor is it being used for the dynamic anger of Position Three. And you are able to accept your own experience for what it is, rather than having to distort it to make it correspond to others' versions of it (particularly those of your oppressors).

In Position Four, Victor/Victim games are obsolete. You don't even have to concentrate on rejecting the role of Victim, because the role is no longer a temptation for you. (38-39).

Despite this promising formulation, the depiction of most artists and writers in Canadian works, Atwood asserts, is characterized by a paralyzed creativity. And what of Atwood's own work? For Piercy, the main characters of Atwood's first two novels share a narrative pattern: "In both The Edible Woman and Surfacing, the protagonist is a woman who becomes aware she has lost her identity--her self--who comes to experience herself as victim, and finally to reject that state" (54). Unfortunately, Piercy laments, Atwood seems unable to step beyond the "rhetoric" of Survival to give the reader a "creative non-victim" who could translate theory into action (65).⁴

In Cat's Eye, however, Atwood appears to grapple directly with the problems of a creating and created self that seeks to reach beyond a scenario of victimhood. This focus reflects the historical context in which Atwood began her writing career, the 1960's, a period in Canada that was characterized both by a "new nationalism" and by an increasing

"feminine consciousness" (Djwa 16).⁵ Today Atwood's work "invites a combined feminist and postcolonial approach," according to Diana Brydon, who defines agency as "the creation of an active role beyond victimhood," a formulation reminiscent of Atwood's "creative non-victim" (49).

Donna Bennett and Nathalie Cooke also point to the intersection of Canadian nationalism and feminism in Atwood's work, signaling that both tendencies have felt compelled "to construct themselves out of a larger culture in which they felt invisible" (33). Bennett and Cooke elaborate on this process which, they state, includes a friction between appearance and authenticity, and a consequent "unnaming" and reinvention of the world. According to these scholars, this passage from Atwood's poetry collection The Circle Game, illustrates the act of reinvention in this author's work:

Talking was difficult. Instead
we gathered coloured pebbles
from the places on the beach
where they occurred.

They were sea-smoothed, sea-completed.
They enclosed what they intended
to mean in shapes
as random and necessary
as the shapes of words

and when finally
we spoke
the sounds of our voices fell
into the air single and

solid and rounded and really
there ("Some Objects of Wood and Stone" 61)

This poem evokes a creative act that begins with the objects at hand, objects that are saturated with language and meaning, laden with promise and potential. Their selection is a matter of chance, but it is also determined in some unspecified way--perhaps by space and time. In addition, they are connected to a language that falls on the side of authenticity rather than appearance, because "the sounds" that result from their discovery are "really there." In short, the poem gives the reader an approach to the process of self-creation in Atwood's later work. Moreover, the "coloured pebbles" strewn on the beach announce the objects that litter the surface of Atwood's text. The number of objects the reader finds lying about in Cat's Eye is striking; the novel is both trash heap and treasure trove conjured by Elaine's plunge into memory. Objects that are buried in layers of time float to the surface like so much flotsam. Thoughts of her early nomadic childhood call forth roadside wild flowers, the caterpillars her father shook from the trees--"blue striped, and velvety and cool, like the muzzles of dogs"--and the grey felt hat that kept the insects out of his hair. Images of gas pumps float up to consciousness, "human-sized, with round discs on top, lit up like pale moons or haloes minus the head. On each disc is a shell or a star, an orange maple leaf, a white rose." The alcohol used for preserving the specimens, with its smell of "white enamel basins," evokes the scent of the stars. They are "cold and white and sharp, I think they must smell like that" (22-23).

The family's move to Toronto precipitated by her father's career change from field-researcher to university professor provokes a new accumulation. The objects in the Zoology Building, themselves organized into layers according to floor, pile up over several pages: "jars full of dead lizards or pickled ox eyeballs"; "a cement pool filled with thick-looking greenish water in which large turtles sit and blink or clamber ponderously up onto the rocks"; "a cage full of gigantic African cockroaches, white-coloured and so poisonous that their keeper has to gas them to make them unconscious every time he

opens the cage" (35). Objects begin to fill the family's newly acquired although spare and unfinished bungalow--stove, refrigerator, and card-table.

A different clutter of remembered objects is acquired by virtue of Elaine's friendships with other little girls, relationships that were once impossible because of her all too brief stints in public schools. Because Elaine lacks familiarity with the discourses of girlhood and domesticity, the names of these objects strike her as extraordinary. Her companion, Carol Campbell, introduces Elaine to pageboys and chintz, a term that strikes neophyte Elaine as more appropriate for a crayfish, or one of the outer space aliens invented by her brother. Equally strange is the designation used for matching sweaters called "twin sets," a name that Elaine finds particularly disappointing because it has nothing to do with twins. It is as if Elaine has moved from a wilderness world of metonymy to an urban domain of metaphor. Moreover, Carol treats these domestic objects with a curious veneration, taking Elaine on a tour of her house "as if it's a museum, as if she personally has collected everything in it" (51).

Elaine learns that girlhood (of a distinctively white, Protestant, middle class variety) is closely tied to the act of accumulation. She discovers how to play at being a girl. Her mentors include Carol and Grace Smeath, who show her how to cut pictures of household items from an old Eatons Catalogue and paste them into scrapbooks next to figures of women representing the proud owners of these objects. Elaine deems this game "tiring," recalling the effort of packing and unpacking that her previous nomadic existence required. However, for Elaine's companions, who envision their pasted "ladies" in single-family dwellings, there is no end to acquisition. "They can add more and more, stuff the pages of their scrapbooks with dining room suites, beds, stacks of towels, one set of dishes after another, and think nothing of it" (54).

There are the gendered collections of boyhood as well. Once in Toronto, brother Stephen builds a considerable stash of comic books under his bed. Elaine remembers Stephen as a perpetual collector. He scavenges milk-bottle tops, pop-bottle tops, licence

plate sightings, and butterfly sightings. For Elaine, Stephen's most significant collection is a jar full of his most prized marbles which he buries in the ravine along with a treasure map, buried separately, that reveals the jar's location.

The succeeding years superimpose additional layers. Elaine's studies in Art and Archaeology--a telling combination of creation and excavation--contribute new images to the increasing debris: Doric, Ionic, and Corinthian columns; Greek and Roman statues with their missing body parts. A second semester adds new madonnas, contorted saints and more:

Biblical subjects tilt towards violence: Judith cutting off the head of Holofernes is now popular. There are a lot more classical gods and goddesses. There are wars, fights and slaughter, as before, but more confused and with intertwined arms and legs. There are still portraits of rich people, although in darker clothing.

As we run through the centuries, new things appear: ships by themselves, animals by themselves, such as dogs and horses. Peasants by themselves. Landscapes, with or without houses. Flowers by themselves, plates of fruit and cuts of meat, with or without lobsters. Lobsters are a favorite, because of the colour.

Naked women.

There is considerable overlap: a naked goddess wreathed in flowers, with a couple of dogs standing by; biblical people with or without clothes, plus or minus animals, trees, and ships. Rich people pretending to be gods and goddesses. Fruit and slaughters are not usually combined, nor are gods and peasants. (325-326)

The narrator's stylistic rendering of art history emulates the substance of the rubble heap, with its confusion of disintegrating categories. Likewise, Toronto, the novel's

setting, becomes an excavation site, where layers of glitz, fashionable boutiques, and chic retro décor thinly mask the staid city of Elaine's childhood.

For Atwood, archaeological projects are part of the Canadian literary landscape; and while she admits there is nothing very new about rummaging around in the past to find one's roots, what authors do with the objects found there will significantly vary. In Survival, Atwood points out that the nature of Canadian history imposes certain limits on the artifacts, stating that "When you've gone through a thin topsoil of immediate ancestors, what you hit will not be Richard the Third or the American or French Revolutions..." (112-113). Instead, Canadian authors have discovered tales of suffering settlers and failed explorers, in other words, tales of victimhood. From the perspective, then, of Atwood's own critical work, the archaeological project in Cat's Eye appears to militate against its canonical tradition. In Cat's Eye, the "thin topsoil" is transformed into a rich, multicolored, and illuminated treasure, a precious source of material for the project of self-creation. Found objects enfold, not simply tales of victimhood, but also stories about discovered authenticity, growth, and success. This reading provides insight into Atwood's choice of a quote from Stephen W. Hawking's A Brief History of Time which precedes the novel's text: "Why do we remember the past, and not the future?" Both dimensions are collapsed into the novel's objects which encompass both a history and a vision of things to come.

The accumulation of textual objects in Cat's Eye is not uncharacteristic of Atwood's prose. In Margaret Atwood: A Feminist Poetics, Frank Davey calls attention to the wordiness, or "verbal wastefulness" in the author's novels. He argues that such stylistic abundance may signal that "words belong to the surface world of manipulated and rationalized experience," a surface that obscures deeper "realities that are best communicated in code, in gestures rather than articulations of language" (76).

Indeed, Atwood's rubble heap stands in opposition to rationally organized categories and collections. This obscured "underground" requires alternative modes of

expression, and the pursuit of such forms constitutes an important focus of Atwood's fiction as well as her poetry. According to Davey, Atwood's poetic "oeuvre" seems to protest against a language of rational generalities that "empties the signified of its history and particularity...." However, restored context and specificity is only part of the project. Davey asserts that Atwood's poems disrupt the logic of chronological time, proposing instead a time that is not measured, but rather "fluid, metamorphic, multiple, without temporal landmarks, in motion but not systematically in motion." The result is a poetry that is "gestural" and "aphoristic"; it is a language that appears to solicit the aid of other arts, "mime or one of the plastic arts" (52-54).

The textual objects in Cat's Eye, then, seem a summary of multiple pursuits. Each is a capsule of collapsed time enfolding both a present and a future; each restores history and specificity to a particular female subject, and consequently disrupts the general category of female object. Finally, each selected object finds alternative expression in a painting by Elaine Risley, mediated by a description of the painting and its history. The novel, in fact, alternates between what Howells terms a "doubled narrative" composed of a "'discursive' memoir version" and a "'figural' version presented through her paintings (204).

This "figural version" refers to Elaine's descriptions of her canvases, descriptions inserted at various points in the coming-of-age story. Narrative alone, or what Elaine calls "the imprecision of words" (3), seems inadequate to the task at hand. For example, the artist sets forth the details of a six-panel series about her mother. The first panel is a realistic, colored pencil rendering; the second, a collage of magazine illustrations in "rancid greens and faded blues and dirty-looking pinks." The next panel is "white on white, the raised parts pipe-cleaners contoured side by side and glued onto a white cloth-covered backing. Reading across from left to right it looked as if my mother was slowly dissolving, from real life into Babylonian bas-relief shadow" (150). The lower panels proceed in the opposite sense, from pipe-cleaners, to collage, and finally to realistic

representation. "You could read it as a materialization, out of the white pipe-cleaner mist into the solid light of day," Elaine explains, adding:

I made this right after she died. I suppose I wanted to bring her back to life. I suppose I wanted her timeless, though there is no such thing on earth. These pictures of her, like everything else, are drenched in time.
(151)

Language somehow falls short of the task, and reaches for an elusive visual element, seeking a complement, a means of attaining the unsayable by gesturing toward illustration.

The accumulation of objects in this novel is also addressed by J. Brooks Bouson, who cites Alberto Manguel's description of the textual rubble as "an atticful of memorabilia," or "an anthropological catalogue of the evolution of Toronto's tribal customs from the forties to the eighties" (qtd. 160). Bouson, however, reads the massive detail as a form of defense against the painful memories of girlhood, whose narrative is "embedded" within copious documentation (160). While this assessment has merit, it gives only a partial understanding of the object's role, underscoring its negative function as obstacle or impediment. However, as this study seeks to demonstrate, the relationship between subject and object world also constitutes a promising site of creative play and self-realization.

Philosophers and researchers who investigate creativity have traditionally focused on agent, process and product (Rothenberg and Hausman 6). While all these components are essential features of the protagonist's work, *Cat's Eye* invites readers to examine the place of self-creation, what object relations theorist D.W. Winnicott designates as a "potential space" between one's inner psychic world and external reality (*Playing* 41), a borderland between inside and outside. In *Cat's Eye*, it is a preoccupation with this very edge between the "me" and the "not-me" that conjures forth objects from Elaine's past. For example, her arrival in Toronto for the retrospective revives an old habit: "I've started to chew my fingers again. There's blood, a taste I remember. It tastes of orange

popsicles, penny gumballs, red licorice, gnawed hair, dirty ice" (9). The ragged fingernails, a recurring motif in much of Atwood's fiction, form a blurred boundary, at once frightening and richly evocative, a source of literally raw materials for creating a sense of self.⁶

The use to which Elaine puts selected objects can be elaborated in light of Winnicott's theories concerning transitional objects. Winnicott posits an initial illusion of oneness between mother and child: "Psychologically the infant takes from a breast that is part of the infant, and the mother gives milk to an infant that is part of herself" (Playing 12). This perception, however, does not endure as the child learns to distinguish between self and external world. Winnicott suggests that the passage to a new perception is accomplished by means of a "transitional object," which constitutes both the child's first "symbol," as well as his or her "first experience of play" (Playing 96).

The transitional object functions as a symbol of the mother (or "some part-object, such as the breast") that staves off anxiety during periods of separation between mother and infant. However, just as important as its symbolic status is the fact that it belongs to external reality; Winnicott specifies that the object is not internalized as a mental concept, but rather it is a possession to be forgotten or discarded when the field of play expands to wider cultural experience. In short, the transitional object occupies a space in-between; it is neither wholly inside nor completely outside, neither completely within the child's magical control, nor totally without in a remote and uncontrollable world. It exists in the space of a playful illusion that replaces the initial illusion of oneness.

What is more, the nature of the illusion--which, for Winnicott, expands to encompass the realms of art and religion in adult life--must remain unchallenged. To question whether the object originates from the subjective or objective world would be inappropriate and misplaced and would ultimately destroy the game. On the other hand, to impose the illusion on others as objective reality would constitute madness (Playing 4-12). The precarious business of negotiating the inside and outside worlds is never

finished; Winnicott assumes that "...no human being is free from the strain of relating inner and outer reality, and that relief from this strain is provided by an intermediate area of experience....This intermediate area is in direct continuity with the area of the small child who is 'lost' in play" (Playing 13).

Winnicott's discussion of play also hypothesizes an interaction between child and environment that leads to a moment of ecstasy or satisfaction. However, such an experience is predicated on the presence of another, the mother figure, who provides an ambience of safety and support, which in turn allows the infant to become "unintegrated." Such a state is reached only in the absence of demands on the child that would require the child in some way to comply or acquiesce. In other words, the infant is in a purposeless state and is therefore free to react spontaneously to the sensations and impulses s/he encounters. "It is only under these conditions," Winnicott concludes, "that the infant can have an experience that feels real" (Maturation 32-34).⁷

In the early chapters of Cat's Eye, Elaine appears to experience just such moments of delight which are translated into expressions of authentic desire. Her childhood travels give her the opportunity to wander along the littered margins of gas stations and motel sites where she discovers scraps of shiny silver paper used to package cigarettes. She begins to collect it: "I don't know what I'll do with it," she observes, "but it will be something amazing" (28). She responds in a similar way to a balloon which her mother presents to her daughter as she nurses her through the mumps. "It was blue, translucent, round, like a private moon." Unfortunately the balloon soon bursts, leaving Elaine "heartbroken," but all the while hoping for another, "one that will not break" (28).

The absolute assurance of her desire and pleasure recalls Winnicott's words about experiences that feel real; they also resonate with Atwood's image of the "sea-smoothed" pebbles whose "sounds" are "really there." In light of Winnicott's theories, the narrator appears to be tracing the beginnings of an authentic selfhood, informed by the subject's unimpeded response to surrounding objects discovered within the framework of a secure

environment. Elaine has now defined herself as someone whose predilection is for things shiny, blue, round and enduring, preferences that are elaborated in deeper and increasingly overdetermined patterns of meaning as the novel progresses. As an artist, she concocts her own recipe for an egg-based tempera, which she prizes for its ability to render a shiny and resistant surface. In her painting "Life Drawing," the semi-nude model is framed by representations of Elaine's art instructor and lover, Josef, and her first husband, Jon, also an artist. However, despite her object status in the painting, the model's imperviousness is signaled by her head, "a sphere of bluish glass" (366). Moreover, in the final chapters, which recount the opening night of the artist's retrospective, the reader discovers that Elaine's self-portrait is named after her treasured blue marble of the title, "Cat's Eye."

However, balloons and silver paper are not Elaine's only desires. She also longs to have girl friends. This exigency, which is juxtaposed in the narrative to her wish for the other two, underscores a contrast between authentic and socially constructed desire. Elaine has very little experience of other girls, because of her family's protracted travels. Her knowledge comes, instead, from the school readers used to teach Elaine and Stephen basic skills as they move from campsites to motels. In fact, the textbook characters, with their houses, picket fences and forms of dress, have nothing in common with Elaine. However, while Stephen draws scenes of war, Elaine draws little girls in every variety of dress, from old-fashioned "puff sleeves" to the "big hairbows" sported by her textbook heroine, Jane. As the pictures suggest, Elaine's conception of little girls is limited to adornment. "I don't think about what I might say to them if I actually met some," she remarks. "I haven't gotten that far" (29).

Elaine's representation, moreover, begs the question of gender, because the little-girl category seems without substance, reduced to the external trappings of fashion history and a concomitant absence of dialogue or story. Details pertaining to clothing and fashion pile up as the novel progresses, an accumulation whose very weight seems to suggest ironically that the category "female gender" bears a resemblance to the emperor's new

clothes. The matter of clothing remains problematic throughout the text; clothing serves primarily as a disguise that will allow the protagonist to "pass" as she struggles to fit into a classification in which she cannot entirely believe. However, since Elaine's created self has its point of departure in the object world, it is not surprising that she must come to terms with gender via this abundance of superficial trappings; the object world of girlhood is the realm of excess and decorative surface. This formulation adds a new dimension to the significance of the textual rubble heap; rather than reject the discards of social history, the narrator embraces these material scraps which are then incorporated into acts of creation and artistic transvaluation. As an adult, Elaine continues to express a preference for excess, preferring ornate Catholic churches to the more severe Protestant ones: "I liked the shameless extravaganza; gold leaf and baroque excesses did not put me off" (197). However, the appeal of excess is accompanied by ambiguity; at her first show, a group exhibit including three other women artists, Elaine worries that her paintings, compared to the other works in the show, are without substance, because her pieces are "too decorative, too merely pretty" (350).

Elaine must adapt to a different kind of play in order to master the art of girlhood. Her efforts are not entirely unsuccessful, although uncomfortable and inauthentic. She reports that she feels "self-conscious, as if I'm only doing an imitation of a girl" (52). Her apprenticeship is also mixed with a fear of humiliation. "I know the unspoken rules of boys," she explains, "but with girls I sense that I am always on the verge of some unforeseen, calamitous blunder" (47). Indeed, this perception foreshadows her role as a victim who is increasingly punished for her lack of knowledge about and conformity to middle-class girlhood's tacit standards.

Paradoxically, Elaine's playmates seem oblivious to the novel's rendering of femininity as a matter of arbitrary excess; on the contrary, their games concentrate on remaining within some rigid but unspoken category, games that avoid immersion with objects by staying at a safe distance from the precarious edge. Elaine is instructed not to

touch the rubber plant at the house of her friend Grace Smeath, a restriction that evokes the museum-piece reverence with which Carol treats domestic objects. Grace lets her companions use her coloring books as long as they promise to stay inside the lines. Certain proscriptions also apply to playing school; the participants are forbidden to draw pictures, or pretend disobedience; spelling and math are the only acceptable subjects, because "Grace doesn't like disorder" (53). However, Elaine has not yet lost her affinity for the playful edge. She climbs up the frame of a partially constructed house, leaving her fearful girlfriends behind. Perched on a beam, she savors a "red-gold sunset." The tenuous boundary continues to feel sufficiently secure, a perception that is essential to attaining Winnicott's unintegrated state. Elaine remembers the experience: "I don't think about falling. I am not yet afraid of heights" (62).

The potential space of play, where the boundaries between subject and object blur, is by its very nature delightful but also frightening, according to Winnicott. It appears to contain the irony that one is most oneself--at the height of authentic or creative experience--when one temporarily loses a sense of self. For this reason, Winnicott consistently refers to the "precariousness" of play which straddles "near hallucination" and "shared reality." Games, which are rule-bound, tend to impose a certain organization on play that "forestalls" play's frightening dimension (Playing 50-52).

Cat's Eye, however, portrays female gender as a kind of game whose rules are elusive, arbitrary and unspoken. Elaine's experience of girlhood is not unlike Alice's proverbial plunge beyond the looking-glass into an absurd and unpredictable world. The sequence posited by Winnicott that begins with the transitional phenomenon, and leads on to individual play, shared play and then to wider cultural experiences (Playing 51) becomes short-circuited in the novel. Girlhood play precipitates a loss of self rather than a subjectivity enhanced by shared play and social integration.

Elaine learns that losing oneself in play is not only delightful; it can also be annihilating. Indeed, play informed by gender relations implies an interrelationship

between play and power. According to Mihai I. Spariosu, the concept of play in Western thought has been consistently commingled with power in either its pre-rational form as "physical, naked, and immediate" or its rational guise as represented rather than presented phenomena (*Dionysus* 7). For Elaine the experience of growing up female appears to alternate between these two expressions of power, between the terror Elaine experiences at the hands of her girlhood playmates who seek to enforce the unspoken gender code, and her later efforts to represent the nature of play in her paintings.

The shift from the delights of non-integration to the terror of disintegration is determined in part by the advent of Cordelia. When Elaine returns from a summer's absence, brought about by her father's continuing research in northern Canada, she discovers that Cordelia has joined her group of friends. Immediately Elaine senses the possibility of a different space, where boundaries are less rigid, where edges are filled with imaginative potential. On their very first encounter, Elaine realizes that Cordelia is not preoccupied with staying inside the lines. Remembering that first meeting, Elaine recalls: "She creates a circle of two, takes me in" (71). Her new playmate, however, sensing her companion's gender insecurities, exploits this knowledge in order to enhance her own power. Elaine is convinced of her own inadequacy. "I am not normal," Elaine surmises, "I am not like other girls. Cordelia tells me so, but she will help me" (118).

Cordelia quickly prevails as the leader of the other girls, inventing imaginative scenarios that approach the boundary between the subjective and the real. For example, Cordelia lures her companions to the edge of a rickety bridge that the girls cross on their way home from school. The bridge spans a ravine, a menacing borderland frequented by dangerous men, according to neighborhood lore. It is reputed to be an unsafe place for little girls, although Stephen plays there with his friends, and Elaine's mother chooses the ravine for her solitary walks.⁸ Cordelia expands on the ravine's dubious reputation, asserting that the creek below, clogged with discarded junk, is actually fed by water from the cemetery. These "dissolved dead people" rise with the mist and snatch those who

stray from the bridge's safety (75). The girls decide to gather a bouquet of weeds for these spirits, although Elaine can't tell whether they are providing lunch for the living or offerings for the dead. Elaine assures herself that it is all a game, but is disturbed to find the bouquet has disappeared the next day. In a sense it is the best kind of game, one that doesn't insist on staying between the lines; here subjective and objective worlds seem hopelessly blurred.

Cordelia's imaginative pronouncements seem to carry a certain weight in part because of her greater social status derived from her family's wealth. She instructs her friends on the importance of sticking a pin in the bottom shell of a soft boiled egg "so the witches can't put out to sea". Cordelia's older sisters also indulge in dramatic pronouncements—"like an imitation of something," Elaine observes, although she is hard put to discover what they are imitating (72). Given the household's theatricality—all three daughters are named after characters from Shakespeare—it is not surprising that Cordelia, decked in eyebrow-pencil moustache and velvet-curtain cape, insists her girlfriends act out plays of her invention, dramas that frequently fail to coalesce into a coherent shape.

In fact, when compared with Elaine's experience of the balloon, Cordelia's play has a ring of inauthenticity. Her smile itself is "like a grown up's, as if she's learned it and is doing it out of politeness" (70). What Elaine vaguely perceives as a child, but knows with greater certainty as she grows older, is that Cordelia herself is a misfit within her own family, unable to please regardless of her efforts to imitate her sisters' femininity. In later episodes, Cordelia recalls childhood fantasies, imagining herself seated in complete stillness and utter silence in her desire to please. It is this sense of her own inauthentic and failed subjectivity that Cordelia projects onto Elaine, her newest playmate.

Thus, Cordelia introduces a raw power into girlhood games that require a victor and a victim. Elaine traces the beginning of her victimization to a childhood game in which she played the part of the beheaded Mary Queen of Scots, a repressed memory that rises to consciousness with Elaine's return to Toronto. She recalls being lowered into a

hole dug in Cordelia's backyard. The hole is covered with boards and dirt; then, the other girls run off, leaving Elaine essentially buried alive. She has been literally precipitated over the edge of play into the terror of the void. She is unable to evoke a mental image of herself underground, "only a black square filled with nothing, a square like a door" (107). All other memories of the trauma, including her rescue, lie buried in the past.

The persecution continues. Elaine is too "goody-goody," too dumb, or too smart. Her posture is wrong. She is tricked into saying dirty words. She is shunned for her ignorance. With each supposed faux pas, Cordelia confronts her victim: "What do you have to say for yourself?" (117); Elaine's only response is "nothing." Cordelia furnishes Elaine with an image of her disintegrating self. She tells Elaine to imagine ten stacks of plates. With each mistake, Elaine is to visualize one stack of plates crashing into fragments. Each time Cordelia shouts "Crash!", Elaine ponders what will happen when the last stack has fallen. Gradually Elaine incorporates Cordelia's projection, assuming she is indeed "nothing." As an adult, Elaine reflects: "It was a word I came to connect with myself, as if I was nothing, as if there was nothing there at all" (41).

However, Elaine is able to resist annihilation thanks to her cat's eye marble. While Stephen becomes adept at shooting marbles, and he acquires an impressive collection, Elaine, by contrast, keeps only one, a blue cat's eye with its "bloom of coloured petals in the centre...." Its shiny surface captures the brilliance of her treasured silver paper, while its color and shape are reminiscent of the blue balloon in miniature, except that the marble, true to her earlier wish, is not so easily broken. The marble echoes past experience, but also announces a vision, the potential of an unfolding. Cat's eye marbles, Elaine explains, resemble eyes, "but not the eyes of cats. They're the eyes of something that isn't known but exists anyway; like the green eye of the radio; like the eyes of aliens from a distant planet" (62-63). Ironically, Elaine stores this kernel of authentic selfhood inside her red plastic purse, a kind of commodity fetish, a symbol (rather than an authentic/ation) of her gender, acquired in emulation of her girlfriends' hoarded objects.

At times, Elaine puts the marble in her pocket and takes it to school as a talisman, because she believes in the object's power to protect her. She also credits the cat's eye with the power to permeate boundaries, a capacity for "looking out through bone and cloth with its impartial gaze...." At the same time, the object confers on Elaine the ability to withdraw into vision as a means of self protection: "With the help of its power I retreat back into my eyes." Thus artistic vision is born as a defense strategy. This ploy transforms her persecutors into mere abstract shapes, "blocks of colour, a red square of cardigan, a blue triangle of skirt" (155).

Elaine's encounter with the intricately interwoven nature of gender, power and play is further complicated when her victimization receives tacit support from the adult world in the form of Mrs. Smeath, Grace's mother, whose power further diminishes Elaine's sense of self. The narrator describes her in all her unflattering and matronly detail, her big bones, her skin "that looks rubbed raw as if scrubbed with a potato brush." Her bibbed apron sags at the waist, as if she had "a single breast that goes all the way across her front and continues down until it joins her waist." A sparse moustache, sturdy shoes and heavy stockings "which make her legs look stuffed and sewn up the backs" complete the picture (57-58).

However, Mrs. Smeath's most important feature is her bad heart, which proves both literal and figurative. Elaine quickly recognizes the power of illness, since the girls must exercise great caution in their play, so as not to disturb Mrs. Smeath's afternoon naps. The notion of a bad heart fascinates Elaine, and she conjures up its image as she cuts out valentine hearts at school. She sees it "hidden," "pumping in the thick fleshy darkness"; it is "red, but with a reddish-black patch on it like rot in an apple or a bruise....But the bad heart is also compelling. It's a curiosity, a deformity. A horrible treasure" (58).

Mrs. Smeath's heart shares certain properties with the cat's eye; it, too, is capable of penetrating boundaries inasmuch as Elaine credits Mrs. Smeath with the power to see

into her own heart and to find it wanting. In counterpoint to the marble's brilliance, the heart exerts its own dark energy and thus becomes an emblem of the woman's authority to sanction the destructive power games that the little girls play. Having discovered that Elaine's family does not go to church, Mrs. Smeath invites Elaine to attend Sunday services. Despite her parents' concern about the dubious value of such religious practice, Elaine accepts so that she can have Grace all to herself. Everything is new to Elaine, including the spell-binding luminescence of the stained glass. She dutifully learns Bible verses and obediently covers her head before entering the place of worship, but despite her efforts, she senses Mrs. Smeath's disapproval. She gains proof of it when she surprises a conversation in which Mrs. Smeath agrees that Elaine is "like a heathen." What is more, Mrs. Smeath asserts that Elaine merits the persecution of her playmates, which she sees as nothing short of "God's punishment" visited on a family of miscreants (179-180).

With the recovery of this long-buried memory, Elaine finds an explanation for her intense hatred of Mrs. Smeath, whom she has repeatedly painted in indecent poses that border on the obscene. Mrs. Smeath is a hypocritical enforcer of rigid middle-class morality, as well as something of a monster who sanctions cruelty in the name of some higher good. According to Earl G. Ingersoll, Mrs. Smeath is the "Bad Mother," a representation of evil split off from Elaine's own mother, who is helpless in the face of her daughter's dilemma. Mrs. Risley, then, is the "Good Mother," although ineffectual, because she is unable to school her child in the ways of "femininity." She is "the representation, like her husband, of the well-intentioned, virtuous, but not terribly effective liberal humanists who sense that evil exists but refuse to acknowledge it, since a knowledge of evil would force them to find a place for it in their world" (20-22).

More importantly for this reading, Mrs. Smeath seems to invade the psychic space of play which must feel secure in order that an individual might attain an unintegrated state where the objects in the environment can be experienced as real. Winnicott explains that the capacity for play is initially predicated on "the infant's awareness of the continued

existence of a reliable mother...." It is this internalized awareness that allows for individual play. In other words, Winnicott's understanding suggests that one is never truly alone in the sense that creative play assumes a benevolent presence which in turn allows the child to believe in a "benign environment" (Maturational 31-32). Mrs. Smeath's malevolence, then, contaminates the potential space of self-creation by sanctioning games of power and impinging on the child's developing sense of self by the imposition of her adult demands, which, moreover, the little girl cannot hope to meet.

Mrs. Smeath's power may seem puzzling; however, the narrator makes clear that the woman exhibits a certain energy, albeit a poisonous one. Elaine's mental image of Mrs. Smeath is that of a napping woman "luminous in the dim space, like a phosphorescent mushroom" (58). Like all luminous objects, she exerts a attraction, drawing Elaine into her force field. In addition, the reader is struck by a silent distance separating Elaine and her mother and creating an emptiness in which Mrs. Smeath can assert her power. Mrs. Risley responds to Elaine's increasing unhappiness with useless, formulaic wisdom, advising her to "have more backbone" (156). When Cordelia reveals the mysteries of menstruation to her playmates, the girls are overwhelmed by the inevitability of their changing bodies, finding it impossible to address questions about the female body to their mothers. "Between us and them," Elaine recalls, "is a gulf, an abyss, that goes down and down. It's filled with wordlessness" (93). Elaine discovers that the business of becoming female eludes language; it occupies a space akin to that of the ravine, a site already associated with death and the dangers of sexuality. It is also the location of discarded excess--tires, broken bottles, and other useless refuse. Not surprisingly, then, the ravine, location of disorder and excess, as well as the site of luminous mystery in the form of Stephen's buried marbles, will become the place of recovered creativity.

The attraction exerted by Cordelia and Mrs. Smeath transforms the potential space of play into a dangerous razor's edge. Elaine becomes preoccupied with the tenuous

boundary between inside and outside that now threatens to give way, precipitating a spill into the void. In dreams, she picks berries from the deadly nightshade plants that flourish in the ravine. Round, shiny-red and fragile, the berries reverse the properties of the blue marble, with its hard protective surface. Elaine remembers: "As I touch them they burst, and the blood runs over my hands" (145).

At the Zoology Building open-house, the heart of a vivisected turtle, which has been hooked to an amplifier to magnify the sounds of its fading beat, provokes intense anxiety. The animal straddles that tenuous edge. It is both alive and dead, its heart exposed to view but still inside its body. "It's like a hand, clenching and unclenching. It's like an eye," Elaine recollects shortly before she passes out (170). The image of the turtle heart rhymes with that of Mrs. Smeath's diseased heart, which the little girl endows with vision: "her bad heart floats in her body like an eye, an evil eye, it sees me" (180).

However, the turtle-heart episode has also given Elaine valuable information. She discovers her ability to faint, to step outside a dangerous situation. She begins to exercise this defense at school, mastering the art of fainting at will. In this unconscious state she can often see her body lying on the ground, like the victim of a car accident. She has once again retreated into vision, but this time she has literally come apart, leaving her victimhood behind. This moment of fragmentation begins to enhance the reader's understanding of the artist's assertion: "There is never only one, of anyone" (6). Elaine experiences a letting-go of rational consciousness, and then learns to master the art of this out-of-body state "without falling over. At these times," she reports, "I feel blurred, as if there are two of me, one superimposed on the other, but imperfectly" (173).

Thus, Elaine discovers a means of balancing on the dangerous edge. But fainting is not flying; it is survival, not creation. At this point, Elaine seems to have embodied Atwood's version of the dilemma of the subject--at once Canadian and female--who, having internalized defeat, can only endure. The narrator captures this state of affairs in her description of a conversation over Christmas dinner, when Elaine's father explains to a

guest that the turkey they are eating is vastly inferior to its wild counterpart. The wild turkey, he explains, is not only smarter; it also retains its ability to fly. Elaine ponders her father's remarks as she helps herself to a serving of the domestic bird: "It's the wing of a tame turkey, the stupidest bird in the world, so stupid it can't even fly any more. I am eating lost flight" (131).

Nonetheless flying and falling share a common site. In Cat's Eye, both involve approaching the precarious and paradoxical edge of play, where binary categories tend to blur. Falling becomes a metaphor for the draw of the brilliant object. Falling is articulated as a matter of attraction, a play of force fields, an inevitable part of the physical world. It is the dream image of her protective cat's eye, plummeting down like a shooting star, that Elaine internalizes as a child and ultimately adopts as the emblem of her art: "It's falling down out of the sky, straight towards my head, brilliant and glassy. It hits me, passes right into me, but without hurting, except that it's cold" (145). Here, the revered object emulates the heavenly bodies that so fascinate Elaine's brother. As Stephen shares his increasing knowledge of astronomy with Elaine, she learns that the star's radiance is a matter of sheer appearance; since its light must travel such a vast distance, the star has gone dark and cold by the time those on Earth perceive its brilliance. Its illumination is, at heart, a beautiful illusion. Falling objects, then, promise brilliance, but also imply the menace of the void. In a subsequent dream, Elaine sees herself standing precariously on a rickety bridge over the dark ravine. The bridge begins to disintegrate, while her mother stands on the bank, unable to help.

Elaine tells the reader that her painting Falling Women portrays falling in love. It depicts three women jumping from a bridge, but they are gently floating, their skirts ballooned like parachutes onto the rocks below. In a moment of contentment, Elaine perceives her first husband as a still life, glowing "like a plum in sunlight, richly coloured, perfect in form" (341). But things are forever falling apart, because time itself, Elaine concludes, is "a blur, the moving edge we live in" (409). When love ebbs, it leaves behind

a vision of fragments and debris: "broken bottles, old gloves, rusting pop cans, nibbled fishbodies, bones" (372). The art of selfhood, then, consists of balancing on the creative edge, where the unintegrated state promises a blurred intensity that is both illumination and chaos.

The persecution of Elaine culminates with a fall. Elaine anticipates a coming crisis in the intensity of Cordelia's malice: "She's backing me towards an edge, like the edge of a cliff: one step back, another step, and I'll be over and falling." Having fallen herself, Cordelia punishes Elaine for laughing at her by throwing Elaine's winter hat into the ravine, and then demanding that she retrieve it in order to obtain forgiveness. Elaine struggles down the banks and out onto the frozen surface, but at that moment the ice gives way, and the child falls into the icy water. Her playmates have long since run off. Leaving her boots in the muck of the creek, she makes her way back to the bank. Cold and exhausted, she lies down to sleep despite the falling snow, but a voice prompts her to open her eyes. There is someone standing on the bridge in the dusk.

A woman wrapped in a dark cloak floats down from the bridge. Wrapped inside this robe is something red: "It must be her heart," Elaine concludes, "on the outside of her body, glowing like neon, like a coal." Elaine is filled with happiness as she feels herself surrounded by warmth. "It will be all right," the woman tells her. "Go home" (189). Elaine scrambles out of the ravine, and is met by a disheveled Mrs. Risley, who is searching for her daughter.

Elaine's vision signals her ability to restore the illusion of a secure oneness through her use of the discarded object. The source of Elaine's extraordinary vision is a holy card she found on the sidewalk, a card representing the Virgin Mary, her heart on the outside of her robe pierced by seven swords. Elaine had been praying to this figure as an alternative to Mrs. Smeath's inexorable God. She squeezes her eyes shut in an effort to conjure up the Virgin's image, but all she can manage is an image of the heart, which bears a strong resemblance to Elaine's red plastic purse.

The episode on the bridge is interpreted by David Cowart as "Elaine's symbolic death and resurrection..." (126), and the protagonist's Virgin-like vision as an image of "ideal womanhood." The woman on the bridge "is at once the muse within and the idealized representation of her own risen self, the Elaine Risley that she will honorably spend her life striving to become" (134). Such idealistic striving, however, seems contradicted by the vindictiveness with which Elaine portrays Mrs. Smeath, as well as her hardened response to other characters in times of need. What is more, as Sonia Gerns points out, while Atwood does tend to mythologize the novel's objects, turning them into icons, she demythologizes them as well, painting the Virgin as a fierce lioness with a gnawed bone and as a tired old woman slogging through slush with her groceries (150).

These multiple representations of the Virgin point to the dream-like nature of Elaine's vision, which in turn gestures to the found object. When Elaine puzzles over the nature of her vision, she concludes that the woman in the cloak was really there, "but in the same way dreams are" (192). The holy card is layered with complex and ambivalent meaning. Superimposed on the image of Mrs. Smeath's rotten heart is the pierced heart of the Virgin, which in turn is associated with the purse, symbol of an acquired gender. However, instead of formulating an equation between saintly suffering and ideal womanhood, Elaine turns away from her victim status. Like her treasured, star-like cat's eye, its image masks the void with brilliant illusion. In emulation of the games she once played with her brother, Elaine uses this found object to "see in the dark." She projects the object onto the environment in the form of a supportive mother figure, thereby restoring security to the potential space of play. The holy card, then, functions in much the same manner as the transitional object, providing material for Elaine to conjure the illusion of presence in times of the mother's absence. Here it is useful to recall Winnicott's stipulation that it is inappropriate to determine whether the object of play originates in the subjective world of the individual or the objective world of things concrete. Clearly, Elaine's apparition belongs to both realms.

Elaine's vision of the Virgin-like figure stepping off the bridge inspires Elaine to walk away from Cordelia the next time she becomes a target for her venom. Describing this new-found ability, she says: "It's like stepping off a cliff, believing the air will hold you up. And it does." This act confirms her belief in the hard core of a real self that mimics the cat's eye. Turning her back on Cordelia, she affirms: "There's something hard in me, crystalline, a kernel of glass" (193). The episode shares with Winnicott's theories an optimistic conviction that the capacity for creative play is tenaciously persistent.

Winnicott asserts:

...one has to allow for the possibility that there cannot be complete destruction of a human individual's capacity for creative living and that, even in the most extreme case of compliance and the establishment of a false personality, hidden away somewhere there exists a secret life that is satisfactory because of its being creative or original to that human being.

(Playing 68)

Although the appearance of Elaine's Virgin Mary signals a restored capacity for self-creation, the experience is not immediately put to the service of art. On the contrary, Elaine begins to fashion a self based on the hard surface of her childhood talisman, with its separation from and imperviousness to the outside. As an adolescent, Elaine describes herself as "happy as a clam, hard-shelled, firmly closed" (201). As Elaine's personality begins to harden, Cordelia's starts to fall apart. Having flunked out of a private institution, Cordelia returns to public school and renews her relationship with Elaine. By this time Elaine has developed a "mean mouth" which she frequently uses on Cordelia for "target practice" (235).

Elaine has mastered power-driven gender games, only now the roles of victor and victim are reversed. Walking home through the cemetery at dusk, Elaine takes great pleasure in evoking the same fear Cordelia had so cleverly summoned in the past. Elaine insists that she is a vampire, and that the Elaine who walks about in daylight is her

identical twin. Terrified, Cordelia insists that Elaine stop playing, but Elaine can't help but savor her new-found power. The game is only interrupted when they realize that the cemetery gates will soon be locked for the night.

Commentators characteristically read Cordelia as Elaine's double or twin. Ingersoll suggests that each member of the dyad is "fashioning the other in the image of a self she could not otherwise confront" (24). Cowart links Cordelia to the hosts of "shadowy doubles" that abound in Western literature, listing Oscar Wilde's portrait of Dorian Gray, Joseph Conrad's secret sharer, and Mary Shelley's monster as cases in point. Cordelia is likewise an "evil or base self" which must be "integrated or brought into harmony with the good self" in order to avoid destruction of the individual (128). According to these readings, Cat's Eye reiterates the thematic preoccupation of Atwood's Bodily Harm and attempts to resolve the binary tension in the same way. In Bodily Harm, the heroine Rennie comes to understand her own complicity in victor/victim games with the realization that her anonymous persecutor is in fact her double "with silver eyes that twin and reflect her own" (287).

Bouson in part echoes these readings, concurring that Elaine internalizes Cordelia's persecutory aspect (174). To illustrate, this critic recalls the novel's account of a comic book story the girls read to each other in which a pretty sister discovers the half-burned face of her twin glaring back at her from the mirror. Later Elaine paints her only portrait of Cordelia, entitled Half a Face. In the background a second face hangs on the wall covered with a white cloth which gives it the appearance of a mask. Its masked nature recalls the anonymity of the persecutor in Bodily Harm, a stance with which Elaine is still reluctant to identify in Cat's Eye. Reflecting on this picture, Elaine muses: "I'm not afraid of seeing Cordelia. I'm afraid of being Cordelia. Because in some way we changed places, and I've forgotten when" (227).

The juxtaposition of the vampire episode and the painting do not so much beg the question of who Cordelia is, but rather where she is. The vampire story supports a reading

in which Cordelia is a projection of the self. The incident appears to coincide with what Winnicott terms "object-relating" where an object outside the subject is invested with meaning. In this case, he explains, "the subject allows certain alterations in the self to take place, of a kind that has caused us to invent the term cathexis." At the same time, "the subject is depleted to the extent that something of the subject is found in the object, though enriched by feeling." In this sense, the subject "can only feed on the self" (Playing 88, 90). A selfhood that is limited to object-relating seems narrowly bounded; as the fenced cemetery of the text seems to suggest, this version of subjectivity is something of a dead end. In the victor/victim dynamic the double can do no more than feed off its twin in true vampire fashion.

However, Elaine's painting indicates that the subject is not entirely isolated from the object's difference, as is the case with object-relating. On one hand, the painting seeks to maintain the separation by masking the face in the background, and by covering the eyes. On the other, the representation is belied by the title and the artist's fear that she has somehow taken on Cordelia's identity. The ambivalence points to a movement away from object-relating, where "the subject is an isolate," to what Winnicott calls "object-usage," where the object is not an ensemble of projections, but a real and autonomous entity that participates in a "shared reality" (Playing 88). Thus, the painting plays with the boundary between separation and connection.

Once again, the thematic preoccupations of Cat's Eye resonate with those of Bodily Harm. In the earlier novel, protagonist Rennie insists on the difference between her own status and the victimhood of Lora Lucas, on whose body various power struggles are played out. At the novel's conclusion, Rennie demonstrates her connection with Lora when she grasps her hand in their shared prison cell in an effort to draw Lora back to life (Rubenstein 273). However, the self-other problematic, resolved only at the novel's conclusion through the joining of hands, takes on a greater complexity in Cat's Eye. In the later novel, the boundary between self and other is continually blurred, with its recurring

image of twins evoking simultaneous separation and connection. At the Zoology Building open house, for example, Elaine spots a jar of dead identical twins floating in greyish liquid; their separation is denied by their shared circulation system that has been injected with dyes, "so we can see that their blood systems are connected" (169).

It can be argued, then, that Cordelia is not only Elaine's double, but also an autonomous other with whom Elaine seeks to establish a sense of shared reality. Such an awareness is accomplished, Winnicott theorizes, by a child's repeated fantasy of the other's destruction. When the projected destruction fails to come true, the child gleefully discovers that the object is constant, outside the infant's omnipotent control. In this way, Winnicott explains, "it is the destructive drive that creates the quality of externality" (Playing 90-93). The dynamic between Cordelia and Elaine seems to capture the protagonist's efforts to move from object-relating to object-use, yet throughout most of the novel she continually blurs this distinction. Elaine does have fantasies of Cordelia's destruction; she dreams of Cordelia plummeting off a cliff, or being trapped in an iron lung. However, Cordelia's autonomous status is called into question by the fact that Elaine dreams of herself in identical situations, rendering Cordelia's position inside or outside undecidable.

The text's narrative organization repeats this dual aspect. Even with the conclusion of adolescence, Cordelia doesn't go away; like a constant object, she resurfaces throughout the narrative, first as a virtual high school drop out, then as a bit-part actress, and finally as the victim of a nervous breakdown. During Elaine's stay in Toronto for the retrospective, Cordelia becomes an obsession. Elaine dreads the return of her persecutor who once convinced her she was nothing. Anticipating Cordelia's appearance at the exhibit, she plans to assume an appropriate disguise or stance, one that will cast her in the role of successful artist--a victor at last--and thereby hide her recurring feelings of nothingness and proving Cordelia wrong. At the same time, she moves beyond resentment, longing for the autonomous Cordelia who could become a partner in the shared reality Elaine has represented in her paintings.

However, while Cordelia appears a constant, she also moves ever farther away from Elaine. First Cordelia's family moves to a wealthier neighborhood, after which time Elaine rarely sees her companion. Cordelia becomes increasingly remote, her presence consisting only of brief encounters with Elaine, until she disappears completely. Form is echoed by content as Cordelia herself becomes increasingly fragmented. Visiting Cordelia in a rest home after her attempted suicide, the adult Elaine observes: "It's as if Cordelia has placed herself beyond me, out of my reach, where I can't get at her. She has let go of her idea of herself. She is lost." (358). Thus the text creates a paradoxical pattern of intense concentration counterpointed by increasing dispersion that echoes the interwoven pattern of connection and separation.

A similar pattern of intensity and dispersion also obtains in the relationship between Elaine and her brother Stephen, a character who, I suggest, also figures as a twin in the text. It is as if Atwood is reconfiguring Aristophanes' conception of primeval humankind in Plato's Symposium. According to the myth, each symmetrically round individual was split in two by the gods, leaving each half compelled to seek its matching counterpart in life. The original beings were of three types, one composed of two male halves, one of two female halves and the third, Androgynous, of one male and one female component. In this way, Aristophanes explains the variety of human desire. By following the attraction established by one's primeval nature, one might realize true love with one's missing half in the union of the whole (353-358).

In Cat's Eye, however, there is a double attraction or intensity exerted by both Cordelia and Stephen. In the case of Stephen, the connectedness of twins is suggested by the play of brother and sister as they accompany their parents on their travels. Elaine remembers how, placed head to toe in a motel bed to minimize the horseplay, "we try to see how far we can get our sock feet up each other's pyjama legs" (30). Elaine and Stephen also partake of a shared reality, as do Elaine and Cordelia. For example, he

eagerly shares his knowledge with his little sister, teaching her, among other things, to see in the dark:

You never know when you might need to do this, he says...you have to stay still, in the darkness, waiting until your eyes become accustomed to no light. Then the shapes of things begin to emerge, greyish and glimmering and insubstantial, as if they're condensing from air. (26)

This proves to be one of Elaine's most valuable lessons, coming to her aid when she summons the Virgin-like image as she lies on the banks of the ravine.

The initial intensity of their relationship progressively dims when the family moves to Toronto. The children now have separate rooms, and their forms of communication-- tin cans attached with string, coded messages and kicks traded under the dining room table-- announce impending separation. School imposes a gendered code of behavior that inhibits communication: "Boys get teased for having younger sisters, or sisters of any kind, or mothers; it's like having new clothes" (47), so Elaine loyally avoids her brother in this setting. At the same time, she seems to sense that separation is not a feasible model for self-creation, because it impairs one's ability to fly. While Stephen is fond of singing a World War II song that begins with the words "Coming in on a wing and a prayer," Elaine finds the song sad, reasoning that a bird can't fly with one wing, and therefore "the prayer in the song is useless" (24).

The increasing separation between Elaine and her brother contributes to Elaine's sense of nothingness. Social codes prohibit certain boy-like behaviors for girls. When Elaine's friend Carol accompanies the Risley children on a visit to the Zoology Building, Elaine is unable to join Stephen in teasing Carol when he suggests she have some of the preserved ox eyeballs for dinner. While she is no longer able to participate in the invention of "revolting foods, such as toadburgers," she is equally unable to squeal and wriggle as Carol does at the mention of them, because Stephen would immediately spot her inauthenticity. "So I say nothing," Elaine recalls (50).

There are still, nonetheless, moments of intensity, when Steven shares his knowledge with his little sister, teaching her about the stars. "We aren't really seeing them at all," he explains, "we're just seeing the light they sent out years, hundreds of years, thousands of years ago. The stars are like echoes" (104). Elaine responds to Stephen's explanations by discovering the stars previously unperceived and "wordless" brilliance which exerts an intense attraction: "I feel as if my body is dissolving and I am being drawn up and up, like thinning mist into a vast emptying space" (105).

Stephen's growing passion for astrophysics, itself a kind of intensity that draws him ever farther from Elaine, reveals to her the playful paradoxes of science. The tension between the concentrated brilliance of the stars and her sense of dispersion in their presence is elaborated when Stephen corrects the erroneous representation of the atom in Elaine's textbook. As Elaine tries to help Cordelia with her physics homework, Stephen remarks, "They've still got the atom looking like a raspberry." To correct this error, Stephen explains that the atom is instead made up of "empty space." It is really "just a few specks held in place by forces. At the subatomic level, you can't even say that matter exists. You can only say that it has a tendency to exist." He turns toward Cordelia, and says jokingly, "Cordelia has a tendency to exist..." (242).

The remark carries a double meaning alluding both to Cordelia's inauthentic performance and to Elaine's evolving conception of subjectivity. Cordelia's persistent efforts to mime her sisters' version of femininity fail to coalesce, as did her childhood efforts at drama. Although Cordelia can ape many of the rituals of female adolescence, Elaine notices that her efforts on their double dates fall flat; her laugh is artificial, in imitation of women she has heard on the radio. "She's mimicking something," Elaine surmises, "something in her head, some role or image that only she can see" (244). When she resurfaces in the narrative, Cordelia seems intent on performing a version of success (much as Elaine hopes to do at the retrospective), demonstrating to Elaine that she has overcome her "overeating and failure." In short, Elaine remarks: "She has reinvented

herself" (301). In their final encounter, Elaine discovers that Cordelia has once again "let herself go," coming apart both physically and mentally.

"Letting your self go," Elaine remarks," is an alarming notion; it is said of older women who become frowzy and fat, and of things that are sold cheap" (Atwood's emphasis, 277). It is by means of Stephen's theories that Elaine begins to transvalue this expression in the service of an altered notion of subjectivity. The autonomous self, with its emphasis on separation, seems as inadequate as the raspberry-shaped atom. The self is rather "a few specks held in place by forces," forces exerted by the attraction of surrounding objects, such that the "specks" intermingle, making it impossible to determine the boundaries delimiting inside and outside, or self and other, thus making the place of selfhood the site of play. Like Stephen's atom, the self "has a tendency to exist."⁹

Elaine's evolving conception of self gains further complexity with the added discovery that matter itself is nothing more than "widely spaced atoms moving at greater or lesser speeds" (220). Stephen reveals that:

...matter and energy are aspects of each other. It's as if everything is made of solid light...if we knew enough we could walk through walls as if they were air, if we knew enough we could go faster than light, and at that point space would become time and time would become space and we would be able to travel through time back into the past. (220)

Elaine's version of self, then, becomes a place of "solid light," a source of brilliant energy emitting or dispersing its own light and exerting its own force field as do its surrounding objects. It is almost as if Atwood is playing on the ambiguity of the psychoanalytic term "object," which can refer to both things and persons (Moore and Fine 129). The subject dwells in a pananimistic world where both silver paper and cat's eyes, Stephen and Cordelia, emit an intense and attracting light, as does the "phosphorescent" Mrs. Smeath.¹⁰ The space of these brilliant objects is rendered even more complex by the dimension of time, with which it coincides. The novel opens with Elaine's condensation of Stephen's

theories: "Time is not a line but a dimension like the dimensions of space." Time becomes:

...a shape, something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies
 ...You don't look back along time but down through it, like water.
 Sometimes this comes to the surface, sometimes that, sometimes nothing.
 Nothing goes away. (3)

Elaine's construction of self, then, incorporates a dispersion, a disintegration or letting go, analogous to the emitted light of stars, while at the same time it includes the paradoxical dimension of constancy, where "nothing goes away." It resonates with the star-like brilliance of the cat's eye that merges Elaine's childhood past with the promise of an artist's vision in a move that encapsulates past and future, holding within it a totality of unraveling time. It is something akin to the enfolding of chaos.¹¹ To read the project of self-creation in this way opens our interpretation onto a more abstract and philosophical discussion of the self, a discussion that seeks to broaden our understanding of the artist's praxis.

The notion of enfolded chaos was prompted by Gilles Deleuze's discussion of "folds" ("plis") in a work, entitled Foucault, which is devoted to the development of Michel Foucault's thought. Deleuze proposes that with the completion of The History of Sexuality, Foucault worried that his analysis led to the firmly locked trap of power relations from which point resistance seemed impossible. In Cat's Eye, Atwood positions her protagonist similarly, trapped in silence between the inviable options of male subjectivity and inauthentic female performance.

Foucault's approach to this dilemma, Deleuze states, hinges on Foucault's fascination with the double, which is "never a projection of the interior; on the contrary, it is an interiorization of the outside. It is not a doubling of the One, but a redoubling of the Other" (98). Deleuze elaborates on Foucault's concept of the "outside" describing it as an "ultimate spatiality that was deeper than time"; however, Deleuze continues, in Foucault's

later work "he offers the possibility once more of putting time on the outside and thinking of the outside as being time..." (108).

Deleuze's version of the "Outside," which obtains in his reading of Foucault, is elucidated by Ronald Bogue in "Foucault, Deleuze, and the Playful Fold." Bogue explains that this version draws on Maurice Blanchot's articulation of "absolute memory," a notion which Blanchot attempts to evoke by means of a variation on the Tristan and Isolde romance. A magic potion causes the couple to fall in love, but the spell wears off after several years and the lovers part. However, the passion persists, taking on an existence of its own "as if their separation itself formed a new relation between the two lovers--a non-relation...." For Blanchot, Bogue continues, the story intimates that desire is a forgetting that is retained, an enfolded, ineffable infinity that can never be known directly....That which can only be retained as a forgetting is what Blanchot calls the Outside, that stubbornly resistant dimension of experience that defies signification yet inhabits language as its shadowy, anonymous unthought. (16-17)

The Outside also takes on a spatial dimension in Deleuze's reading of Foucault. The Outside is not situated at the site of knowledge, which for Foucault is doubly constituted by "speaking and seeing, language and light" (Deleuze 109). Rather it is persistently remote, farther than any imaginable exterior, a site that Deleuze likens to a "battle or stormy zone where particular points and the relations of forces between these points are tossed about." Knowledge is only a kind of precipitate, or "solidified dust" that makes the ongoing struggle evident (121).

At the same time, Deleuze argues that, for Foucault, the outside is folded inside, to the degree that power relations are internalized by the subject, and constitute thought. Thought, then, as a function of power relations, partakes of the continually shifting and chaotic play of forces; thought is situated at the limit of the seeable and sayable, in the gap between the two, on an edge between that which can be said today and that which is now unsaid (or unseen), but which language or light might render tomorrow. The subject,

then, is a thinking subject who dwells in "praxis," at the limit of knowledge ready to take advantage of shifting forces that precipitate something new, a "new Self" that might prove "a centre of resistance" to existing power relations (Deleuze 115).

Deleuze's discussion of Foucault contains a rich spectrum of ideas that enable a broader interpretation of Atwood's self-creation narrative. The novel situates the ongoing process of selfhood at the edge of a time-space dimension constituted by memory which is both individual and collective and virtually unlimited because "nothing goes away." The self is somewhere between the representation of the artist on the flyer and the chaotic demolition site whose surfaces doubles it like a lining, much as Foucault's outside doubles the self in Deleuze's reading. The self is both that which can be remembered--said or seen--and that which cannot--that which remains on the Outside. It is an entity of both light and dark that resides at the site of expectation where things "surface," yielding material for the "seeable" and the "sayable," for both Elaine's art and her narrative. Situated at this edge, Elaine waits with eyes wide open, trying to see in the dark. This reading adds new meaning to Cat's Eye's textual rubble, which now becomes a metaphorical limit of both light and language. The protagonist's repressed memories also take on a metaphorical status, as if they were the painful yet productive fruits of playing on the edge, the ironic pleasures of dispersion, of letting go of oneself, of becoming lost in play on the boundary of chaos. Thus Atwood's version of self is also a non-self located at the gap between that which can be seen and that which can be said, open to the possibilities of chance. What is more, the emphasis is not on product--the production of a new feminine self--but rather on "praxis," on the perpetual effort of what can be seen or said today through the artist's production. In this way, Elaine's process of self-creation, like Deleuze's understanding of Foucault's subject of thought, turns away from any universal formulation of subjectivity; it resides instead in the particular and the historic that result from the ongoing play of forces.¹²

It might be argued that a formulation of authentic experience based on Winnicott's object relations theory seems fundamentally incompatible with Foucault's thought, in that authenticity suggests an interiority, or naturalistic consciousness, that eludes the determining forces of the exterior world. Does Elaine's delight in blue balloons and silver paper originate in an individual consciousness or is her response determined by the forceful attraction exerted by the outside object? This question can best be answered by returning to Winnicott's stipulation that when it comes to transitional phenomena, the question is simply not important: "Did you conceive of this or was it presented to you from without?" The important point is that no decision on this point is expected. The question is not to be formulated" (Winnicott's emphasis, *Playing* 12). Neither origins nor originality occupy a central position in Winnicott's theories of play and creativity.

One might also object that Elaine is not a "subject of thought" in that her attraction to surrounding objects seems to be based on something other than rationality. However, Deleuze makes clear that thinking constitutes something of a blurred boundary:

Thinking is neither innate nor acquired. It is not the innate exercise of a faculty, but neither is it a learning process constituted in the external world. Artaud contrasted the innate and the acquired with the "genital," the genitility of thought as such, a thought which comes from an outside that is farther away than any external world, and hence closer than any internal world. Must this outside be called Chance?" (117)

Thus thinking seems to occupy a site similar to, although far from identical with, Winnicott's site of play. (However, the use of Artaud's formulation clearly distances Deleuze from Winnicott, in that Winnicott seeks to separate play from desire.) What is more, the link between thinking and chance reverberates with Atwood's "sea-smoothed" pebbles, which are both "random and necessary." Their necessary nature seems to allude to their determined status--like the Outside folded within--while at the

same time they are random, in the gap between the seeable and sayable--on the edge of the oceanic--where the subject waits in expectation on the random, shifting forces at play.

Elaine's variety of "thinking" seems opposed to that of her astrophysicist brother who is preoccupied with ordering the world. An inveterate collector, Stephen is preoccupied with categories and accumulation; for Elaine his fascination with the universe is reminiscent of his jar of marbles. As Stephen stares at the sky, his sister remarks: "My brother is collecting again; he's collecting stars" (105). Stephen's carefully ordered collections find an echo in other precisely ordered accumulations, like the specimen jars in the Zoology Building and masterpieces in her art history class, with its "smell of dust and airlessness...." (274). She sardonically qualifies her own efforts as something other than art: "Art has been accomplished, elsewhere. All that remains to be done with it is the memory-work" (276).

The clarity of precise categories, however, is not without a certain appeal. The adolescent Elaine, who still emulates the impervious surface of the cat's eye, is preparing to become a biologist; she is her father's daughter, specializing in exacting and brightly-colored drawings of sectioned insects. She is fascinated by microscopic views of stained slides "coloured with vivid dyes, hot pinks, violent purples, radiant blues." They remind her of stained glass, which once exercised such a strong appeal when Elaine accompanied the Smeaths to church. She finds them "breathtaking," and she diligently tries to duplicate what she sees, "though I can never get the same luminous brilliance" (247). Her vivid representation superimposes art on science, signaling yet another blurred category, another set of twins that share the principles of play. However, the connection is tenuous. As she writes her final exams prior to graduation, she is struck with the sudden conviction that she will be an artist rather than a biologist. Appropriately enough, the revelation is an epiphany, a conversion that evokes the attraction of the stars.

Steven's own subjectivity acts as a foil to Elaine's self-creation. The stars draw Stephen in a very different direction. Even in adolescence, Elaine remembers, her brother

was "moving away from the imprecision of words" toward mathematics. Her descriptions imply that Stephen's sense of self is rarely blurred by the playful paradoxes of his scientific theories. Consequently, he remains happily unaware of the dangerous edge. Sitting in a tree he has climbed in order to watch a football game for free, he writes to Elaine as he eats a peanut butter sandwich. Upon receiving the letter, Elaine worries about the precariousness of his perch: "He thinks he is safe, because he is what he says he is" (291).

The episode also foreshadows Stephen's death. When his plane is hijacked by terrorists, Stephen is singled out for execution and shot as he is falling from the plane--although Elaine would like to believe that before he died he experienced a moment of "pretended flight" (392). "He died of an eye for an eye...," she concludes, signaling the dangers that derive from restricting the cat's eye to its impervious separateness and its consequent economy of equivalences (388). It is not so much that Elaine rejects Stephen's version of selfhood; it is rather that it is incomplete. Stephen cannot fly on one wing.

As Elaine pursues her painting, the cat's eye's hard surface will undergo a re-vision. She will differ from Stephen, who separates the realms of being and doing. Instead, Elaine, whose sense of self has already become interspersed with the playful intensity of Stephen and Cordelia, will blur the lines between life and art. Her apprenticeship begins, appropriately enough, with a class in "life drawing," where she begins to "let herself go," experiencing the attraction of the people and the objects that surround her. In her art class, she starts to connect with the female body. Confronted with the abundant flesh of a naked woman, Elaine squeamishly attempts to follow her instructor's advice: "You must think of the fingers, touching the flesh, or the running of the hand over. This must be tactile," he explains (272). She "falls" for her art teacher and her sexual initiation results from the intense attraction. However, the dispersion is countered by illumination, by the bright things to which she has always been drawn; she longs to represent "objects that breathe out light" (326).

Elaine rejects the artistic pursuits of her male counterparts, who seek the cutting edge by chasing after the art world's latest fashionable abstractions. While they pursue the originality they associate with high art, Elaine becomes immersed in everyday objects. Inspired by the luminous details, especially the pier-glass, in The Arnolfini Marriage by Van Eyck, she paints the reflective surfaces that attract her: wineglasses, fake pearls, and aluminum pans. Hoping to capture the shiny surfaces of yet earlier works of the Middle Ages, Elaine returns to her mother's kitchen where she concocts a recipe for egg tempera. Her mother uses the leftover egg whites for meringue. While boyfriend and then husband Jon creates abstract squiggles, op art, and motorized constructions, Elaine persists in painting the luminous. Her work, Jon tells her, is nothing more than illustration, rendered passé by photography. Unfazed, Elaine takes commercial art classes, determined that art will be more than what her mother's friends deem "something you can always do at home, in your spare time" (275). Art for Elaine, becomes "a living," a way of being, a means of self-creation.

Yet the impervious surface that Elaine persists in creating is called into question when she discovers she is unexpectedly pregnant. In the past, shiny objects had been a means of "delaying time, slowing it down" (119). As a child, she had stared at the glass coffee percolator, contemplated the silvery toaster as a means of postponing her terrifying encounters with Cordelia. With the pregnancy, the inside-outside boundary is blurred once again, and the place of selfhood disintegrates, much as it did when she discovered Stephen's version of the stars: "I feel as if I'm at the centre of nothingness, of a black square that is totally empty; that I'm exploding slowly outwards, into the cold burning void of space" (336). Her body is the site of new life, of an outside folded inside: "It ticks like a clock; time is inside it. It has betrayed me..." (338).

The remembrance of the blurred edge precipitates a change in her art, as Elaine begins once again to see in the dark, painting "things that aren't there" (337), things that come to the surface from the disordered rubble heap of her past: many versions of Mrs.

Smeath, the nightshade that grew in the ravine, the egg-cup featured in Cordelia's lore and much more. At the same time, she continues to turn away from recognition and originality, retaining the hard shiny surface that becomes a hallmark of her work. In fact, the shiny veneer protects her paintings when an outraged viewer flings ink on an objectionable portrait of Mrs. Smeath. The ink simply slides off the surface leaving the painting unharmed. At the same time, this incident marks the beginning of Elaine's fame, which is portrayed as something of an accident. Nonetheless, Elaine remarks that paintings capable of provoking "uproar and display, must have an odd revolutionary power....Some dimension of heroism has been added to me" (354).

Thus Elaine's construction of selfhood resists the formulation of transgression. Transgression would involve attaining recognition for the intentional violation of proscribed boundaries, a definition that might also apply to a modernist definition of original art. However, it is the issue of recognition, or more specifically her failure to achieve recognition for her girlhood status, that so terrifies Elaine. The terror of power games is resuscitated by the retrospective, where her work will be judged and perhaps found wanting. Indeed, Elaine's attempt at self-creation begs the question whether female subjectivity can be attained without falling into the recognition trap, which is merely a version of the master-slave dynamic. Cordelia achieves power only when Elaine recognizes her as the arbiter of femininity, hoping that Cordelia will in turn recognize her gendered status. She initially breaks Cordelia's power by turning her back on what she concludes is just a terrifying game, only to discover that she herself vengefully longs to exercise an equally cruel power. Her paintings of Mrs. Smeath reveal a hateful ressentiment which Elaine confronts when she sees the paintings once again at the retrospective. While she acknowledges the malice with which they were conceived, she also seems to justify the representations, observing that she has endowed the portraits with light. "I have said Look," she comments. "I have said, I see" (Atwood's emphasis, 404).

Elaine's remarks may best be understood in light of these lines by Canadian poet Margaret Avison, quoted at the conclusion of Survival: "Nobody stuffs the world in at your eyes./The optic heart must venture: a jail-break/and a re-creation" (qtd. 246). Atwood interprets Avison's "jail-break" not as transgression, but as agency. Atwood elaborates:

What these lines suggest is that in none of our acts--even the act of looking--are we passive. Even the things we look at demand our participation, and our commitment: if this participation and commitment are given, what can result is a "jail-break," an escape from our old habits of looking at things, and "re-creation," a new way of seeing, experiencing and imaging--or imagining--which we ourselves have helped to shape. (Survival 246)

In fact, as Elaine looks at the eyes she has painted, she reads the image sympathetically, perceiving Mrs. Smeath's "melancholy" and "threadbare decency," realizing that there was much they held in common (405). Howells understands this re-visioning as a move from "blind consciousness to the insight of imaginative seeing" (214).

This version of agency, while not exempt from power dynamics, skirts the issue of recognition. Elaine is well aware that her painter-husband finds her work "irrelevant." Her work is marginal:

...I am off to the side somewhere, fiddling with egg tempera and flat surfaces, as if the twentieth century has never happened. There is freedom in this: because it doesn't matter what I do, I can do what I like. (346-347)

Elaine's irrelevance gives her the freedom to play on the blurred edge. Returning for a moment to the Avison poem, one might add that agency entails not only a "re-creation," but a "recreation," or playfulness, that turns away from recognition. Elaine dismisses the importance of recognition when she embraces a phrase her mother uses in scorn of public opinion, saying that "she doesn't give a hoot." The self-conscious, adolescent

Elaine who is worried about the judgment of others finds the phrase attractive. "Not giving a hoot would be a luxury," she muses (Atwood's emphasis, 214). As a teenager, Elaine happily envisions Cordelia and herself as "old ladies" who never stay inside the lines. Instead, they smear their make-up beyond the boundaries of their features and allow their outrageously colored slips to protrude beyond the hemline. The girls like this variety of older women best. "They have a certain gaiety to them, a power of invention, they don't care what people think." The adolescents perceive the women's appearance as a matter of choice, and conclude "that when the time comes, we also will be free to choose."

The middle-aged Elaine rethinks this perception, concluding that with age she notices that her own vision problems make it difficult to apply make-up: "Who knows what faces I'm making, what kind of modern art I'm drawing onto myself?" (5). Whether the old ladies' creativity is a matter of something akin to Winnicott's non-integration--a matter of free and authentic choice--or whether it is a matter of disintegration--a question of time on the inside, a literal and metaphorical ageing--remains undecidable. What is more, the artist turns away from this question of agency versus determinism to embrace what appears to be a kind of creative entropy, a mutual letting go of constraint, a playful agreement to color outside the lines. In the end, what Elaine most hopes to emulate is a shared play that turns away from recognition.

At least, she seeks to find an alternative to the kind of recognition that informs the victor/victim dynamic. Perhaps the concept of recognition requires nuance. Elaine is desperately searching for Cordelia in order to demonstrate that she has "made something of herself," a victor at last; but she also hopes to establish a sense of "thereness" that seems integral to self-creation. The text suggests, for example that the eye/I of the artist also longs to be seen. As an adolescent, Elaine dreams she is looking in a mirror, while at the same time she senses someone standing behind her. If she positions herself properly, she will be able to see who it is without turning around. This image is reworked in one of her paintings called Cat's Eye. It is a self-portrait that includes only half a face from the

nose up. Behind it hangs a pier-glass that reflects the back of her head. In the convex mirror there also appear three girls, suggesting Carol, Grace and Cordelia, their faces hidden by shadow, looking at the back of Elaine's head. The painting, with its anonymous persecutors, echoes the themes of Cordelia's portrait, Half a Face, but the convex shape of the mirror and the painting's title reiterate the emblem the reader has come to associate with Elaine's created selfhood.

This re-visioning can be elucidated by turning to what Winnicott terms the "mirror-role" of the mother, which he differentiates from Jacques Lacan's understanding of the mirror function in "Le Stade du Miroir." Winnicott's theory turns on the baby's initial inability to distinguish the "me" from the "not-me." When the infant looks into the mother's face, s/he is essentially seeing herself or himself, Winnicott theorizes. The success of this experience hinges on the act of the mother, who looks at the baby with delight as if the baby were her mirror. "In other words," Winnicott explains, the mother is looking at the baby and what she looks like is related to what she sees there" (Winnicott's emphasis). By looking at the mother in this way, children discover a means of "getting something of themselves back from the environment." Deprived of this experience, some children continue to search the environment; "they study the object and do all that is possible to see in the object some meaning that ought to be there if only it could be felt." If the mother's mood is clearly disconnected from that of her child, the mirror match does not take place with the result that the child "will grow up puzzled about mirrors and what the mirror has to offer" (Playing 112-113).

This experience of the mirror takes place when the child is in a state of "formlessness" described earlier in this study as both a purposeless and an unintegrated state. In this state, the infant is free to react spontaneously to sensations and impulses presented through interaction with the environment. Mirroring in this state establishes a sense of self, according to Winnicott, although the individual will not recollect the experience. Yet a sense of self will be "lost unless observed and mirrored back by

someone who is trusted...." In his discussion of a case study involving a woman who is searching for a sense of self, Winnicott offers this interpretation: "All sorts of things happen and they wither. This is the myriad deaths you have died. But if someone is there, someone who can give you back what has happened, then the details dealt with in this way become part of you and you do not die" (Playing 61). Here, selfhood is portrayed as a matter of relationship. Events that are not in some way mirrored by an outside other "wither," like so much grist without which there is simply no mill. Winnicott seems to suggest that without a mirroring relationship, the substance of selfhood is somehow lost.

I would argue that Elaine's art translates the search for a mirror, for a Cordelia who can give back "all sorts of things" that have been shared, thereby preventing the "myriad deaths" of the substance of which the self is made. The lost self signaled by Elaine's feelings of nothingness is reconfigured in the artist's representation of the Virgin of Lost Things. As an adult, Elaine frequently wanders into churches, ostensibly to study the art, but subconsciously in pursuit of representations of the Virgin Mary. In a Mexican church she discovers a crownless statue on whose dress have been pinned shiny objects that Elaine initially mistakes for stars. They are instead tiny metallic replicas, "little brass or tin arms, legs, hands, sheep, donkeys, chickens, and hearts." Elaine discovers: "...she was the Virgin of lost things, one who restored what was lost....There could be some point in praying to her...But I didn't do it, because I didn't know what to pray for. What was lost, what I could pin on her dress [sic]" (198).

Elaine portrays the Virgin of Lost Things in her latest painting, entitled Unified Field Theory. Her black cloak is studded with "pinpoints of light"; in her hands she holds a large, blue cat's eye marble that replaces the inauthentic shape of the red-purse heart. The title echoes that of a lecture by her astrophysicist brother which Elaine had attended. In his presentation, "The First Picoseconds and the Quest for a Unified Field Theory," he discusses the origins of the universe and the nature of the stars, which were created, he theorizes, by one enormous burst of light, a "fiat lux" that can only be expressed in the

language of mathematics. "This sounds a lot like metaphysics to me," Elaine comments, "although the men in the audience don't seem to take it amiss" (332).

Does the painting fulfill the function of the mirror role, restoring a sense of lost self in much the same way that Stephen seeks to embrace an ideal universe? On one hand, the painting seems "a lot like metaphysics" in that it conflates a number of categories--earth and sky, science and art, light and dark--suggesting the illusion of a transcendent oneness, although the hint of irony in Elaine's comment about metaphysics undercuts this interpretation. Perhaps, the painting reveals the degree to which Elaine's self-creation is interspersed with that of her male "twin," lost to death but recovered through art. Perhaps only the successful quest for a female twin can render up the necessary reflection.

At the retrospective, Elaine surveys the paintings and ponders Cordelia's absence. The last time she had seen Cordelia, her childhood companion was in a rest home, after having "fallen apart," after having "let go of her idea of herself." Elaine now imagines giving to Cordelia what she herself seeks: "...I could give her something you can never have, except from another person: what you look like from outside. A reflection. This is the part of herself I could give back to her" (411). As Elaine leaves the exhibition, she envisions herself falling apart, disintegrating in old age. The next day, plagued by an emptiness, "as if there's nothing more to come," Elaine returns to the bridge over the ravine, the old wooden form now replaced with a more solid one in concrete. In the growing dusk, she senses a childhood version of Cordelia standing behind her, staring at the back of her head, in imitation of her painting.

Thus, Elaine's ability to see in the dark yields the reflection she seeks. However, because she is facing away from the mirror, the image will continue to elude representation. At last Elaine can paradoxically make good her loss by "letting herself go." In a gesture that embodies her Virgin-like vision, Elaine holds out her hand to indicate both benediction and release of her persecutor, saying "It's all right...You can go home now" (Atwood's emphasis, 419).

At the same time, the gesture signals another kind of "letting go," a renunciation. This act constitutes a reworking of Cordelia's lore about the pin and the egg cup. One doesn't prick the shell so that the witches won't put out to sea, as Cordelia once maintained. One does so to break the vacuum in order that one may separate cup from shell. Elaine accepts that Cordelia and she will never become partners in shared play. The image of the old ladies who don't give a hoot, introduced in the first chapter, is reiterated in the last. On her flight home, Elaine is seated next to two old ladies at play. As these women drink, joke and cheat at cards, Elaine addresses her reader as if s/he were a mirror image of her childhood friend: "This is what I miss, Cordelia: not something that's gone, but something that will never happen" (421). Nonetheless, as the novel closes, Elaine is flying as she stares out at the stars, affirming her ability to see in the dark, to create rather than simply survive.

According to Howells, Elaine's inability to find Cordelia signals an "incompleteness" in the author's representation of selfhood. She summarizes: "The best Elaine Risley or Margaret Atwood can offer is a Unified Field Theory from which inferences about the subject may be made, but the subject herself is always outside, in excess, beyond the figurations of language. The 'I' remains behind the 'eye'" (216). While this reading addresses the problematic of self-representation, it fails to acknowledge some of the more self-affirming aspects of the text.

Howells's interpretation narrows the discussion of selfhood to a question of imitation, or the degree to which writing or art can accurately and completely represent the self. Thus, the argument hinges on what Mihai I. Spariosu terms "mimesis-imitation," a formulation of mimesis found in Plato, one that signals a "transition from an archaic to a rational mentality" in the history of Western thought. Spariosu contrasts this version with a pre-socratic or archaic understanding of mimesis as "mimesis-play," a term connected with ritual and drama that suggests instead a "performative function" that involves

"miming,' 'simulating,' or even 'presencing' (invoking or calling something forth)"
 (Dionysus 17-18).¹³

The latter version of mimesis is also useful in formulating Atwood's articulation of selfhood in this novel. Like Cordelia, Elaine is also acting or performing, but unlike her friend, Elaine is able to embrace both the terror and the delight of the blurred edge of play. Situated in the gap between the seeable and the sayable, she remains in expectation, ever open to the new, in a state that encompasses the conflated possibilities of both non-integration and disintegration, at the site of authenticity. Her subjectivity resides in "praxis," or the "presencing" of the illuminated objects that surface at that edge, rather than in the objects themselves. The paintings and text produced in turn become brilliant objects, like Elaine's blue balloons and silver paper. The subjectivity of the playful reader, if modeled on the disintegrating light of Atwood's star, will thus become interspersed with its otherness through the creative act of reading, a process of reflection that denies the mirrors hard surface.

However, female subjectivity in Cat's Eye is always an alternation of light and dark. In a sense, Howells is right, the subject always does remain "in excess, beyond the figuration of language," but it is an excess that is transvalued in the text. Elaine transforms the "nothingness" or absence of female story, characterized by meaningless and excessive adornment, into the essence of play, the act of "letting go of oneself." In the end, Elaine resolves her dilemma over what to wear to the opening of her show. She has tried on several dresses in anticipation of that night, looking for an appropriate victor's costume. When the moment comes, she opts for something more authentic. She wears black: "I will have to do. Come-as-you-are parties, they used to have. I will come as I am" (403), the dark star that is merely echoed by its perceived light.

Elaine, then, is not unlike Plato's *Ion*. In this dialogue, Socrates diminishes Ion's art, claiming that when he performs Homer's poetry, he is inspired or possessed by the gods. It is not a question of art at all, Socrates explains, because Ion is not in his "right

mind" when he performs; or, as Socrates tells Ion, "you get beside yourself" (19). Performance, or mimesis-play, is a matter of letting go of oneself.¹⁴ Elaine's understanding of art, then, subverts the Platonic hierarchy by restoring Ion's performance to its creative status.¹⁵ She anticipates the possibilities of ageing, or disintegration, whose early signs may be only "the thin edge of the wedge, the crack in the wall that will open, later, onto what? What vistas of shining eccentricity, or madness?" (6).¹⁶

Yet this anticipation is tempered in the end by the renunciation of shared play between female subjects. It is a sense of mutual creation rather than self-creation that eludes Atwood's fiction. While the author comes closer to narrating a tale of "object-relating" between women in her 1996 novel, Alias Grace, these relationships are continually undermined by the heterosexual plots in which the characters are trapped. In the end, protagonist Grace Marks seems to renounce the lived experience of shared play with other women, and turns instead to a figural representation of such relationships on her "Tree of Paradise" quilt.¹⁷ While Atwood can imagine a variety of shared play between women that turns away from power by turning its back on recognition, this variety of relationship seems to defy narration. Thus while self-creation in Atwood's fiction involves the playfully paradoxical act of seeing in the dark, the subject is left to soar alone.

END NOTES

1. Howells draws on Paul De Man's essay, "Autobiography as De-facement," to elaborate her analysis of the painter's altered photograph, which, according to Howells, echoes De Man's understanding of autobiography. Citing DeMan, Howells points out that the novel's episode "deals with the giving and taking away of faces, with face and deface, figure, figuration and disfiguration" (qtd. on 207).
2. Frank Davey reads the stuffed moose family encountered by the protagonist of Atwood's Surfacing in a similar way, suggesting that it represents "a conventional North American family complete with sexual stereotypes and the eclipsing of girl by boy" (68).
3. Earl G. Ingersoll also overlooks the gendered nature of Elaine's early experiences, claiming she must put away her "unfeminine clothes and ungendered roles" when she moves to Toronto (20).
4. Other Atwood novels which precede Cat's Eye appear to have a similar pattern. In Bodily Harm, the protagonist becomes aware not only of her victim status, but also of her complicity in the victor/victim dynamic. She returns to Canada from her harrowing Caribbean experience with a newly acquired lesson in human connectedness (Rubenstein 272-274), but the novel concludes before the lessons can be applied. Likewise, the novelist heroine of Lady Oracle seems unable to pursue a storyline in real life that differs from that of the persecuted Gothic characters in her own fiction. While the narrator is able to "resist others' versions of reality," she is unable to invent an alternative vision. Her understanding of her narrative trap is only "momentary" and "does not result in a personal mythology adequate to oppose the prevailing social mythology" (Rosowski 206-207).
5. Atwood's first published work was Double Persephone, a chapbook of poems that was privately printed. A collection of poems, The Circle Game, was published in 1966, and her first novel, The Edible Woman, appeared in 1969.
6. Roberta Rubenstein's article on Atwood's novel Bodily Harm first called my attention to the significance of bitten fingernails, a recurring motif in much of Atwood's fiction. In this novel, Atwood refers to the gnawed fingers of character Lora Lucas as a troubling "sight of ravage, damage, the edge between inside and outside blurred like that" (Atwood, Bodily 86).
7. The words "ecstasy" and "satisfaction" may suggest a link between play and instinct gratification. However, Winnicott clearly states that physical arousal interferes with and eventually disrupts the play experience. In "Playing. A Theoretical Statement," he specifies that "playing needs to be studied as a subject on its own, supplementary to the concept of the sublimation of instinct" (Playing 39). Unfortunately, to sideline instinctual desire in this way places serious limits on theories of subjectivity that are linked to Winnicott's formulation of creativity.

Or, as Jane Flax puts it in Disputed Subjects: "Contemporary psychoanalysis presents us with objects without desire or desire without related objects" (19). This issue is addressed directly in my discussion of Monique Wittig's novel L'Opoponax.

8. The ravine as magical and menacing borderland recurs in much of Atwood's work. The poem "In My Ravines" appears in The Circle Game (19) and her first novel, The Edible Woman, accords an important role to this site. W. J. Keith discusses the importance of the ravine in this novel as a subterranean "underworld" to which the heroine must journey in order to solve her dilemma (59-60). In Atwood's third novel, Lady Oracle, the heroine is cruelly persecuted by members of her Brownie troop as she crosses a bridge over a neighborhood ravine (54-67). The ravine episodes in Cat's Eye appear to be a reworking and expansion of the Lady Oracle passage.
9. Blurred categories are a typical feature of Atwood novels, according to Robert Lecker's study of the author's first three novels. For Lecker, it is the obliteration of binary categories--the heroine's inability to distinguish between nature and culture, male and female roles, or reality and romantic fiction--that makes it impossible for the protagonists to achieve a sense of self. This reading, he asserts, contradicts the frequent interpretation that Atwood's characters undertake a "descent" and then return transformed having "discovered identity, meaning, and purpose" (186). He explains the latter reading is due to the influence of Atwood's Survival, whose "theories...have suggested that Atwood's heroines can only survive by becoming something other than what they were (victim rather than victim, hunter rather than prey)" (178).

While these remarks suggest that Lecker is unaware of Atwood's formulation of the "creative non-victim," Lecker's analysis nonetheless has merit. Lecker's observations concerning the heroines' ambivalence and the novels' circular structure support his conclusion that the protagonists appear trapped in a world where "the traditional faith in identity no longer holds" (193). Indeed, selfhood in Atwood's fiction is never a matter of a unified, autonomous entity, but is rather fragmented and multiple. However, it should also be pointed out that two of these novels, The Edible Woman and Lady Oracle, are satires that call attention to the difficulties involved in writing a narrative of female selfhood. In other words, it is one thing to critique the problem, as she does in these early works. It is another to try to find a solution, as she appears to do in Cat's Eye, where the blurred edge approximates the site of playful self-creation.

10. A certain pananimism also informs Atwood's poetry. See, for example, "After the Flood, We" in The Circle Game, where the speaker's companion is unaware of the metamorphosis taking place: "not seeing/the almost-human/brutal faces forming/(slowly)/out of stone" (12).

11. The notion that Cat's Eye's version of selfhood features an enfolded chaos was initially suggested to me by Ronald Bogue's article, "Foucault, Deleuze, and the Playful Fold of the Self."
12. For Coral Howells, the alternation between the "seeable" and the "sayable" in this novel signifies a double remembering constituted by the "conscious mind's discursive narrative and the figural narrative of [the protagonist's] imagination" (213). This study doesn't seek to refute her reading, but rather to focus attention on the site between the two elements.
13. A thorough discussion of the double nature of play in Western culture that is reflected in these two versions of mimesis, see Spariosu's introduction in his Dionysus Reborn: Play and the Aesthetic Dimension in Modern Philosophical and Scientific Discourse.
14. I am indebted to Professor Spariosu for this reading.
15. In this way, Atwood's work seems to participate in what Spariosu terms the "by no means irreversible process of restoring mimesis-play to its high pre-Platonic cultural status" (20).
16. Various commentators have compared the narrative pattern in Cat's Eye with Dante's Divine Comedy in that the protagonist's journey through memory is begun in middle age and takes Elaine from the dark depths of the ravine to the illumination of art. One might also add that Cat's Eye approaches Dante's definition of comedy in his "Letter to Can Grande." Elaine's art is situated at the edge of art and recognition in the way Dante's notion of comedy is something that takes place outside the city walls. Moreover, the novel, as a work of popular fiction, is marginal to the world of literature.
17. The quilt's title suggests the ideal nature of Atwood's vision of shared play among women. This view accords with Spariosu's remark in God of Many Names that an "anarchical, nonviolent" variety of play "from the perspective of Western history, seems to be on the order of Utopia" (xii).

CHAPTER 3

FINDING THE FIGURE: THE SUBJECT AS EMBEDDED OBJECT IN COLETTE'S LA MAISON DE CLAUDINE

In the opening pages of La Maison de Claudine, Colette invites her reader to play a familiar childhood game, to search for the hidden object. Readers raised on coloring books will remember hunting for the embedded figure disguised within a maze of squiggles--a rabbit curled up among the branches of a tree or a snail tucked under the edges of a cloud. In the book's first vignette, entitled "Où sont les enfants?"--one of thirty-five sketches that comprise the definitive 1930 edition--the narrator's myopic mother scans her enclosed garden, hoping to discern the whereabouts of her children. Immersed in their object world, the narrator-daughter and her siblings are all but invisible, having blended with their surroundings. Only scattered playthings--a jump rope, a book, a mock garden planted with pebbles and the heads of flowers--intimate their presence while insisting on their silence. A closer look, however, transforms the glowing triangle into a face, and two pale spots in the hay become a pair of eyes, while twin pine trees sway suspiciously in the background.

The game of the embedded object, then, becomes a search for the hidden subject, a game that cautions the reader against a myopic reading of the text. If Margaret Atwood's Cat's Eye renders the subject in terms of dispersion, so much disintegrating light and time on a dark ground, the initial sketch in La Maison de Claudine evokes an immersed subject subtly ensconced in a collection of objects, insisting not on the outline but on the blur. While Atwood introduces a visual dimension to her narrative by means of a "figural discourse" that describes her protagonist's paintings, it is this game of hide and seek that foregrounds the figured dimension of subjectivity in the early pages of Colette's work.

The sequence of vignettes can indeed be viewed as a series of visual puzzles, challenging the reader to locate a self within an intricate weave of subject and object.

Like Atwood's text, La Maison de Claudine focuses primarily on episodes from the narrator's girlhood and adolescence, beginning with experiences of the child at ages seven and eight. Colette calls attention to the rift between her childhood experiences and those as a married woman in Mes Apprentissages, a work that recounts the often unhappy years with her first husband, Henry Gauthier-Villars, the notorious "Willy" of "la belle époque." It was only after her discovery of the affair between Willy and Charlotte Kinceler, she writes, that she could admit to such a rift: "...j'ai eu beaucoup de peine à accepter qu'il existât autant de différence entre l'état de fille et l'état de femme, entre la vie de la campagne et la vie à Paris, entre la présence--tout au moins l'illusion du bonheur et son absence..." (35).

Colette's remarks resonate with recent observations by a number of American psychologists who conclude that a child's ability to narrate her girlhood experiences to receptive listeners may prove an effective defense against a sense of lost or inauthentic identity. According to Lyn Mikel Brown, such stories could act as a hedge against "inauthentic or idealized relationships" that are part of a broader cultural narrative about womanhood (72-72). Moreover, Brown's work with young girls has prompted her to ask "whether the lucidity women find or gain or develop in later life is not in fact a lucidity they once had, then lost, and have since refound and discovered" (83). Likewise, Emily Hancock's interviews with adult women suggest that "a distinct and vital sense of self," once lost in the process of growing to womanhood, could be regained by "circling back" to memories of a former self at ages eight, nine, and ten (148).¹

This narrative return in the quest for authentic selfhood appears as a textual strategy in Colette's work as well. While many commentators agree that the pursuit of selfhood constitutes a major thematic preoccupation in La Maison de Claudine, Joan Hinde Stewart specifically designates this work as a kind of circling back, as an attempt to

supply the heroine of her earlier Claudine novels with a past; indeed, some of Colette's explicitly autobiographical work expresses the author's dissatisfaction with these first novels.² Colette describes the genesis of these early works in Mes Apprentissages, a story that has been repeated by commentators and biographers alike and thus constitutes part of the myth that has come to surround the author. Willy, claiming a shortage of funds, told his wife to write down memories of her primary-school days, encouraging her to include a number of "détails piquants" (21). In this way, Colette joined the ranks of other ghost writers who penned the spicy novels that Willy signed and promoted. These school-day recollections were published as Claudine à l'école in 1900 and in two months sold some 40,000 copies (Sarde 146). Four more novels featuring the Claudine character were to follow.³

However, in Mes Apprentissages, published in 1936, Colette judges the first four of these novels unfavorably:

...je ne trouvai pas mon premier livre très bon--ni les trois suivants. Avec le temps, je n'ai guère changé d'avis, et je juge assez sévèrement toutes les Claudine....il ne me plaît guère de retrouver, si je me penche sur quelqu'un de ces très anciens livres, une souplesse à réaliser ce qu'on réclamait de moi, une obéissance aux suggestions et une manière déjà adroite d'éviter l'effort. (58-59)

In fact, Colette turns away from the subject matter that characterized the Claudine novels in order to write Dialogues des bêtes, the first work published under her own name. Commenting on the motivating force behind this text, Colette asserts: "Je m'éveillais vaguement à un devoir envers moi-même, celui d'écrire autre chose que les Claudine" (Mes Apprentissages 81).

Seen in the context of D.W. Winnicott's theories, Colette's remarks concerning compliance and obedience appear to address the issue of creativity. At times, Winnicott hones his conception of creativity by describing its opposite; he maintains that individuals

sense that they are not living creatively when they experience feelings of compliance, "as if caught up in the creativity of someone else, or of a machine" ("Creativity" 65).

This understanding of creativity further enhances Stewart's conjecture that Colette's dissatisfaction with the early novels is based on a "culpable docility," an indicting willingness to yield to Willy's scabrous literary tastes ("The School" 260).⁴ Therefore, Stewart reasons, the decision to feature the schoolgirl heroine in La Maison de Claudine's title, despite the fact that this character is never mentioned in the collection of vignettes, is more than a promotional technique. While Stewart acknowledges that the title was proposed by Colette's publisher, eager to capitalize on the success of the early novels, Stewart concludes that Colette's acceptance of the title indicates a relationship between La Maison de Claudine, first published in 1922, and Colette's early novels. Basing her judgment on the title, the similarity of themes, and the fact that both works focus on "a life story," Stewart suggests that La Maison de Claudine "recalls and expands on the earlier fiction" ("The School" 260, 268). Stewart introduces the notion of authenticity in her comparison of the protagonists in Claudine à l'école and La Maison de Claudine, maintaining that the heroine of the latter work demonstrates "a more complete identification of author and narrator/protagonist." For Stewart, this enhanced coincidence is born out by the protagonist's "greater degree of existential authenticity." To illustrate, Stewart points out that while the heroine of the early novel "moves in a moral vacuum...creating herself out of nothing, the narrator of La Maison de Claudine is intent on showing her emotional and intellectual ties to a family and a setting..." ("The School" 269).

Thus, while Stewart's remarks raise the issue of authenticity, it is an authenticity couched in terms of autobiography and fiction rather than in terms of creative process. On one hand, she underscores the importance of a close author/narrator identification to the autobiographical project, citing the significance accorded to such an identification by Philippe Lejeune in his examination of the genre ("The School" 272, Note 10). On the

other hand, her remarks suggest that the "subject" of La Maison de Claudine is more authentic because the characterization is based on a cause-and-effect relationship within the given context; in short, the protagonist of the later work more closely conforms to the criteria for fictional realism.

This ambiguity concerning the classification of the text raises the issue of genre distinctions and their importance in relation to representations of female subjectivity. Indeed, a vast amount of comment about Colette's work has been prompted by the critics' quest for the real--the authentic--Colette, a search that proceeds by attempting to sort fact from fiction. However, much of Colette's work defies traditional genre distinctions. As Nicole Ward Jouve points out, Colette, like Proust, rarely wrote about anything other than her own life (14). Nancy K. Miller grapples directly with the relation between genre and female subjectivity. Her argument notes that Lejeune's inventory of French autobiography excludes Colette's work, in part because her "oeuvre" does not meet the requirements of Lejeune's "autobiographical pact," which Miller describes as "a promise to the reader that the textual and the referential 'I' are one" (Miller's emphasis, "Women's" 260).⁵ Miller does not so much argue with Lejeune's classification of Colette's work as she questions the usefulness of genre distinctions that turn a blind eye to the considerations of gender. What is at stake in Miller's analysis is a different kind of reading. If the reader seeks to discover a female self in women's writing, Miller recommends a practice that "would privilege neither the autobiography nor the fiction, but take the two writings together in their status as text" (Miller's emphasis, "Women's" 270).⁶

In light of Miller's discussion, this study proposes a shift in emphasis by formulating authenticity in terms of textual strategy rather than in terms of genre. Nicole Ferrier-Caverivière's treatment of selfhood in her preface to La Maison de Claudine raises several issues that suggest avenues of pursuit toward this end. Ferrier-Caverivière concedes that, like previous works, La Maison de Claudine appears to draw heavily on the author's life and has often been classified as a work of autobiography. Nonetheless, she

asserts that La Maison de Claudine is qualitatively different. Whereas the pursuit of self in the earlier works appears to be mediated by the creation of fictional characters--whether Claudine or heroine Renée Néré of La Vagabonde and L'Entrave--La Maison de Claudine "breaks the mirror" of the fictional double in an effort to construct a sense of self that is situated in the present rather than mired in the past:

Colette utilise les faits passés comme autant de matériaux à travers lesquels elle va, non pas se perdre...mais se retrouver, c'est-à-dire se construire. Par la magie de l'art, elle recrée son passé, et ne le répète ni ne le décrit. Elle y choisit ce qui correspond à ce qu'elle se sent être, à ce qu'elle aime, à ce qu'elle désire dans le présent. (xii)

Here Ferrier-Caverivière favors the process of self-construction over genre, stressing the author's efforts to create a sense of self in the present via the found objects of the past, rather than to reconstitute a nostalgic past self that turns away from the present. She also raises questions of textual strategy, signaling Colette's departure from the use of fictional doubles who function as mirror images.

Some of the texts that precede La Maison de Claudine do, in fact, demonstrate an interest in doubles and mirrors. Moreover, the solution to Colette's expressed obligation, to write something other than the Claudine novels, does not seem to lie in a straightforward gesture of self-portraiture. With the Claudine character, author Catulle Mendès told Colette, she had created a type, a literary "tour de force" as well as an author's nightmare-- "une sorte de châtement," he told her, "une faute qui vous suit, qui vous colle à la peau...." She would, he predicted, never be able to escape its shadow (Mes apprentissages 46).

Indeed, Claudine proves a tenacious double, and the mirror a problematic conceit for beginning anew. In "Le Miroir," a vignette contained in Les Vrilles de la vigne, published in 1908, the author describes an encounter with Claudine, who greets the first-person narrator with the words, "Bonjour, mon Sosie!" (201). A dialogue ensues in which the narrator tries in vain to draw boundaries between self and literary creation, a creation

that sends back an image emptied of the vitality and particularity of her childhood: "Hélas, Claudine, j'ai perdu presque tout cela, à ne devenir après tout qu'une femme..." (204). The mirror, then, lacks relief, its flat surface reflecting the monotonous generalities of an inauthentic cultural category emptied of memory. In addition, while Colette's use of the mirror as figure suggests a definitive gap between self and image, the space cannot be sustained. In the end, the mirror images remain fixed while, at the same time, they merge in thought like two owls at twilight ("je sens que la pensée de mon cher Sosie a rejoint mapensée...comme les doux hiboux veloutés de ce crépuscule verdissant") where they remain suspended in deferred flight (205). This image of reunion and postponed departure hints at the mirror's failure as an effective textual strategy in the formulation of a selfhood that definitively breaks with the Claudine tradition; it is perhaps the merged figure that will prove the more promising.

The mirror reappears as an important leitmotif in Colette's 1910 novel, La Vagabonde. According to Stewart, the mirror works here as a device that reflects the protagonist Renée Néré's ongoing efforts at self-definition. While the heroine's given name signals a rebirth, the last name, as Stewart points out, constitutes its "nearly perfect reverse mirror image" (Colette 43). The reflected persona of the music hall performer is a source of advice--a "conseillère maquillée"--but also one of instability as Renée wonders whether the face in the mirror will melt away with her stage make-up. Moreover, Renée's mirrors seem bent on returning images of a female object inextricably enmeshed in the workings of a male gaze, and in the concomitant anxieties concerning beauty and aging that such images elicit. In the end, Renée rejects her wealthy suitor's marriage proposal, fearing her perception of the world would forever be distorted by the mirror of his eyes (Colette 41-44).

While the mirror functions as a conventional trope for identity in La Vagabonde, Miller's analysis of this novel suggests that this device serves as a basis for interrogating its own effectiveness. On one hand, the heroine's mirrored image insists on the traditional

rendering of woman in art--what Miller calls her "status in representation as representation." On the other, Miller proposes that the novel explores what lies 'beyond a representation of identity that depends upon the truth of the mirror" (Miller's emphasis, "Woman of Letters" 230), a formulation of female subjectivity that escapes a poetics of reflection by means of the protagonist's return to writing.

The earlier examination of Atwood's Cat's Eye found the mirror to be an equally problematic device. Cordelia, protagonist Elaine's "twin" or double, provided a persecutory reflection that progressively changed into an image of fleshy femininity, inauthenticity and madness. As argued earlier, Atwood's narrative evokes other possibilities for the double as well; Cordelia represents the potential for a positive reflection of Elaine's childhood, a figure who could reflect back something of the self from the environment. However, this potential is never realized within the body of the narrative, and thus remains a feature of Elaine's capacity for seeing in the dark, for imagining that which remains at the limits of her story in the form of two playful old women who "don't give a hoot" and who appear only marginally at both beginning and end of the novel.

Thus, the mirror proves both a troublesome obstacle and an evolving strategy in the representation of female subjectivity. Lynn Huffer views Colette's rendering of the mirror in a positive light. In her reading of the previously mentioned sketch, "Le Miroir," Huffer interprets the gap between author Colette and her mirror image Claudine as a creative space for the generation of metaphor. It will be recalled that at the end of this text the narrator and her double face off, while in the mind's eye of the narrator, the two figures--self and creation--merge in thought where they hover like a pair of owls ("comme les doux hiboux veloutés de ce crépuscule verdissant"). For Huffer, the mirror images are joined by the metaphor. The word "as" ("comme") acts as a hyphen that unites the two, while at the same time signaling the gap between narrator and reflection.

According to Huffer, this double image reveals the metaphorical status of subjectivity. The mirror enticingly promises an exact duplicate of the subject, while at the

same time it indicates the twin nature of reflection, thereby demonstrating that reality and representation can never coincide. It is only by dint of metaphor that self and reflected image appear to unite. The gap between author and self-representation is an endlessly productive and playful space, Huffer argues, the creative space of metaphor whose meaning can be continually reread and reinterpreted. For Huffer, Colette's pursuit of selfhood takes place within this "metaphorical space of self-invention" (3).

In summary, Colette does not so much seem to abandon the strategy of the mirror as to reformulate it. From this perspective, both Ferrier-Caverivière and Stewart are right. Colette does abandon the fictional double whose fate the reader follows along the path of continuous narrative. At the same time, she pursues a different rendering of Claudine, that is, a more authentic creation of selfhood. This essay seeks to demonstrate how Colette realizes this project by foregrounding a version of the creative process as it evolves in La Maison de Claudine. Exploiting the metaphorical space highlighted by Huffer, the narrator articulates the gap between the creating artist and her subject as a continuous dimension that blurs distinctions between self and other, begging the question of difference between subject and object. As Miller points out, Colette moves beyond a "poetics of reflection"; the work sends back multiple images that constantly challenge the reader to locate the subject of the text. In a sense, the self is both nowhere and everywhere, perpetually embedded in the world of objects the artist depicts. These strategies with their emphasis on connection permit a reworking of woman's traditional place in art, her "status in representation as representation," by altering the subject's anticipated place in self-narration.

It is evident that Huffer's remarks about the relationship between metaphor and self-representation would hold true for any author engaged in the pursuit of selfhood. However, the issue in Colette's work that interests Huffer--and the issue that will serve as a starting point for this analysis--is the specific "figural system" that characterizes Colette's project.

This study advances the argument that La Maison de Claudine is concerned not only with the figures of selfhood, but that it focuses equally on the process involved in imagining these figures. For this reason, I would argue that, like Cat's Eye, the text functions as a "Künstlerroman," fashioning the portrait of the artist as a young girl. Atwood's novel relies on what Coral Howells calls a "'figural' version" of the heroine's narrative, a term this commentator uses not simply to refer to rhetoricity, but to the descriptions of Elaine Risley's paintings which parallel the "'discursive' memoir version" (204-205). While La Maison de Claudine is not a "Künstlerroman" per se, it is possible to read Colette's sketches as a series of portraits that constitute an artist's retrospective. As a study of symbol formation, La Maison de Claudine frequently draws on elements characteristic of visual representation. In this way the work invokes continuous relationships in space--the contiguity of subject and embedded object--as an alternative to the gap between self and other. Through a variety of visual poetics, La Maison de Claudine reimagines the space between self and mirror as a continuous one.⁷ Thus, if Colette's text demonstrates an increased identity between author and narrator/protagonist, as Stewart maintains, this heightened coincidence may derive not simply from an increased "existential authenticity," but from a rendering of the process of self-creation that is formalized in the text.

The embedded objects of Colette's opening sketch not only introduce a metaphor for selfhood, but also the visual play of figure and ground, one that continually requires that the reader rethink the nature of subjectivity as part of a creative process, one that confuses the distinction between subject and object by filling up the intervening space. The very title of La Maison de Claudine emphasizes a poetics of location, focusing attention on the narrator's house and garden, the ground of childhood. However, the traditional boundaries of these spaces become fluid as the terrain of selfhood, the "house," expands beyond the garden walls. The initial sketch of La Maison de Claudine, "Où sont les enfants?," also encourages the reader to focus on spatial relations by asking the

question "Where?" The narrator's mother enters the garden in search of her children who have failed to appear for either their afternoon snack or their dinner. Her question, "Where are the children?," is met with silence. Busy at play, hidden among the branches, the narrator chooses not to answer.

Catherine Slawy-Sutton attributes this silence to the limits of language. The mother's unanswered question, she maintains, signals only one of several failures of language in the text. To the lack of verbal communication between mother and daughter, Slawy-Sutton adds language's inability to adequately grasp sensation, the inaccessibility of animal life via language and the impossibility of recovering the magic of childhood through words (308). Slawy-Sutton's remarks, then, encourage a consideration of the text as one that seeks to counter the deficiencies of language with alternative strategies. The mother's unanswered question provokes a visual search.

The narrator's silence also constitutes a kind of disappearance, designated as "*une sorte d'évanouissement miraculeux*" (9), or loss of self that is characteristic of play. Indeed, this sketch seems to establish the ideal play environment described by Winnicott, where an individual has the paradoxical "experience of being alone" in the presence of a reliable other ("*The Capacity*" 31). However, the text reverses the typical play dynamic between parent and child. Here it is the mother who seeks to periodically verify the persistent presence of her children despite an exercise of freedom readily granted by the parents.

The conclusion of the sketch, however, reveals the search to be mutual, as the narrator ponders the possibility of the mother's on-going presence despite her death. Through a shift in time and tense, the narrator relocates herself, moving from the imperfect of childhood to the present. As an adult reduced from silence to language, the narrator answers the mother's question, which echoes continuously throughout this initial sketch. The daughter finally replies: "*Deux reposent*" (9). Like the mother, two of the children have died, while the narrator and a second sibling remain alive. It is as if the

narrator speaks in response to the mother's anxiety for her children, an anxiety that persists beyond the grave. Now the daughter speaks and the mother is silent. The narrator's recourse to language despite the mother's death supposes the parent's ongoing presence and reiterates or mirrors the paradox of play, a continuous twoness in oneness, a reliable presence in absence. The text becomes a two-way mirror.

In a later work, La Naissance du jour, published in 1928, the mirror image of mother and daughter takes on an even greater symmetry. As the daughter reads a letter from her aging mother, the mother's illegible handwriting takes on the features of the embedded object:

De sorte que cette lettre, au lieu de la contempler comme un confus délire,
j'y lis un de ces paysages hantés où par jeu l'on cacha un visage dans les
feuilles, un bras entre deux branches, un torse sous des noeuds de rochers...
(167)

While the two-way mirror of the first sketch organizes a playful space for self-creation, the text's reflections and reversals also introduce a spatial confusion between subject and object. Colette's embedded figures prompt the reader to ask not simply where the subject is, but who the subject is, a move not unlike the ambiguity introduced in Cat's Eye between the protagonist and her "twins." Colette's text, in fact, is not a self-portrait, but rather a portrayal of objects that counters simple reflexivity.

As this first vignette makes clear, La Maison de Claudine announces a number of preoccupations examined in the preceding discussion of Cat's Eye, specifically those concerning questions about the subject's boundaries and location. However, Atwood's articulation of these issues relies on a different form; essentially, Atwood uses linear narrative to tell the story of artist Elaine Risley, a story that functions in tandem with descriptions of the artist's paintings. While the narrative must be pieced together from a series of flashbacks, and while the issue of twins introduces an ambivalence concerning the

autonomous nature of the subject and her boundaries, it is clear that Cat's Eye relates the life story of a specific protagonist.

In contrast, no linear narrative unites Colette's thirty-five sketches, although the order appears to be loosely chronological. While a number of the vignettes can be construed as portraits of the narrator as a young girl--"Le Curé sur le mur" and "La Petite," for example--the "subject" of most of these texts is someone else. The narrator often functions as observer, reporter, witness or minor character, situated at the margin of events, or in some other way "embedded" in the narrative.

While Valérie C. Lastinger points out that La Maison de Claudine belongs to the tradition of first-person narratives characterized as "souvenirs d'enfance," or childhood memories, she nonetheless argues that it is the narrator's mother "Sido," rather than "le 'je' narrateur," who is the text's main character. She justifies her statement by pointing out that Sido furnishes most of the work's anecdotal material (542-543); and, indeed, Sido plays a central role in twenty-one of the thirty-five vignettes and is in some way mentioned in five others. Six of the sketches feature animal portraits, while four either mention or focus on Colette's own daughter, Bel-Gazou, a nickname first used by Colette's father to designate the author when she was a child. Alternatively, Stewart asserts that the protagonist is a multiple character, a "composite" of the narrator's various childhood designations--Gabri, "la Petite," and Minet-Chéri--plus Colette's mother and daughter. "These three," Stewart observes, "rejoin and repeat each other, just as do the sundry household pets of the novel's concluding chapters..." (Colette 24).

Accordingly, Stewart seems to locate the arena of selfhood at the site of coincidence between narrator and composite character, in an identity that manifests a greater "existential authenticity" than did the character Claudine. This study, however, takes Stewart's hypothesis concerning the pursuit of authenticity in a different direction, one that locates subjectivity in the playful space between the poles of reflection, between narrator and text, between artist and portrait. Here, the term "sketch," used to designate

the vignettes that constitute this work, is taken in both a literal and a figurative sense, as both text and painting. I argue that the author strives to sustain a double system of representation that draws on both vision and language, the embedded silent figure and the unfolding narrative. As a result, this reading suggests a parallel between the artist's retrospective in Cat's Eye and the "portraits" of La Maison de Claudine, both motivated by the task of self-creation. While Huffer's reading of Colette's autobiographical fiction explores metaphorical or figural space between Colette and Claudine, this study argues in favor of a pictorial space that questions the linguistic gap between self and other, a space between artist and object that is the site of the creative process.

Portraits purport to render the object, but at the same time they implicate the artist. Who, then, is the "subject" of the painting? Portraiture can be construed as a matter of relationship rather than as a matter of clear separation between artist-agent and represented object; or, as art historian Marcia Pointon asserts, "at its most abstract, portraiture is a question of the relationship between the self as art and the self in art" (qtd. in Hoffman 4).⁸

Connections between self and art have been explored by psychoanalyst Marion Milner, whose ideas influenced Winnicott's understanding of play and creativity.⁹ In particular, Milner's interest lies in the relationship between creativity and authentic self-expression. Milner's point of departure in this investigation is her own artwork which she initially deems to be "disappointing." In her book entitled On Not Being Able to Paint, published under the pen name Joanna Field, Milner elaborates, insisting that her paintings "gave no sense of being new creations in their own right, they seemed to be only tolerably good imitations of something else; in fact, to be counterfeits" (3). In a series of drawings undertaken in order to work her way out of this dilemma, Milner began by analyzing her choice of perspective, her desire, for example, to draw a garden as if "nearly inside it and surrounded by it" (10). She seeks a sense of embeddedness.

In essence, Milner attempts to lose her sense of separation from the objects of representation by becoming "more mixed up with them." What is more, she describes her endeavor as a kind of circling back, a move undertaken in order to diffuse her sense of separation, although she at first perceives her efforts as "a retreat from the responsibilities of being a separate person." However, she refines her remarks, stipulating that "it felt more like a search, a going backwards perhaps, but a going back to look for something, something which could have real value for adult life if only it could be recovered" (10). Her first step in this circling back to explore "the nature of imagination" resides in her fascination with the blur, with "the play of edges" rather than the outline, with the transition of one color to the next, with color as movement rather than precise delineation.

For Milner this process consists of something other than mastering the techniques of painting or the rules of perspective; she contrasts this process with a "publicly agreed" or "common sense" conception of seeing that insists on separation and outline. Thus, Milner's work does not enumerate the characteristics of creativity, but instead navigates the reader through a series of her own drawings which involve the painter in "a world of change, of continual development and process, one in which there [is] no sharp line between one state and the next, as there is no fixed boundary between twilight and darkness but only a gradual merging of the one into the other" (16-24).

Milner's elaboration of creativity, which renounces artistic prescription without proposing a transgression of these directives, suggests a model for reading Colette's text. La Maison de Claudine thus becomes a gallery, a series of portraits or "drawings" that turn away from an earlier compliant or "publicly agreed" and clearly outlined conception of Claudine, dictated by Willy's notion of the marketable novel of "libertinage," in exchange for a subjectivity of process, a perpetual circling back, an artist's retrospective that immerses or hides the self in a world of represented objects.

Clearly, the opening text of La Maison de Claudine exploits the form of the retrograde circle by concluding with the query "where," a search for the invisible but

embedded object, that sends the reader back to the question of the title, "Où sont les enfants?," and a number of additional sketches explore this form in different ways. The second vignette is a case in point. The title of the second vignette, "Le Sauvage," seems to announce the portrait of Sido's first husband, the uncouth heir of gentlemen glass blowers ("gentilshommes verriers") who had accumulated land and property in Colette's native Burgundy. Instead of a portrait, however, the narrative is more like a fairytale gone awry. "Le Sauvage" is cast as something of a dark prince, with his black beard and his ghoulish pallor ("sa pâleur de vampire distingué"), while Sido—short for Sidonie—is the graceful and lively young woman from the city visiting her childhood nurse in the countryside. But Sido falls short of the ideal princess; despite her charm, she is neither pretty nor rich. Therefore, when "le Sauvage" proposes marriage, Sido, who lives in Belgium as her brothers' dependent, cannot but accept.

This story of marriage falls somewhere between ideal and reality. The words "il l'enleva"—he abducted her or carried her off—signal romance and seduction as well as unwillingness and violence. The rumored "belle maison à perron et jardin" turns out to be something of a sham. While it boasts an unexpectedly bright "salon," the upper floor resembles an abandoned attic. There is also the suggestion of evil enchantment. The kitchen is peopled by old women who spin by candlelight and aggressive, cackling cooks:

...des fées barbues projetaient dans un regard, sur la nouvelle épouse, le mauvais sort, et quelque belle lavandière délaissée du maître pleurait féroce, accotée à la fontaine, en l'absence du Sauvage qui chassait.

(11)

Despite the disillusioning ambience, Sido throws herself into her role as lady of the manor, taking charge of house and kitchen, while "le Sauvage," named for his silence and solitude, spends his days hunting alone. In the end, though, isolation gets the better of her and she breaks down in tears. "Le Sauvage," despite his ineptness and confusion, determines her state must be due to a lack of her accustomed urban amenities and heads for the nearest

city. He returns with precious objects, a mortar of rare marble and an Indian cashmere shawl, offerings that constitute his first and last disinterested act.

Prized by Sido for their rare and costly nature, these gifts have been handed down to the narrator, who contemplates them from the perspective of the present at the end of the text. The mortar, now dull and chipped, can still be used for grinding almonds, and the cherry-red shawl has been stitched into cushions and handbags.

Thus, at the end of the story, the reader actually reaches the beginning by encountering the objects that appear to have prompted the narrated memory. Here, from the present, the author/artist contemplates and depicts these now commonplace objects and their potential for transformation, at first, for changing almonds to powder or for assuming the shape of a cushion, and secondly, for unfolding on a broader canvas in the shape of a modern fairytale. In this way, the reader's encounter with the objects' evocative power at the end of the text sends him or her back, in a perpetual circle, to the story's beginning as the memories they rekindle open once again into story.

At the same time, it should be recalled that the objects do more than call forth a repetition of a familiar fairy tale plot. It is neither a happily-ever-after tale of wedlock, nor a realistic story about the economic nature of marriage. Falling somewhere between ideal and reality, Colette's story makes use of objects buried in a conventional tale to spin out a narrative that is not, in the end, about marriage, but about the act of creation. The precious gifts, valued by Sido for their cost and exotic nature, become humble household objects prized for their everyday transformative powers. However, their use value extends to include their potential, not only to open out into story, but also to transform the story into something new, merging the plot of the narrator-artist with that of the marriage tale in the final paragraphs. In the end, the text, with its magical details and elegant circular structure, reinstates the objects' precious status, intimately linking them to the act of creation and the work of art.

Colette's procedure, which approaches self-creation through the artist's relationship with everyday objects, finds an echo in the importance critic Walter Benjamin accords to the world of cultural fragments and debris. For example, in his essay "The Storyteller," (Illuminations 83-109), Benjamin sees the tale as a fragment, an object relegated to the cultural trash heap when the art of storytelling was displaced by the novel. Laden with potential, such a fragment encapsulates an entire world within; it is rather like a monad with the capacity to unfold in the present and seems to have much in common with the involuntary memory of Proust.

In "Franz Kafka," Benjamin includes a tale that illustrates the nexus of fragments, memories and their inherent potential. One evening in a dark inn, villagers reveal what they would choose if granted one wish. When it comes to the beggar, he expresses his desire, which is embedded in the tale:

"I wish I were a powerful king reigning over a big country. Then some night while I was asleep in my palace, an enemy would invade my country....Roused from my sleep, I wouldn't have time even to dress and I would have to flee in my shirt....I would finally arrive safely right here at the bench in this corner." The others exchanged uncomprehending glances. "And what good would this wish have done you?" someone asked. "I'd have a shirt," was the answer. (Illuminations 135)

This tale within a tale appears to illustrate the potential of the story's fragments. In his desire for a shirt, the dreamer conjures up a tale in which he glimpses himself as king. From this story, or bit of collective memory, he pries loose one detail, a connection with the present, which allows the beggar to envision himself in his own personal narrative as one who wears a shirt. The unfolding of this wish, a potential contained within the tale's fragment, appears to elaborate Benjamin's understanding of imagination expressed in an earlier text, entitled One Way Street. Here Benjamin describes imagination as "the gift of

interpolating into the infinitely small, of inventing for every intensity, an extensiveness to contain its new compressed fullness..." (Reflections 83).

In essence, Sido's precious gifts function in much the same way as the beggar's shirt, as objects of "intensity" and "compressed fullness" that invite interpolation. Buried in a story reminiscent of the cultural conventions of fairy tale and gothic romance are objects that allow the narrator to envision herself as writer, as artist, as teller of tales--a Scheherazade who escapes a traditional fate through her art. La Maison de Claudine, then, parries the trend designated by Benjamin; indeed, the work seems to rescue storytelling from the cultural trash heap in that the book more closely resembles an illustrated collection of tales than a novel.

The overall organization of the final edition of these tales, as well as many of the individual sketches themselves, invoke the retrograde circle. Commentators have characterized the structure of La Maison de Claudine in a variety of ways. Elaine Marks asserts that there is "no significant arrangement in the order of the stories," that they are primarily held together by the voice of the narrator. Nonetheless, she notes, the sketches form patterns, "the repeated patterns of everyday life, familiar patterns which make the period of childhood seem eternal." In addition, she notes, these patterns seem to emanate from the warmth and security of house and mother. In support of this statement, Marks cites a passage from the sketch entitled "La Petite," a text that suggests the tales form a series of concentric circles radiating from a maternal center (201-203). Standing outside the house in the growing twilight, "La Petite" sees the glowing light that illuminates her mother's thimble as she sews:

...cette main et cette flamme, et la tête penchée, soucieuse, auprès de la lampe, sont le centre et le secret d'où naissent et se propagent,--en zones de moins en moins sensibles, en cercles qu'atteint de moins en moins la lumière et la vibration essentielles,--le salon tiède, sa flore de branches coupées et sa faune d'animaux paisibles; la maison sonore, sèche, craquante

comme un pain chaud; le jardin, le village...Au-delà, tout est danger, tout est solitude... (22-23)

Louis Forestier approaches the work's structure thematically. He proposes a hidden structure that subtends an apparent thematic organization, one that seemingly groups the texts under the headings of nature, love and animals, an organization that, Forestier finds, inadequately speaks to the complexity of the material. As an alternative, Forestier suggests that the collection of tales constitutes a confrontation between subject and world. This exploration begins by situating the individual within the context of family and birthplace, then by exploring conflicts with society involving language, culture, politics and contacts with others. The subsequent discovery of the consolation derived from nature and animals is followed by encounters with the problems of death, love, and motherhood. The remaining texts constitute a response to the earlier sketches, comprising an investigation of elements that bring relief and deliverance: "imagination, morale, rire, sentiment, merveilleux retrouvé dans les prestiges de l'enfance" (30).

This "merveilleux retrouvé" is the subject of the final vignette. La Maison de Claudine ends with "La Noisette creuse" which consists of an inventory of the objects found in the pockets of Colette's daughter, Bel-Gazou, during a holiday at the beach and the connection between these objects and the realm of imagination. The collection of scavenged seaside treasures includes a hollow nutshell which Bel-Gazou holds to her ear as if listening to the sound of the ocean. In a remark characterized by a synesthesia that shifts from language to vision, eight-year-old Bel-Gazou exclaims: "Je vois! Je vois la chanson! Elle est aussi fine qu'un cheveu, elle est aussi fine qu'une herbe..." (159).

As Forestier points out, this text brings the reader full circle: "Parti de l'enfance, magnifiée par le souvenir, garant d'une sagesse, il s'achève sur l'enfance retrouvée et, déjà, presque perdue" (30). At the conclusion of the final vignette, the narrator worries that by the same time next year her daughter may have lost her gift of imagination in the process of growing up. However, the text also reveals the object's latent potential for the narrator.

Forestier concludes that this final sketch signals the rediscovery and permanence of imagination as a deliverance from or transcendence of life's difficulties.

From a formal point of view, the last vignette duplicates the retrograde circles of earlier sketches. The bits of debris in Bel Gazou's pockets mirror the everyday objects--the mortar and shawl, for example, ensconced at the end of "Le Sauvage"--and thereby clue the reader to the importance of the embedded object in the creative process. Like the mortar and shawl, Bel-Gazou's magical bit of debris sends the reader back to the beginning of the cycle to look more closely, to hunt for the hidden figure, one whose latent potential enfolds not simply a story of childhood, but one of artistic endeavor. Thus, the circular structure encourages a double reading. On one hand, the subject seems to look to childhood as a closed circle in a mythical past. In this sense, La Maison de Claudine appears to be a "syngenetic" text, containing the germ that determines and occasions a repeated unfolding of the subject's various generational forms--Sido, narrator, and Bel-Gazou. Stewart's understanding of the work's "composite" subject, as figures who "rejoin and repeat each other" appears to coincide with this rendition of subjectivity. On the other hand, the text's version of selfhood is also an "epigenetic" one that involves the artist-protagonist's continual intervention from the perspective of the present, a remaking whose raw materials are drawn from childhood, but whose ultimate form is a matter of an ongoing creative process. This second version of selfhood is compatible with Ferrier-Caverivière's assessment of the text, which asserts that Colette neither repeats nor describes the past; rather, she recreates it.¹⁰

The changing shape of the work as a whole lends credence to this second interpretation. Three different editions of La Maison de Claudine were published, each with a somewhat different collection of texts arranged in a slightly different order. "La Noisette creuse," for example, was not included in the original text. It was added, along with four other vignettes, to the second edition in 1923 and maintained as the concluding sketch in the definitive 1930 edition.¹¹

These revised editions imply a repeated circling back on the part of the author, a continual reworking and reinvention of the subject. The form and content of "La Noisette creuse" serve to accentuate the formal properties that emerge as the vignettes accumulate. The sketch acts as a key to the work as a whole, by inviting the reader to circle back to the beginning, by suggesting a perspective for re-reading. The retrograde circle supplies a figure that gives shape to or formalizes Huffer's metaphorical gap between subject and reflection, a gap that, according to Huffer, encourages infinite reinterpretation. The text's evolving nature suggests that its shape--unlike traditional linear narrative, with its "a priori" requirements of beginning, middle, and end--is a function of process, an ongoing interaction between the narrating subject and textual object. If Colette's rendition of selfhood is something of a perpetual return, it is also one that persistently opens into the future by means of constant re-creation.

While Marks's observation that the vignettes show "no significant arrangement" indicates the absence of an "a priori" ordering principle, the addition of "La Noisette creuse" implies the emergence of an ordering principle that surfaces over time. In her exploration of creativity, Milner examines two different approaches to form via a series of drawings she undertakes in an effort to arrive at an authentic product that is more than a copy or "counterfeit." To this end, Milner evolves a process that she describes as giving "something that came from within oneself" to the external world, a process that could feel like "a plunge--a plunge that one could sometimes do deliberately but which also sometimes just happened, as when one falls in love" (26). She undertakes a series of "free drawings," deciding that she will in no way determine the form or subject matter in advance--a move akin to that of *Cat's Eye's* protagonist, who begins to paint "things that aren't there" (337). Milner realizes that the imposition of authoritative forms can seem "an attempt to separate one from the very source of one's creative relation to the world" (50). However, she also discovers that abandoning the "ordering principle" is a risky endeavor. While a "common sense" or "publicly agreed" way of seeing can be "hated for its

restrictiveness," it can also be "loved" because it ensures "one's very psychic and physical existence" (100), one's integration into an accepted social vision.

What is wanted, Milner decides, is "something in between drawing random lines with all thought shut away, and trying consciously to make the lines follow a mental image" (72). Milner describes this in-between place as a "gap," or "framed emptiness," bordered by the artist's understanding on one side and the rhythm of bodily movements engaged with a medium on the other. What emerges on paper or canvas is a kind of inherent, spontaneous or "non-willed order" that reveals a pattern of the artist's authentic dreams and desires (103).¹²

Milner's formulation of a "non-willed" order suggests a means of approaching the relation between form and self-creation in La Maison de Claudine. As of Colette's decision, her avowal "d'écrire autre chose que les Claudine," the author experiments with several forms that break with or rework that of the traditional novel. Dialogues des bêtes, for example, is written in dialogue form; Les Vrilles de la vigne is a collection of sketches; and La Vagabonde is part epistolary novel. Thus, Colette gradually abandons the novels of "libertinage" and plays with a variety of forms. La Maison de Claudine, with its juxtaposed sketches, "reads" like so many pictures in an exhibition that gradually fill a playful gap or "framed emptiness" where, unhampered by predetermined form, the shape of the self's dreams and desires unfold.

Colette's self-making process differs from the classic notion of creativity formulated by Aristotle in his Metaphysica. For Aristotle, art, or making, involves both matter and form, the latter contained "in the soul of the artist." Art's starting point is the artist's notion of form, its conceptualization through the process of thinking which, once completed, leads on to the process of making.¹³ The form to be realized is "present potentially" and can be expressed negatively as the absence of the form to be achieved, in the way that illness might be defined as the absence of health. Thus, matter and form predate the process of making and are both contained within a conceptual formulation

prior to the actual making. To illustrate, Aristotle offers the example of the "brazen sphere," a verbal formula that implies both the matter and form of object to be made (Book Z.7-8, 1032a-1034a).

In contrast to Aristotle's process of making, the created self in La Maison de Claudine takes shape gradually, gains form at the site of a "framed emptiness" where it is sensuously negotiated on paper. In other words, self-making involves a dynamic between matter and matter, rather than a hierarchical organization of form and matter. Instead, form is emergent, deriving from the interplay of childhood objects, which translate the "matter" of dream and illusion, and concrete, physical engagement with the medium, as pen or paint brush moves along the surface of paper or canvas.

Moreover, a number of the vignettes suggest a preoccupation with a shift from the "a priori" dictates of form to something more akin to Milner's "non-willed order." The third sketch entitled "Amour"¹⁴, for example, begins with Sido's lament that there is no meat for a proper dinner since the village butcher has failed to do his slaughtering at noon, as is his custom. In her predicament, Sido asks the question: "Qu'allons-nous manger ce soir?" The narrator reports the answers she imagines family members giving in reply: her father's choice, raw tomatoes with pepper; brother Achille--had he not been studying in Paris--would have requested red cabbage with vinegar; hot chocolate for brother Léon; and for the narrator, fried potatoes, nuts and cheese. "Mais il paraît que frites, chocolat, tomates et choux rouges ne 'font pas un dîner'..."(14). For Sido, the apparent arbiter of proper form, these vegetarian alternatives are not acceptable; meat is indisputably the centerpiece of dinner's appropriate shape. When asked why, she simply replies: "Ne pose donc pas de questions stupides..." (14-15) as she hurries to the butcher to right the situation.

Form, then, falls within the purview of adults, most especially the mother, and constitutes part of their arcane knowledge. The fifteen-year-old narrator puzzles over these imperatives, but also tests her understanding of them by suggesting that Sido,

dressed in her gardening clothes, should remove her apron before heading off on her errand. However, Sido counters her daughter's conception of the requisite forms of coquetry; after all, she tells the child, she is going no farther than "rue de la Roche."

If creation, albeit of a domestic nature, requires a conceptualization of ideal form as its point of departure, the daughter is left in the margins; it is not surprising that she doesn't feel like accompanying Sido, but instead waits for her mother's return on the steps of the house, on the edge of inside and outside, where the atmosphere is cool and sad ("frais et triste").

Nonetheless, the incident engages a contemplation not only of form, but of process, and the narrator ponders what it means to obtain meat for a proper dinner. In this way, she is led to consider her fascination with the butcher shop, whose display--"ses couteaux, sa hachette, ses poumons de boeuf gonflés que le courant d'air irise et balance, roses comme la pulpe du bégonia" (15)--exercises the same sensuous appeal as a candy store. However, her experience of the place is no longer a matter of simple pleasure, a delight in swallowing up the transparent ribbon of rosy lard the butcher's wife extends at the end of her finger. The complexity of the adolescent's perceptions is brought home through a description of the butcher's daughter. Although she is as old as the narrator, Marie Tricotet has a different sense of boundaries; for her, the offal in the butcher's garden suggests no sense of separation or difference. Instead, these body parts appear blurred with the domain of the self--objects drawn into the child's empire of play. Marie entertains herself by piercing pig and calf bladders, then stepping on them "pour faire jet d'eau" (15).

For the narrator, however, the butcher shop evokes a heightened awareness of self and other, of inside and outside, of the violence and chaos that are implied by the creation of a proper dinner: "Le son affreux de la peau qu'on arrache à la chair fraîche, la rondeur des rognons, fruits bruns dans leur capitonnage immaculé de 'panne' rosée, m'émeuvent d'une répugnance compliquée, que je recherche et que je dissimule" (15).

By reading this vignette as a story of coming to the creative process, we may draw points of comparison with Atwood's Cat's Eye. In Atwood's novel, the violence and chaos that menace the delights of a non-integrated state, where subject and object blur, are rendered by the image of the vivisected turtle, whose heart, at the service of scientific play, remains inside the body while exposed to view, pounding faintly on the edge of life and death. Colette's sketch addresses a similar discovery, but with a different emphasis. Atwood's narrative stresses the attraction of the luminous object, both good and evil, that surround the artist, drawing her into a play of forces. Colette's text focuses on the problematic shift from the apparently innocent games of Marie Tricotet, whose play reveals an enviable obliviousness to divisions between self and other, to a new understanding of creation that forces an awareness of separation and difference. Simply swallowing the outside world--the rainbow colors of the candy store, or the rosy delights of the butcher shop so necessary to achieving appropriate form--now proves an inadequate paradigm.

In On Not Being Able to Paint, Milner takes up the same preoccupation. Here, creating is an art of selfhood, a means of establishing a relationship between self and world. It is one thing to recognize the objects of authentic desire as those to which the non-integrated subject responds unimpeded within a secure environment. However, what is the next step? Milner objects that to approach art as a means of "spiritual enveloping," as a way of imaginatively making the desired object one's own, proves unsatisfactory. For although such an undertaking, like eating, she explains, "may satisfy the desire to have the good thing in one's own possession, it certainly does not preserve that thing's essential identity and nature, it rather destroys this identity in order to merge it with one's own" (56-57).

What is more, the notion of enveloping fails to address the limits of the body, the separation between subject and object, an awareness that is forcefully brought home to the artist as soon as the pencil, pen, or paintbrush make contact with paper or canvas.

Making, then, if one abandons an allegiance to predetermined form in pursuit of Milner's "non-willed" ordered, entails the apprehension of loss. "At the moment of having to realise the limits of the body, when beginning to make marks on the paper, all the anxieties about separation and losing what one loved could come flooding in," Milner elaborates. One response to such anxieties, she notes, is a return to "moral law" (57), the prescribed and predetermined forms, the "publicly agreed" way of seeing.

In light of Milner's theories, then, Colette's "Amour" appears to take up not only the temptations of a predetermined form, but also the problems of the paradigm of envelopment. As Sido leaves the house, the narrator's father goes in search of his treasured magazines and reviews, "toute provende imprimée," which will be swallowed up, disappearing into his library, his metaphorical eyrie ("aire"). In anticipation of his recurring hunt ("chasse") for texts, an activity that echoes Sido's repeated trip to the butcher's, the children have taken to hiding the most desirable reading material, a ploy taken up by the father as well in self-defense as he tucks the latest copy of Le Temps under the cushion of his chair.

A later rendering of Captain Jules-Joseph Colette in Sido, published in 1929, reveals the father's desire to be a producer, as well as a consumer, of texts. After the father's death, the daughter learns that a dozen bound volumes, each bearing a handwritten title, have been discovered in his room. However, aside from a dedication to Sido, the hundreds of pages they contained were all blank. "Il y en avait tant, de ces pages respectées par la timidité ou la nonchalance," the daughter-narrator recounts, "que nous n'en vîmes jamais la fin" (Sido 55). Her brother, a doctor, uses them for prescriptions; Sido wraps them around jam jars; and granddaughters use them for their scribbles. The narrator, already a writer, uses them as tools of the trade: "J'y puisai à mon tour, dans cet héritage immatériel, au temps de mes débuts....J'osai couvrir de ma grosse écriture ronde la cursive invisible..." (Sido 56).

Commentator Jouve finds significance for the writer in this inheritance: "All that space: no need to write in the margins. 'Virgin pages' had been given to the daughter instead of the demand that she be a good girl. But the white space had also been protected by the father" (51). However, taken in conjunction with the earlier vignette, "Amour," this freedom--a kind of safe space enclosed by the meticulous binding--is not a guarantor of creative process. The narrator of "Amour" is problematically positioned between the productive mother's formal imperatives and the father's ineffectual consumption that leads only to the blank page. The narrator's pursuit of her own "non-willed" order begins, as Milner's theories would predict, with a heightened sense of separation and loss.

Having garnered all available printed prey, the father inquires after Sido's whereabouts as he stomps off to his lair. The thump of his crutch and cane--the necessary consequence of his wartime amputation--create a familiar rhythm. Despite the familiarity, however, the narrator experiences a new "malaise," noticing for the first time the prominent veins, the wrinkles, the graying hair: "C'est donc possible qu'il ait bientôt soixante ans?..." (17). When Sido returns, the child is waiting for her on the steps of the house, where she gains additional, parallel insights. She is disheartened by the awareness that she is not her mother's primary concern, when Sido asks a question, a puzzling one in that Sido must certainly already know the answer. She mirrors the father's inquiries, asking "Où est ton père?" Thus, Sido sends the reader back to the initial question--"Où sont les enfants?"--as the daughter ponders the mother's apparency: "...c'est donc possible que ma mère ait bientôt cinquante-quatre ans?..." (17). In this context, the question "where" insists on separation and disappearance, as does the theme of consumption. The vignette insists on the gap between subject and object, and the consequent chaos that informs both love and creation. Indeed, the reader finds the narrator/writer/"subject" seated in this metaphoric gap, on the steps, between inside and outside, between mother and father, between different but untenable versions of creativity. In addition, the text ad-

dresses a series of gaps that contrast a purported ideal with a perceived external reality: the proper dinner and the facts of the butcher shop; the consumption of a delicious world and the eradication of the other; the oneness of eternal love and the awareness of mortality.

Likewise, Milner's text dwells on the relationship between a similar series of gaps and the act of authentic creation. Her drawings, she concludes, reveal a fear of the gap between subject and object, because this dissonance threatens the individual's identity which is closely tied to the desires one directs at the outside world. The disparity invites the conclusion that desire and the outside world will never match. What is more, to engage with such chaos threatens one's sense of "objectivity," a kind of "disillusion that if known about could seem to threaten all one's belief in any goodness anywhere" (50-52). Milner's remark about a lost belief in goodness can be elucidated by recalling Friedrich Nietzsche's description of Hamlet as "the Dionysian man" in *The Birth of Tragedy*, a text with which Milner's theories resonate. Nietzsche asserts:

...both have once looked truly into the essence of things, they have gained knowledge, and nausea inhibits action; for their action could not change anything in the eternal nature of things; they feel it to be ridiculous or humiliating that they should be asked to set right a world that is out of joint. Knowledge kills action; action requires the veils of illusion.... (60)

Nietzsche's understanding of Greek tragedy turns on the importance of its artistic illusion. His theory supposes a form of "proto-tragedy" in which an ecstatic chorus achieves a perception of oneness with the natural world through the celebration of its god, Dionysus, thereby obliterating the disparity between subject and object, the gap between appearance and reality. This proto-chorus, then, becomes "the mirror image in which the Dionysian man contemplates himself" (63). However, the spectator, by virtue of its position in the "orchestra," is contiguous with this proto-chorus, physically engaging with its revelry.

Therefore, his illusion, his identification with the chorus, is not--at least in its origins--an intellectual endeavor, but rather a phenomenon based on action.

In light of this text, Milner's theories appear to be a reworking of a Nietzschean theme. Although the body imposes limits on the individual, the imagination, Milner counters, can transcend these boundaries, fancying itself in the shape of its surrounding objects. She refers to this ability as the capacity of the "imaginative body." What is more, her understanding of the relationship between disillusionment and creativity lead her to a reconsideration of this capacity. Milner reflects:

These questions brought me back to thinking more about the phenomena of spreading the imaginative body to take the form of what one looked at.

For might not this power to spread around objects of the outer world something that was nevertheless part of oneself, might it not be a way of trying to deal with the primary human predicament of disillusion through separation and jealousy and loss of love? (55)

Disillusionment is approached via the illusion of art, which serves as a bridge to a different, and for Milner, a more hopeful perception of the outside world. It is an apprehension that attenuates the perception of chaos and despair by spreading around objects in which the self has become embedded.

Attaining this illusion entails two initial moves: first, an awareness of the gap where "the inner dream and the objective fact can never permanently coincide, they can only interact"; second, it involves resisting the temptation to return to preconceived ideas of appropriate or socially approved forms. Milner posits:

...if one could bring oneself to look at the gap, allow oneself to see both the ideal and the failure to live up to it in one moment of vision, and without the urge to interfere and alter oneself to fit the ideal, then the ideal and the fact seemed somehow to enter into relation and produce something quite new.... (90)

However, like Nietzsche's theories of Greek drama, Milner's illusions require action. Having both acknowledged the gap and turned away from preconceptions of form, the individual must establish a rhythm of her own through action by moving the brush over the canvas. Movement or physical play thus eventually reveals an evolving form that the mind can then recognize, elaborate and enhance.¹⁵

With the texts of both Nietzsche and Milner in mind, the reader will recall that the fifteen-year-old narrator of "Amour" has acknowledged the gap in both her altered experience of the butcher shop and in her sudden perception of the signs of aging in both parents. However, this knowledge does not impel the child to embrace the dictates of pre-determined form; instead, the issue of a proper dinner is abandoned. In effect, the daughter turns away from her initial narrative to give the reader the action of drama.

Sido's return precipitates a jealous quarrel with her husband, a dialogue which papers over Captain Colette's own knowledge of the gap which has been rekindled here by his perception Sido's seemingly long absence. Where has she been--simply to the butcher's? No, he discovers, she has also been to Cholet's to pick up some herbs. And did she visit the Mabilat brothers as well? No? Well then, she must have been too busy flirting with the young dandies at the café ("les godelureaux du mastroquet"). The father's accusations, peppered with popular expressions, and the mother's blushing vehement self-defense lend a passionate verve to a dialogue worthy of a pair of adolescents.

The youthful energy of this set piece flies in the face of the parents' gray hair and wrinkles, a juxtaposition that strikes the daughter as comic. Here the daughter-narrator takes on the role of spectator, but a spectator who is engaged in the rhythmic "play," in that she must render the action, with its movement and gestures, for the reader. Although she is not the focus, or "subject" of the sketch, the narrator has nonetheless embedded herself in the portrayal of the outside world in much the same way as Nietzsche's proto-tragic spectator finds himself embedded in the action of the chorus.

Finally, it is not altogether clear whether the concluding dialogue is the action of comedy or tragedy. At the end of this vignette, the narrator's voice is doubled by that of an older narrator who senses the dual nature of the drama, who perceives the chaotic passion, the gap, that subtends the pleasant illusion afforded by comic play. At the age of fifteen, however, the illusion prevails, making the possibility for action, hope and self-creation available to an older, layered, and more complex subject: "Mais je ris encore, moi, de leurs querelles, parce que je n'ai que quinze ans, et que je n'ai pas encore deviné, sous un sourcil de vieillard, la férocité de l'amour, et sur des joues flétries de femme la rougeur de l'adolescence" (18).

Affinities between Nietzsche's understanding of tragedy and Colette's work have been previously underscored by Robert Goodhand in an article entitled "Apollo and Dionysus: Bedfellows in Colette's Vagabonde." This essay analyzes the ways in which heroine Renée Néré, who is both author and music-hall performer, embodies a number of the qualities associated with the philosopher's sense of the tragic. In addition to her acceptance of the cycle of disintegration and rebirth, Goodhand also signals Renée's loss of self in the Dionysian ecstasies of dance and the link she establishes between the action of dance and the movement of the pen. "It is revealing," Goodhand notes, "that Renée refers to the movement of the word under her pen in descriptive phrases which bring back to mind the corporeal undulations of her dancing" (200).

In La Maison de Claudine, which is published some twelve years after La Vagabonde, the subject is often embedded in the action as spectator, rather than highlighted as the main character. One possible interpretation of this later rendering is that the "dancer" and the "dance" have now become indistinguishable. The narrator and her subjects, the spectator and the dramatic action have blurred, leading the reader to a conclusion reminiscent of Cat's Eye, that the most authentic expression of selfhood involves a loss of self.

It could be argued that this version of self-creation is based on a sense of lack, one that is provoked through an ongoing encounter with disillusionment, and for this reason appears to be something less than self-affirming. A second criticism might consist in labeling this conception of subjectivity regressive in that it appears to involve returning to a romantic or pre-oedipal oneness that refuses a broader social integration. Indeed, the novel's form which emphasizes the retrograde circle might be said to shore up just such a critique.

To some extent, these concerns match the preoccupations of scholars who study the female "Bildungsroman." In her article, "Spiritual 'Bildung': The Beautiful Soul as Paradigm," Marianne Hirsch compares characteristics of three nineteenth-century novels of female development. She observes that "inner development" of all the heroines culminates in a regression to a pre-oedipal state of fusion that dictates each novel's structural circularity. Each of the protagonists enacts a return homeward toward an earlier childhood state, "characterized by fusion, fluidity, mutuality, continuity and lack of differentiation," a return that eventually leads to the heroine's death.¹⁶ Each return is paired with a concomitant rejection of integration into a broader world through marriage, a "refusal of a heterosexual reality that violates their psychological needs, a reality defined by images of fragmentation, separation, discontinuity, alienation, and self-denial" (27).

Thus, the circular pattern of these novels constitutes something of a literal dead end. For these heroines, inner growth fails to open onto a richer life of social integration, and stands in contrast to the outward, linear progression of the "Bildungsroman" of the same period that feature male protagonists. In assessing the nineteenth-century female "Bildung," Hirsch asserts: "Subjectivity is not an assertion of individual identity and imaginative power, but a dissolution, an extinction" (47). While Hirsch suggests that this pattern may be read as a protest against a dichotomization that places crippling limits on both male and female development, her analysis nonetheless links the return of these female protagonists to an undifferentiated state with the demise of the self.

In comparison with the novels of Hirsch's study, La Maison de Claudine embodies both the structure and theme of return, but with very different results. Hirsch's article provides insight into the means by which Colette's work transvalues an apparently regressive pattern. In contrasting the female and male "Bildung," Hirsch points out that the male protagonist who withdraws from society during a period of intense inner growth has a plot available to him that facilitates his re-integration into a broader world. That narrative structure is the "Künstlerroman," a plot that, according to Hirsch, is unavailable to the female protagonist during the nineteenth century. "The male self," Hirsch asserts, "centered in the creative imagination which has the power to absorb, internalize, even to generate the outer world, need not be destroyed by inwardness." For male protagonists, inner growth brings an awareness that is productive, rather than annihilating, resulting in the creation of "forms that can be actualized, communicated, shared" (46).

The difference between the narrative pattern of Hirsch's nineteenth century novels and La Maison de Claudine, I would argue, turns on a shift in plot. While the author doesn't ignore issues of heterosexual love and marriage in this work, her narrator, with her double voice as both child and artist, steps aside from this traditional story in order to focus on the relationship between a rich inner life brought about by a return to the past and the act of creation that this enhanced inner life makes possible. This study proposes that La Maison de Claudine be read as a very particular rendition of the "Künstlerroman," one that differs significantly from Colette's earlier treatment of the heroine-artist in La Vagabonde.

In the earlier novel, the heroine, at once writer and dancer, determines in the end that she must choose between what she perceives to be mutually exclusive alternatives, marriage and art. In her analysis of this earlier novel, Mary Noël Evans points out that while Renée comes to a liberating perception of language through which to render her desires, the writer's pursuit of such a language is impossible within a social institution that preempts these desires by means of the discourse of heterosexual love. Evans states:

"Although Renée continues to assert her independence, this very assertion is now absorbed into a system of destructive alternatives. All choices involve a loss, and the accent here is on what Renée has lost by choosing herself" (67). In other words, Renée's experience is one of disillusionment, where subjective dreams fail to find their match in the outside world. Renée does not resolve the experience by an acquiescence to pre-determined form, by resigning herself to the marriage plot. Neither does she pull back into the remote world of her desires, the decision of Hirsch's heroines, a choice that leads to extinction. Nonetheless, as Evans indicates, Renée never achieves a sense of social integration. Instead, the novel's ending is "inconclusive"; despite Renée's new understanding of language, this form of expression remains "a homeless, vagabond discourse with no defined place in a network of sexual, social, or literary connection" (72).

While La Maison de Claudine is not a "Künstlerroman" in the explicit sense, its narrator, via her recreation of events, achieves an integration that is missing in La Vagabonde. Through the vehicle of the embedded subject, the reader is immersed in the creative process, as the protagonist finds her way from the place of subjective desire to a fusion with a broader world through the illusion of art. Stewart's reading of La Maison de Claudine as a more authentic rendition of Colette's earlier heroine, Claudine, supports this view. Stewart points out that in La Maison de Claudine Colette has fashioned a protagonist with "a literary past" (Stewart's emphasis, "The School" 266) citing as evidence the child's understanding and use of language in a vignette entitled "Le Curé sur le mur."

In this sketch, the eight-year-old protagonist overhears the word "presbytère" and begins to ponder what it might mean, using her perception of the word's sensate properties as her point of departure: "J'avais recueilli en moi le mot mystérieux, comme brodé d'un relief rêche en son commencement, achevé en une longue et rêveuse syllabe..." (29). She carries the word with her as she goes to sleep, ("je dormais avec le mot," Colette's emphasis) and then to a favorite place of play, the wall that separates the garden from the

chicken yard. There she uses the word to denounce an imagined crowd, exclaiming: "Allez! vous êtes tous des presbytères!" (29). However, her understanding of the word undergoes revision when she decides that it designates instead a small snail with black and yellow stripes.

The child then makes the mistake of identifying the animal as such in her mother's presence. Sido questions aloud the girl's good sense and insists that things be called by their appropriate name, clarifying: "Un presbytère, voyons, c'est la maison du curé" (30). Although the child initially resists her mother's pronouncement, she reaches a compromise between authoritative definition and personal connotation:

...je composai avec ma déception. Rejetant le débris du petit escargot écrasé, je ramassai le beau mot, je remontai jusqu'à mon étroite terrasse ombragée de vieux lilas, décorée de cailloux polis et de verroteries comme le nid d'une pie voleuse, je la baptisai "Presbytère," et je me fis curé sur le mur. (30)

For Stewart, this sketch constitutes "a parable of the writer's genesis." The story is one of disillusionment, in which, Stewart claims, "opposition is total between the autonomy, magic and mystery of the child's universe...and the rules and boundaries, arbitrary but unmovable, imposed by the code of adults." At the same time, Stewart continues, it is "an embryonic literary fantasy" in which both child and writer use words "in an aesthetic and non-utilitarian manner, not merely to designate, but to suggest and to create" ("The School" 267-268).

While Stewart's interpretation encourages the reader to understand this work as a portrait of the artist as a young girl, Milner's articulation of the creative process begs the reader to reconsider whether the opposition between the child's universe and the adult's code is as rigid as it might at first seem. For Milner, a nostalgic return to a state of fusion where subject and object blur is not the ultimate goal of authentic creation, but rather a "necessary prelude to a new integration" (154).¹⁷ In other words, the recovery of the lost

object is secondary. It is the artist's creation from the perspective of the present that counts. The motivating force is not lack, but rather the desire to make something new from the debris of the past. Colette's doubled narrator, as both child and artist, captures past and present dimensions alike. When the narrator states "je composai avec ma déception," she exploits the multiple meanings of "composer," which can mean both "to compromise" and "to create." She tells the reader that she picks up the beautiful word, as if it were a precious object, and carries it off to the in-between site of play, the broad wall that separates the two gardens behind the house. There it joins the other dazzling objects that make up the substance of the wall ("cailloux polis" and "verroteries"), whose composite nature suggests the safe space, the nest ("le nid") of the thieving magpie ("pie voleuse"), who gathers debris and weaves it into its house. Thus, the image of the nest acts as yet another mirror, one that reflects the work's title by suggesting that "la maison de Claudine" is a treasure chest or container for the subject's precious objects, which in turn reveal a glimmer of the self in a broader environment.

This configuration of safe space filled with debris whose "compressed fullness" unfolds into play not only announces Bel Gazou's pocketful of objects in the book's final sketch; it also corresponds to Cat's Eye's luminous array of scavenged objects that unfold in a series of paintings. However, Colette's text insists on the altered status of the dream object. A kind of double integration has taken place. While the word has now been incorporated into the child's vocabulary with its socially recognized meaning, the word has also been embedded in the world of play, an additional bright pebble in the wall which now designates a stage. The wall has become a "presbytère" where a new theatrical work unfolds. Here the child enacts her own dramatic rendition of "curé sur le mur," a "play" whose religious context suggests the privilege of naming objects in the surrounding gardens. However, as the text makes clear, the child does not simply play the role of "curé," she both alters and embodies it: "J'étais curé sans obligation liturgique ni

prêche...mais, à l'insu de tous, curé Curé comme vous êtes chauve, monsieur, ou vous, madame, arthritique" (29).

Here, as in Milner's theories, the playful act of authentic creation consists of what Milner calls an "interplay of differences that remain in contact" (73), an interaction that involves a reciprocal interchange between thought and action, the latter rendered in this text once again via the movement of drama. In this sketch, the word "presbytère" becomes the concrete object, or "peg," to use Milner's vocabulary, on which to hang a dream that seems driven by language's pleasurable materiality, woven into the word's rough contours ("relief rêche") that terminate in a long and "dreamy" syllable. However, instead of a hermetic boundary between subjective and social worlds, the result is that both dream and "peg" end up altered. Milner describes the dynamic in a number of ways, as a "reciprocity" or a "two-ness," and the ultimate transformation as a kind of "transfiguration." This sense of reciprocal "two-ness" between self and other adds significance to the two-way mirror of the first sketch by suggesting that it is not matter of reflection, but one of mutual alteration. As Colette's text demonstrates, the result of the child's encounter with the word "presbytère" is an imbrication and transformation that leaves both worlds changed yet nonetheless intact. Additionally, the moment of this transformation is textually recorded in the sketch; it is a transformation, then, whose dramatic action is doubled by the movement of the narrator-artist's pen along the paper, an action that recalls the link between dance and writing evoked by the protagonist of La Vagabonde.

The process of "transfiguration," as Milner describes it, is more than a simple enveloping or swallowing of the world. It is a way, Milner posits, of "making real." In the face of disillusionment, this undertaking proceeds via a medium--the paper, the canvas, the stage--an outside "other" that is all the same "pliant and undemanding," one that does not "stridently insist on its own public nature...." As the artist moves in contact with the medium, this malleable "other" accommodates a temporary fit, an illusion that dream and

reality are one. Through art, the subject is assured of a life of action, because the individual has been able to recreate what one loved in actual achievement. What was once a mere story or fable, a dream of fusion, is transformed into history, into action in the realm of the concrete, or "real," with the social integration that the "objectively" constructed world implies (117-120).

The connection between art and selfhood in Milner's theories turns on the link between the act of "transfiguration" and the process of "making real." For Milner, authentic art recreates the desired object without obliterating it, all the while endowing it with something of the self—not merely via logic, although reason plays a part; but also through movement, rhythm, and pattern that involve one's entire being. Milner elaborates:

Through the process of giving life to the portrayal of one's subject, of coming to see it as a whole through the discovery of pattern and rhythm and so coming imaginatively to appreciate its nature, one is actually creating something, creating the spiritual reality of one's power to love it—if it is lovable; or laugh at it or hate it—if it is laughable or hateful. Ultimately then it is perhaps ourselves that the artist in us is trying to create; and if ourselves, then also the world, because one's view of the one interpenetrates with one's view of the other. (136)

This view of an artistically constructed world shifts the nature of Milner's argument to a consideration of the nature of reality. For Milner it is the transfigured object that has the greater degree of reality for the subject, an assertion that reverses the commonplace understanding of objectivity. Milner brings home this insight, all the while underscoring its philosophical dimension, by citing from the work of George Santayana, who considers the nature of perception. Santayana states: "Perception is not a primary phase of consciousness; it is an ulterior function acquired by a dream which has become symbolic of its own external conditions, and therefore relevant to its own destiny." It seems that the dream and the "peg," or concrete object, come together to form a symbol that is

significant for the subject, a symbol from which perception itself derives. As Santayana explains: "Such relevance and symbolism are indirect and slowly acquired: their status cannot be understood unless we regard them as forms of imagination happily grown significant" (qtd. 26-27).

Santayana's description of symbols as "forms of imagination happily grown significant" seems an apt interpretation of Colette's approach to self-creation. Significant "transfigured" objects become symbolic of a selfhood now embedded in the outside world and therefore capable of mirroring the subject. The self as embedded object, then, is something other than a straightforward--and purely narcissistic-- self-portrait, in that the artist-subject frequently occupies only a small portion of the canvas. She is only one element in a field of objects held in tension by the frame of the vignette.¹⁸

La Maison de Claudine, then, differs from a longer narrative in that the elements of the short sketches, most of which are from three to five pages, can all be retained within the reader's mental "field of vision," whereas the linear march of a longer work usually makes the mental circumscription of all elements impossible. This aspect of the work, along with Colette's detailed descriptions and precise imagery, endows the text with characteristics often associated with the visual arts and leaves them open to interpretation via the criteria applied to visual perception. In Art and Visual Perception, Rudolph Arnheim distinguishes between drama and dance, on one hand, and painting and sculpture on the other, pointing out that in the visual arts all elements are available within a given space at the same time and are therefore perceived as coexistent. Dance, drama--and one might perhaps add narrative--involve a "path of disclosure" that takes place over time and across space, with the unfolding sequence of movements and events playing a role in the perception of the work. "In a painting or statue," Arnheim observes, "the permanent balance of the total 'thing' is built on the actions of forces, which attract and repel each other, push in particular directions, manifest themselves in spatial sequences of shape and color" (308-309).

Given this conception of the nature of visual art, I would argue that the vignettes in La Maison de Claudine can be read as paintings as well as prose. For example, it is possible to arrive at an understanding of the sketch entitled "Ybáñez est mort" via certain criteria formulated by Arnheim for analyzing visual works of art.

The vignette is organized into three parts: the "portrait" of a nameless clerk from Colette's home town; a description of the adolescent protagonist and her female companions, who, in a sense, share space with the clerk every afternoon; and a story about the clerk based on what the teenage heroine observes. The portrait of the clerk is prefaced with remarks by the older narrator, the artist-narrator, who seeks to paint the scene from memory. While the face of the clerk persistently haunts her sleep as she dreams of her childhood, the narrator insists that she cannot remember his name--is it Goussard, Voussard, or perhaps Gaumeau? However, she can conjure his image in meticulous detail. This initial privileging of the visual over the linguistic is reinforced by a comment that, in light of the abundant visual details of the portrait, seems playfully tongue-in-cheek: "Si je peignais, je pourrais faire de Voussard, vingt-cinq ans après qu'il a disparu, un portrait incompréhensiblement ressemblant" (99). In fact she does just that. From his face, stature and complexion, to his clothing right down to the angle of his hat, to his habits and his haunts, the narrator renders her subject in elaborate visual detail. The reader also learns that this threadbare and penurious notary's clerk, who was not born in the narrator's village, has never been accepted as a native son by its inhabitants despite his long years of residence. This marginal character, viewed with suspicion by the locals, spends his noon-time break reading the newspaper while seated on one of two stone benches that flank the house of Mme Lachassagne.

At this same hour, the second bench is occupied by four adolescent girls, including "Colette," who have come to show off in the hopes of attracting would-be admirers. In contrast to the clerk's portrait, which is rendered in all its particularity, the description of the girls appears stereotypic. They are portrayed as if they constituted a single uniform

category in which their individuality is submerged. They dress alike, sport similarly ragged haircuts--achieved with embroidery shears in defiance of their mothers--and behave with an identical combination of impudence, awkwardness and timidity.

The sketch concludes with the recounting of an incident witnessed on one of these afternoons by the adolescent protagonist. An office boy, who usually comes to polish off his lunch in the company of the clerk, approaches the bench. On this afternoon, the office boy is the first to arrive. The clerk arrives late, stumbling along as if making his way in the dark and dragging his newspaper along the ground. Placing his hand solemnly on the shoulder of the office boy, he announces: "Ybañez est mort. Ils l'ont assassiné." With a trembling hand, he opens the newspaper to show the boy the latest episode of a serialized novel, and adds with a bitter laugh, "C'est un coup du cardinal Richelieu" (102). The closing description is one of the clerk transformed by fiction. His eyes survey an imaginary valley, "les yeux jaunes d'un conquérant d'îles, les yeux cruels et sans bornes d'un pirate aux aguets sous son pavillon noir, les yeux désespérés du loyal compagnon d'Ybañez, assassiné lâchement par les soldats du Roy" (102).

If one were to read this sketch as a painting, as a field in which the play of elements results in a balance or tension, one might first seek to determine which of the elements constitutes the figure and which the ground. At first, the clerk appears to be the figure, the "subject" of the sketch, by virtue of the abundant detail with which he is drawn. As Arnheim points out, the surface of a picture is perceived to be divided into a series of receding planes, with the elements that are most "densely textured" appearing to lie in closest proximity to the observer (179). However, the central location accorded the girls, the reduced space they occupy, as if enclosed within the clerk's story, and the contrast afforded by the differences in age and gender make the adolescent protagonist and her companions stand out like a patch of color on a continuous ground. At the same time, the uniformity of their appearance and behavior--the reader is hard-pressed to distinguish "Colette" from the other girls--is a feature more characteristic of a pictorial ground,

because the homogeneity of the surface loosens the contours and flattens the image. These combined traits seem to work against one another. The girls both stand out in relief on a busy ground, and recede in the distance like a hole cut in a textured surface.¹⁹ In short, as a result of these conflicting tensions, the difference between figure and ground becomes ambiguous, as these two elements appear both to approach and recede, thereby blurring these conventional visual distinctions.

This "picture" is rendered more complex by its "frame." The vignette is bracketed by the death of the fictional character Ybañez, first in the title, "Ybañez est mort," and then at the end of the sketch whose closing words refer to the notary's clerk as the loyal companion of "Ybañez, assassiné lâchement par les soldats du Roy." In this way, the fictional text encloses the "real" world of the narrator and enters into the play of figure and ground.

Frames in the visual arts, Arnheim explains, derive from the architectural elements--the lintels and pilasters--of altarpieces. With the advent of the individual paintings of the Renaissance, frames continued to function as architectural components, acting as windows opening onto a pictorial space that was perceived to extend indefinitely in depth and width. In other words, the picture space stretched out laterally on a receded plane and constituted the ground, whereas the frame, which occupied the plane closest to the viewer, comprised the figure. However, with time, the frame in Western art progressively diminished. As the frame decreased and even disappeared, the distinction between frame as figure and pictorial space as ground likewise decreased (192).

As a picture frame, then, Ybañez stands out as the figure of the sketch, pulled into sharp relief by the conventional contrast between fiction and reality. Like the frame of a window, this hero becomes the window through which the reader perceives the ground of "real" village life. He is also the object on which the notary clerk fixes his gaze at the end of the sketch. Ybañez is, in a sense, the created, transfigured object, more "real," from Milner's perspective, than the concrete world; or, to return to Santayana's phrase, Ybañez

becomes one of the "forms of imagination happily grown significant" that precede and orient perception. Standing out as the figure, then, one might argue that he is the true "subject" of the text. However, Ybañez is a very slender frame, a mere wisp of a title, an appositive at the end of the sketch. Like the disappearing frames of modern art, Ybañez seems to blend with the pictorial space as the notary clerk steps into the frame, imagining himself as a character in the serialized newspaper narrative.

The problematic subject status of the adolescent "Colette" in this piece is clarified by viewing the sketch as one painting in a retrospective; the clerk's portrait is one of many transfigured objects whose representation enables the creation of an authentic self. The adolescent "Colette" of the vignette is one element of a picture produced by the narrating artist; the transfigured object--a shunned village clerk--is "made real" for the creating subject when the object is endowed with something of the self; the artist has embedded her image in her portrait of the other. In essence, the vignette reiterates the move made by the notary clerk, whose creative approach to the text--embedding himself in the newspaper narrative--lends an unsuspected degree of reality to Ybañez's story. Once he has included himself in Ybañez's story, the clerk reveals a "more real" dimension of himself, one that both eludes and surpasses his socially constructed role as a colorless misfit. While this vignette may appear to be a cautionary tale signaling the dangers of living in a dream world, it is actually an exemplary one, an intimation of the possibilities of self-creation that the author continually explores as she reworks the image of Claudine.

Read as an artist's retrospective, La Maison de Claudine, like Atwood's Cat's Eye, continually calls attention to the project of self-creation, foregrounding the essential or central role of the outside object or other to this endeavor while embedding the subject within the portrait. However, while Atwood's work alternates between a figural and a discursive text, between a description of Elaine Risley's art and a narration of the artist's life, Colette's vignettes superimpose these two strategies. Each sketch consists of both a narrative, a brief anecdote, and a "sketch" as suggested earlier, a simultaneous

presentation within a circumscribed space of elements that are perceived as coexistent, and therefore suggestive of the visual arts as defined by Arnheim. Colette's vignettes operate on two levels at once, incorporating Arnheim's contrast between the static arts, such as painting or sculpture, and the sequential arts, such as dance or drama. The former medium, as Arnheim points out, "defines acting through being; the other defines being through acting" (309). Thus, in light of Arnheim's analysis, the vignettes can be seen to portray self-creation as a process that accords an equal role to the intertwined modes of being and doing.

This dual structure invites a comparison with Winnicott's reading of Hamlet in "Creativity and its Origins." In this essay, Winnicott approaches the notion of being through a discussion of the "subjective object," one that has not been relegated to the world of the "not-me." Ideally for Winnicott, object-relating allows for the temporary illusion that the infant has created the desired objects of her world, an illusion made possible by presenting the object at the moment when it coincides with the infant's desire (80). Winnicott hypothesizes that a sense of self derives from this notion of being, one "that antedates the idea of being-at-one-with, because there has not yet been anything else except identity" (80). Winnicott designates this notion of being as "the pure female element" of the self.²⁰

Hamlet's dilemma, Winnicott proposes, derives from his passage into manhood, which dictates that he dissociate himself from the "pure female element"; however, Hamlet cannot think of an appropriate alternative to the harmonious mode of existence suggested by the verb "to be," and in frustration simply settles for its negation, an alternative that leads nowhere. Hamlet turns to drama, or acting, in an effort to solve his problem, but in the end the play is not the thing. The play Hamlet stages is, according to Winnicott, Hamlet's attempt "to bring to life his male element" (83-84), to move from the realm of being to acting. In the end, however, his repudiation of being proves fatal. For Winnicott,

an authentic sense of self requires both elements. He concludes: "After being--doing and being done to. But first, being" (85).

Colette's vignettes, by contrast, seem to conflate both modes of existence without privileging either. Her imposition of discursive and figural texts, of the sequential and the static--as opposed to Atwood's alternation of these modes--mirrors her doubled narrative voice that captures both the being of childhood and the action of the artist. By enmeshing these two modes of representation in a dynamic tension, Colette resolves the dilemma presented in Atwood's text, in which the protagonist is mutually drawn to her two "twins," Stephen and Cordelia, without realizing satisfactory synthesis. Stephen, the brother turned scientist, is divorced from "being" and as a result perishes in the world of "doing and being done to" at the hands of terrorists.

Cordelia, by contrast, leaves "doing" progressively behind as she enters adolescence and womanhood. Indeed some of the remarks Winnicott makes about Hamlet apply to Cordelia as well. When her family moves to an exclusive neighborhood, Cordelia transfers from Elaine's school, gains weight and sinks into academic failure. She fades from her friend's life, but resurfaces some years later when Elaine is studying art in Toronto. Having shed her excess pounds, she reappears, now gaunt and dressed in clothes that evoke bohemian chic. Cordelia reveals that she has taken up acting and is performing minor parts in the Stratford Shakespearean Festival. From her gestures and intonations, however, Elaine surmises that the roles are "less minor than she says" (301). Once again she disappears from the story only to resurface years later in a private mental clinic where she has been placed as the result of attempted suicide. Like Hamlet, she has been unable to sustain the play-acting. When Elaine visits her childhood friend at the institution, she focuses on Cordelia's body, stressing that, once again, Cordelia has let herself go. "Flesh," Elaine observes, "has been added, but it has slid down, toward the middle of her body, like mud sliding down a hill" (356). Cordelia's capacity to function rationally has also been dulled by medication, and she enters the room swaying, "the way

an elephant does, or some slow, bewildered animal" (356). Cordelia's story, the complement of Stephen's, founders on conventional themes of excess that focus on the female body and madness.²¹ Once she has left the world of "doing" by abandoning her tenuous acting career, she sinks into a world of isolated "being" that burgeons beyond control. Unlike Colette, then, Atwood is unable to bring "being" and "doing" harmoniously together within the same frame. While Cat's Eye critiques this gendered split by portraying both Stephen's and Cordelia's narrative trajectories as ultimately unsuccessful, Atwood's work never resolves the dilemma.

It should also be noted that the relationship of Cat's Eye's protagonist to the outside other is fraught with anxiety. The subject-object dynamic is often a matter of "doing and being done to," something of a sado-masochistic power struggle. It is only through the child's creation and the artist's representation of the Virgin of Lost Things that a measure of "being" is restored to the narrative. A similar anxiety surrounding subject-object relations is absent from both La Maison de Claudine and from Milner's theories. Perhaps Claudine's house, the space of the novel, simply prolongs the illusion of the "subjective object" that allows the artist to persist in the playful impression that she is the creator of the outside world. In her article "The Role of Illusion in Symbol Formation," Milner likewise insists on the importance of temporarily "treating the world as one's own creation" (100). Milner posits that the move to identify with that which is not the same is informed by "the internal necessity for inner organization, pattern, coherence, the basic need to discover identity in difference...." (83). From a postmodern perspective this empathetic version of the self-creating subject reveals its humanist overtones.²² However, this observation requires some nuance. It should be noted that Milner insists on the illusive nature of this identity, while stressing the interplay of differences involved in the artist's engagement with the medium. In On Not Being Able to Paint, Milner surmises: "...creativity is not the result of an omnipotent fiat from above, but is something which comes from the free reciprocal interplay of differences that are confronting each other with

equal rights to be different, equal rights to their own identity" (143). To achieve this result, Milner continues, is not without difficulties:

In one's own imaginative muscles one feels the strain of the model's pose, in one's own imaginative body one feels the identity of one's opponent, who is one's co-creator....To be able to break down the barrier of space between self and other, yet at the same time to be able to maintain it, this seems to be the paradox of creativity. (144)

La Maison de Claudine, with its motif of the embedded subject, illustrates the possibilities and the limits of this creative "tour de force." An examination of the sketch entitled "La Toutouque," for example, illustrates ways in which Colette reorients mainstream constructions of the rapport between artist and other. While the 1923 edition of La Maison de Claudine eliminated the five animal sketches found at the end of the original 1922 version, it included as its central vignette the previously unpublished anecdote, "La Toutouque." It is the portrait of a mongrel, rescued from extermination by the narrator's brother, who returns home from voluntary service with La Toutouque in tow. In the definitive 1930 edition, "La Toutouque" retains its central position, and the five other animal portraits are restored to the work's concluding vignettes.

In his analysis of the text's structure, Forestier does not stress the centrality of "La Toutouque" to the work, but singles it out instead as one of three essential texts devoted to the themes of love and marriage.²³ However, if the sketches at the beginning and end of the work play a key role in its rendition of selfhood, as argued earlier in this essay, one cannot help but wonder about the center, which is so often the site of narrative significance. It is as if, in a gesture of playful irony, the artist has given pride of place in her retrospective not to Sido or to a more frankly self-reflexive work, but rather to the portrait of a humble household pet.

In the tradition of many nineteenth- or twentieth-century artists, Colette's model for this sketch is decidedly female. The narrator insists on La Toutouque's alluring

womanly features as well as on her sharply drawn canine characteristics. La Toutouque is short and broad, evoking the shape of a piglet. She is a cylinder with short yellow fur, a black mask, and cropped ears and tail. "Mais jamais chienne ou femme au monde ne reçut, pour sa part de beauté, des yeux comparables à ceux de la Toutouque." It is with her beautiful eyes, so human and so seductive, "son regard couleur de vieux madère, à peine inquiet, divinateur, étincelant d'une humidité pareille à celle des larmes humaines," that la Toutouque captures the hearts of the entire family. She is especially appreciated for her docile and submissive nature, "sa cordialité de nourrice." She barks little, but manages to express herself, "donnant son avis d'un sourire à lèvres noires et à dents blanches, baissant, d'un air complice, ses paupières charbonnées sur ses yeux de mulâtresse" (86).

Indeed, La Toutouque takes the form of an overdetermined feminine icon. As a representative of the animal world, she suggests the realm of nature; as nanny, she signals safety and nurture; and as mulatto woman with dark, complicitous eyes, she evokes the seductive submission and otherness of the odalisque. This latter configuration conjures up images of Baudelaire's exotic mistress, Jeanne Duval²⁴, or the harem slaves portrayed in the art of Delacroix, Ingres, and Renoir. According to Marilyn Lincoln Board, the "odalisque motif" was part of "a venerable nineteenth-century tradition" that was revived in the early twentieth century by Henri Matisse (366). In fact, Matisse painted a number of odalisques throughout the 1920's, during which time Colette wrote and edited the various editions of La Maison de Claudine.

While there is no evidence to suggest that Colette is writing against this artistic tradition with the intention of subverting it, nonetheless it is illuminating to view "La Toutouque" as something of a canine odalisque, as a portrait that reworks in a playful and humorous way a number of long unspoken conventions concerning the typically male artist and his female model.

In "Constructing Myths and Ideologies in Matisse's Odalisques," Board examines the artist's relationship to these representations of women from a viewpoint she identifies as the "marginal position of feminist ideology in twentieth-century bourgeois civilization...." (359). From this perspective, she discloses a number of assumptions that underpin these works. According to Board, the odalisque is a motif revived by Matisse at a time when the Orient was perceived as a threat and a challenge to European dominance. As woman and oriental, the model is portrayed as symbol of both nature and otherness, brought within the confines of the studio, where she is rendered meaningful by the self-conscious and creating artist as representative of culture. Matisse renders his model in what Board calls a "possessive idiom" (369). "Nature," she states, "has been tamed and possessed through the creative act" (370). By enclosing the object of representation within the studio setting, Board argues, the artist eliminates all elements of the subject's unpredictability, walling out the potential for conflict, desire, or struggle. Within this space, the artist and ultimately the viewer adopt "a central controlling position that assumes the artist's own pivotal perspective on the subject" (367). From this omnipotent vantage point, the artist occupies a position of dominance in relationship to the other, who is portrayed as enticing as well as submissive, remote, and inexpressive. "The faces of Matisse's models," Board notes, "are empty or impassive; their bodies are motionless; they have neither personalities nor histories of their own" (372). In fact, Board suggests, Matisse's odalisques are "not about his models." They are uniquely about the creative articulation of the artist's perceptions and sensations, and in this sense, Board concludes, "the odalisques are disguised self-portraits" (372).

Likewise, it can be argued that "La Toutouque" is also a self-portrait, but one that reveals a playful reworking of the relationship between artist and other. Colette's choice of the scruffy and somewhat porcine la Toutouque as her model immediately suggests the tongue-in-cheek flavor of pastiche. Even more strongly than Matisse's models, whose pairing with floral elements associates them with nature (Board 363), la Toutouque's

animal status seems to link her to the natural world. However, this category is quickly blurred when the reader learns that la Toutouque has been cruelly fashioned to meet cultural standards of canine beauty: "Des ignares avaient taillé en pointe ses oreilles coquillardes, et sa queue au ras du derrière" (86). What is more, la Toutouque is far from inexpressive and, favoring the visual over the linguistic, she communicates, not with her bark, but with her facial expressions. Unlike Matisse's "blank" models, la Toutouque is painted with an exuberant particularity. From the very beginning of the sketch, la Toutouque is a model with a personality, a history, a model with a difference.

However, once la Toutouque is brought within the domestic frame, she is applauded for her ability to conform to cultural values. With an intelligence that rivals that of a small child, she learns the names of family members along with a hundred other words and memorizes the routes her owners take on their village errands. She is characterized by her gentle, passive nature. Inside the house, la Toutouque can be found lying placidly in front of the hearth, "vitro, bate," where she patiently tolerates the persecutions of a kitten. In short, her animal nature has become meaningful by virtue of an imposed cultural interpretation. She is the ideal pet. Framed by interior space, la Toutouque is portrayed as docile, submissive and predictable.

In contrast to the "central controlling position" that Matisse adopts in the representation of his model, Colette's narrator embraces several different strategies. Initially, the narrator speaks on behalf of the family, including herself in the first person plural "nous." As representative of the social unit, the narrator explains: "...nous Fomes tous chinchiest, et nous denims à la Toutouque sa large place devant le eu de bois." However, from the very start, la Toutouque's inclusion in the domestic circle is a reciprocal event, a matter of "two-ness," signaled when the "nous" appears in object as well as subject position: "elle [la Toutouque] posa sur nous son regard," "Elle apprit nos noms," "Elle nous adopta..." (86).

Sharing in the collective voice, the narrator as "petite fille" joins in the family perception; but as the sketch progresses and la Toutouque reveals her disarming compliance, the ten-year-old child begins to scorn the dog's "mansuétude de commère répue" (88). Speaking individually, the daughter finds the all too passive female model, in both senses of the word, somewhat repugnant. This attitude prevails until the girl discovers that la Toutouque has fallen in love.

La Toutouque, the reader learns, is not uniquely a creature of the domestic interior. Having won the family confidence, she is free to wander about the village, where she loses her heart to the café owner's setter named Black. Unfortunately, Black already has a companion, another setter, Bianca, whose portrait spoofs a different variety of nineteenth-century female representation. Highly bred, in contrast to the indeterminate la Toutouque, Bianca's behavior is governed by her overly sensitive nature, which borders on illness: "...nerveuse et sujette à des vapeurs, elle jetait des cris pour un claquement de porte et se lamentait au son des angélus" (88). The child first learns of the dogs' rivalry when la Toutouque encounters Bianca sprawled languidly in front of the café, her paws crossed, her ringlets drooping ("ses anglaises défrisées"). One look from la Toutouque and Bianca simulates injury ("Bianca fit le grand cri de la patte écrasée"), seeking refuge inside the café. However, when the café owner arrives one day to complain about Bianca's torn ear, the family responds with laughter and disbelief, pointing to the docile "mutt" stretched before the fire.

Nonetheless, a very different image of la Toutouque appears when the easel is moved out-of-doors. The rest of the portrait is sketched from a more marginal viewpoint. Standing on a pillar of the garden wall, where she is engaged in the game of "curé sur le mur" ("j'y prêchais des foules invisibles"), the narrator designates herself as "stylite," signaling her own distance not only from the social unit, but also from the cultural interpretations she herself can elude through play. From this vantage point, she catches sight of Bianca, "décoiffée et hagarde," chased by her rival, a yellow blur in hot pursuit. A

very different portrait of la Toutouque now emerges. She has become "une sorte de monstre jaune, hérissé, les pattes ramenées sous le ventre puis projetées de tous côtés, en membres de grenouille, par la fureur de sa course,--une bête jaune, masquée de noir, garnie de dents, d'yeux exorbités, d'une langue violacée où écumait la salive..." (89).

This bundle of fury disappears from sight and the ultimate debacle is only intimated by the sounds of canine combat. Dismayed, the child runs from the garden to the street to find la Toutouque on the front steps. Despite her wagging tail and her "sourire de bonne nourrice," the dog cannot disguise her bloodshot eyes or the tuft of golden fur hanging from her chops. Faced with the evidence of "une force malfaisante" that has transformed the docile creature into a ferocious beast, the girl is at a loss for words and can only say "Oh! Toutouque...Toutouque..." (90). The voice of the narrating artist concludes the sketch, asserting that, at the time of the incident, the name of this powerful force had eluded the child of ten.

Once outside the domestic frame, the elements of struggle, conflict and unpredictability disrupt the idealized portrait. La Toutouque turns out to be a model with desires of her own, desires that draw her into the broader play of forces. In fact, the chaos of her battle with Bianca escapes the artist's brush as the conflict slips momentarily off the canvas. In keeping with the decorum of classical tragedy, Colette's art gestures toward the troubling contingency that hovers beneath the beautiful illusion of representation. The sketch insists on the gap between the idealized pet and "real" but elusive animal by stressing la Toutouque's black mask. Painted in the enclosed domestic setting, the mask suggests an imposed disguise. Drawn outdoors, it evokes the theatrics that mask the chaos and otherness which forever elude the "imaginative body" of the artist, thereby signaling a reticent barrier that resists the artist's attempt to discover "identity through difference." Just as Milner has cautioned, self-creation through a "free reciprocal interplay" is not without its difficulties.

The garden wall proves the perfect location for attempting this second variety of portraiture, because it is the stage where the scavenged object, like the word "presbytère," unfolds in renewed play. The designation "la Toutouque" is added to the inventory of treasures the child and artist accumulate. To revert to Benjamin's lexicon, "la Toutouque" becomes another fragment, whose compressed intensity holds the potential for a limitless unfolding. As child and dog meet on the steps, at the boundary between inside and outside, after Bianca's debacle, the only word the girl can find to render the animal's portrait is "la Toutouque," which she simply repeats for lack of alternatives that will do justice to her subject. Because "la Toutouque" is a deformation of "toutou," a child's word for dog or doggy, its reiteration appears to signal the obdurate limits of language that can do no more than bang its head against tautology, telling the reader that a dog is a dog. However, at the same time, its childhood silliness places it on the margins of social denotation, while its assonance brings to mind words like "nounou," a child's word for "nourrice," or "nourours," meaning teddy bear, the transitional object "par excellence." As such, "la Toutouque" becomes the symbol of illusion in which subject and object, artist and model, come together at the boundary between inside and outside, at a site that is playfully productive of meaning.

In this way, "la Toutouque" eludes precise definition. Instead, the expression enfolds the potential for the limitless unraveling of stories that implicate the subject, stories concerning rivalry, jealousy, desire, masquerade, and the ongoing generation of self through art. A similar productive word play resurfaces in Colette's 1939 novel, Le Toutounier, in which the protagonist and her sisters revive a private childhood language. In Colette, Jouve describes their exchanges this way: "'Ma Toutoune,' 'my doggy,' is the greatest word of love the sisters in Le Toutounier can speak, and they have a code, half-childish, half-animal, for talking to each other" (136). Commenting on the title, Jouve explains that "le toutounier," which literally means kennel, designates in the novel an enormous sofa where the sisters sleep. It signals "a bond of physicality between them, a

matrix with its own imaginary language....It is not childish, neither a place nor a language to be left behind...but a haven, a hearth that regenerates..." (140).

Thus, as Milner's theories posit, the barrier between artist and model is paradoxically maintained and broken during the process of self-creation. A return to the vocabulary of childhood accesses what Julia Kristeva terms the "limits of language" where meanings are still unstable (129). Thus, la Toutouque's return to the domestic circle is not a regression; rather, it serves to integrate a new symbol into the artist's repository of objects, while in the process it opens a gap for renewed meaning.

The centrality of la Toutouque's portrait may then indicate the importance accorded to the author's relationship to otherness in project of self-definition. In his preface to Colette's Douze dialogues des bêtes, Michel Mercier connects the author's interest in animal portraiture to a particular art of living that includes a constant although challenging renewal of one's sense of wonder. As regards Colette's attention to animals, Mercier proposes that "leur constante présence est l'indice du plaisir et de la difficulté qu'il y a à vouloir les évoquer, et d'une recherche d'un art de vivre" (1282).

This difficulty is featured in the sketch of the leopard, Bâ-Tou. Bâ-Tou is a cumbersome gift bestowed on a Parisian citizen who hopes to palm her off on the narrator of La Maison de Claudine. Despite her exotic beauty, Bâ-Tou, like la Toutouque, is a discarded object, and similarly becomes a subject for the artist. There is, in fact, an ironic sadness in the opening words of the vignette in which the narrator describes her acquisition of Bâ-Tou, stating: "Je l'avais capturée quai d'Orsay..." (129). The phrase gathers meaning as the reader discovers that Bâ-Tou can never really be "captured." Unlike the domesticated Toutouque, who is a blur of categories, Bâ-Tou is equated with pure nature, pure otherness "préservée encore de toute atteinte civilisatrice" (130). Although Bâ-Tou shares the narrator's home for a time, it soon becomes clear that Bâ-Tou's uncompromising difference makes cohabitation untenable. The attempt to find a meeting ground between self and other ends for the artist in failure and in a painful sense

of guilt when Bâ-Tou is sent to live in the confines of a zoo in Rome. In a reversal of la Toutouque's story, Bâ-Tou's unpredictability is enclosed in a remote and culturally regulated outside space, a troubling reminder that the articulation of selfhood in binary terms more than flirts with the dynamics of power.

The difficulty of this portrait, the impossibility of "capturing" Bâ-Tou on paper or canvas, is driven home when the narrator tries to render the subject of her portrait by quantifying the number of her spots: "Un jour, j'ai voulu compter les taches noires qui brodaient sa robe, couleur de blé sur le dos et la tête, blanc d'ivoire sur le ventre; je n'ai pas pu" (129-130). The picture that emerges insists on her admirable but impenetrable surface. She is "le plus magnifique ornement," comparable in beauty to a piece of Chinese embroidery ("broderie chinoise"). She is likened to a precious art object; her features are delicately patterned, "peintes, au dehors, de dessins noir et gris rappelant ceux qui décorent les ailes des papillons crépusculaires." Indeed, one might conclude that Bâ-Tou's mysterious otherness has been honored with the most exquisite decoration.

In fact, the art of decoration is a recurring feature of Colette's "oeuvre" and, I would argue, a significant aspect of self-creation. The decorative nature of Colette's writing has contributed to the critics' dismissal of her work. According to Suzanne Relyea, the author's "refusal to consider the world through abstract forms of reference" has led commentators to label her texts as "purely descriptive" (150). However, Françoise Mallet-Joris sees significance in the attention with which Colette describes the most ordinary objects, indicating the importance "of giving daily life its symbolic and almost sacred meaning, of giving it that 'precious' brilliance in its most humble manifestations" (12). Likewise, Claire Dehon calls attention to the decorative quality of Colette's writing, comparing this feature of her work to that of "art nouveau," which is characterized by "its attempt to give an artistic appearance to everyday objects..." (105).

Indeed, Colette's "decoration" of Bâ-Tou bespeaks the multiple meanings of the word "décorer," which indicates both pleasurable, artistic embellishment as well as the

respectful attribution of honor. Far from superfluous, the descriptive form honors its subject and thereby renders the vignette's content. This alliance is similarly demonstrated in the sketch entitled "Ma mère et les bêtes." The sketch opens with the narrator's recollection of her childhood trips to Paris. Her concluding memory is one of her "aversion" to the dreariness of Parisian spaces, which characteristically lack the enhancement of plants and animals. It is a relief to return home to Sido, her garden, and "la ronde des bêtes" (47).

The return takes place at a special hour of the day, "celle de l'arrosage," six o'clock in the evening when the setting sun colors everything with a rosy hue from flowers to cats. The narrator makes the round of household pets, so many unfolding treasures ("trésors éclos") who have given birth during her absence. She stops to marvel at a tangle of kittens, "un chapelet de nouveau-nés," where further investigation reveals that three generations are nursing in a row. Bijou, who is feeding her young, is herself suckling from her mother, Nonoche, who has also given birth. This remarkable chain of nurturance, whose almost sacred nature is enhanced by the scene's imagery and illumination, leads the narrator to her generalization: "A qui vit aux champs et se sert de ses yeux, tout devient miraculeux et simple" (48).

However, having reached this conclusion, the narrator does not bring the sketch to a close, but instead goes on to illustrate her idea with numerous, additional examples, several of which are elaborated in great detail. There is the cat who smells violets and eats strawberries; the feline who naps on the canary cage, while the birds tranquilly pull hairs from her tail to line their nest; a pair of swallows who come when they are called and go to school in the narrator's pocket. Detail is devoted to the spider who sleeps in Sido's bedroom. This creature, "le ventre en gousse d'ail, barré d'une croix historiée," descends at night to drink the remains of Sido's hot chocolate, and then, sated, totters back to its silken rigging ("son gréement de soie"). Finally, there is the description of the caterpillar,

"ses bourrelets d'un vert de chou, cloutés de turquoises saillantes et poilues," whose destructively voracious appetite enfolds the promise of an Emperor moth.

An abundance of decoration illustrates the main idea. An excess of description, the juxtapositions of the ordinary and the precious or sacred--the garlic and the cross, the cabbage green and the turquoise--inundate the text's generalization to the degree that its illustration, rather than its main idea or abstraction, becomes the focus of the sketch. Like a richly illuminated manuscript, the picture overwhelms the text; the effusive decoration asserts its own visual significance. The sketch of the spider seems particularly apt, in that the reader realizes that the narrating subject herself has become obscured by this decorative web. Embedded in the detail, one finds the adjective "historiée," which describes the design on the spider's body, while at the same time it evokes the subject's strategy of self-creation. According to the Petit Robert, the verb "historier" derives from the medieval latin "historiare," which meant "raconter," to tell. The word evolved into a term used to describe the visual arts and referred to the process of decorating scenes with human figures, especially scenes drawn from scripture or from the lives of saints. However, the definition has broadened to signify "to decorate," or "enjoliver d'ornements (avec ou sans personnages)" (932).

Thus, the word "historier" gathers in a variety of procedures that include narration, visual decoration and illumination, inviting the reader to consider the work as both figure and text. Here one might recall Milner's use of the term "transfigured object" to refer to the process of "making real" through the act of authentic creation. "To transfigure" implies not only transformation, but glorification as well. Like the verb "historier," then, it encompasses the notion of illumination. The outside other is rendered precious and brilliant for inclusion in the collection of illuminated objects that constitute the artist's retrospective of self-creation, in much the same way as the word "presbytere" is figuratively added, in both the visual and rhetorical sense of the word "figure," to the

"cailloux polis" and the "verroteries" of the magical garden wall. Like Elaine Risley's retrospective in Cat's Eye, it is the illuminated figure that predominates.²⁵

However, there are some important differences between the two texts. At the heart of the illumination of Risley's art is disillusionment, the preoccupation of the dispersed subject. Risley's retrospective brings the postmodern crisis in meaning home to the artist. She realizes not only that viewers are free to interpret her paintings as they like, but also that she has been unable to salvage any permanent truth from the chaotic unraveling of time despite the illusive brilliance of her art. As she walks around the exhibit, she has fantasies of setting it all on fire. Her reason: "Because I can no longer control these paintings, or tell them what to mean. Whatever energy they have came out of me. I'm what's left over" (409). Instead of meaning, Atwood's subject finds the darkness of the expired star behind the brilliance.

In light of this conclusion, Atwood's use of chronological narration, the story that ties the artist's life to her painting, appears ironic, inviting the reader to search for the retrospective's ultimate meaning, when in fact there is none. This open-ended conclusion, however, is subverted when, in the final chapter, the search for Cordelia draws to a successful conclusion and narrative closure is reached in a "left over" chapter that extends beyond the story of the retrospective. What is left over is the continuing process of imagination, the ability, as Risley puts it, to "see in the dark." In other words, the interest in the created product is displaced in the end by the process of creation.

In contrast, I would argue that the focus of La Maison de Claudine is first and foremost on process. No continuous narrative holds forth the ultimate promise of meaning. The retrospective, with its thirty-five sketches, stands on its own, enticing the reader to look for the "non-willed" order, the resonances and patterns, the embedded objects, without the anxiety of interpretation. The structure of the retrograde circle, introduced in the very first vignette, suggests that self-creation is an ongoing project that constantly defers conclusion.

What is more, where the brilliant paintings in Atwood's novel mask a provocative disillusionment, the illuminated objects in Colette's sketches cultivate the possibilities of illusion, which opens a space for the subject to see differently, to re-create. For example, the sketch entitled "La 'fille de mon père'" concludes with a figure that permits the narrating daughter to reimagine the ending of a painful tale about gender. The vignette opens with a conversation between Sido and her adolescent daughter in which Sido remarks upon the degree of resemblance between her daughter and "la fille de mon père."

Pointing to a daguerrotype of the child's grandfather--a picture that the adult narrator now keeps in a drawer--Sido reveals that she is not referring to a resemblance between herself and her daughter. It seems that the grandfather, a philandering chocolate maker, one day brought Sido a baby half-sister and instructed her to take care of the child. Sido explains that it is this half-sister to whom the daughter bears a striking likeness.

Sido relates that she was consumed with jealousy when the half-sister arrived and took to cruelly pinching the baby's fingers, rationalizing that her father, who loved beautiful hands, would otherwise fail to find the little girl's fingers sufficiently tapered. Sido adds that she never confessed to this act, and takes the opportunity to unexpectedly ask her daughter whether she herself has taken to lying less now that she is growing up. Having offhandedly signalled her awareness of her daughter's dissimulations, Sido concludes her story. The half-sister grew up to be pretty and to marry, or at least this is Sido's conclusion, because one day the father simply took her away without explanation. Sido associates this memory with the house where she was raised, the same place in which the chocolate bars were produced and left to dry on an upper-story terrace. She concludes: "Et, chaque matin, des plaques de chocolat révélaient, imprimé en fleurs creuses à cinq pétales, le passage nocturne des chats..." (58).

The resemblance between the daughter and the mother's half-sister is not a promising one. Calling attention to family resemblances often implies a path to be

followed, and the half-sister's path is hardly enviable. The story evokes the gendered nature of family relations: the jealous rivalry for the philandering father's attentions, and the father's right to treat the half-sister as a mere object of exchange. The title of the sketch reveals the complicitous role of language in this state of affairs. The expression "la fille de mon père" appears in a new light, signaling the usurpation of Sido's place, and altering her "title" in a way that insists on the father's privilege.

If, as Milner suggests, the process of authentic self-creation consists of matching the individual's dream to a "peg" in the outside world--in the way the word "presbytère," with its appealing sounds, became the "peg" that matched the child's dream of becoming--one is at a loss to find an object in this story, a suitable "peg" on which to hang the dream of selfhood. The discarded object, the daguerrotype of the grandfather tucked away in a drawer, hardly seems the raw material of a promising symbol. Consequently, the narrator resorts to a strategy examined earlier in this essay, that of recuperating the embedded detail and transforming it into a "peg" that holds promise as the vehicle for authentic desire. As the child listens to her mother's story, the detail of the prowling cat captures the girl's imagination, and her mind wanders off:

C'est qu'indifférente à la Fille-de-mon-père, je laissai ma mère tirer de l'oubli les morts qu'elle aimait, et je restai rêveusement suspendue à un parfum, à un parfum, à une image suscités: l'odeur du chocolat en briques molles, la fleur creuse éclore sous les pattes du chat errant. (58)

The narrator turns away with indifference from the mother's story, but retains the image with which she concludes the sketch. This appealing figure, which appears to function in the manner of Freud's dream-work, with its features of condensation and displacement, diffuses the gendered content of the story. The comportment of the philandering grandfather is captured in the cat's nocturnal roving, while the cruel sculpting of the infant's fingers finds a counterpart in the indented chocolate flower. Like the condensed figure of dream-work, the flower's hollow form holds the potential for endless

unfolding and interpretation, an aspect that is emphasized in the text by the use of the verb "éclore."

Thus, the narrator avoids a confrontational strategy. Instead of attempting to argue her way free from the confines of a gendered story by means of language fraught with treacherous binaries and patriarchal privilege, she chooses the figure. This engaging image, like the brilliant illustration of an illuminated manuscript, draws the eye away from Sido's narration. Reminiscent of marginal doodling, it suggests boredom with an all too familiar story while at the same time it playfully furnishes an alternative "peg" on which to pin the authentic dream. Indeed, its affinities with dream-work are apparent. The figure becomes a form "happily grown significant" and reorients the possibilities for self-perception.

What is more, it is difficult, if not impossible, to say what the image means. It bears a relationship to metaphor by reiterating elements of the mother's story in another form, and it evokes metonymy in that it derives from the story's contiguous details. However, it does not suggest an alternative to the story of the exchange of women or patriarchal privilege. One might argue that it is a kind of anamorphosis, a distorted figure that must be read through a different lens.²⁶

This interpretation leads to a broader consideration. What status do the so-called "visual" elements confer on the text's rendering of subjectivity? To talk about the sketches as visual art suggests an attempt to approach self-creation through an alternative means of representation, as if language in some way lacked the movement, color and rhythm that another medium might provide. This concern is certainly a part of Milner's discussion of authentic creation through the visual arts. The activity of painting includes "feelings of weight and spatial position, of up-ness and down-ness, of right and left and three-dimensional spreadness, of balance and uprightness and every kind of movement." In addition, she asserts, these feelings which relate to space and movement are linked to

"memories and dreams, which distinguish the visual arts from the literary ones," the latter for Milner being more strictly tied to rational processes (107).

In an article entitled "Colette and Signs: A Partial Reading of a Writer 'Born Not to Write'," Christiane Makward's assessment of Colette's work asserts that the author shared a similar preoccupation with language's limits. Makward proposes that "for Colette, not everything passes through nor can be understood through writing that is part of the complexity of life" (185). Makward elaborates: "Colette's fascination with non-verbal graphic signs is a recurring theme. She clearly values hieroglyphs and images as being richer in meaning than words" (190).²⁷

These remarks lead back to the juxtaposition of the story of "la fille de mon père" with the image of the wandering cat who leaves petal-shaped prints on the soft bars of chocolate. This image, which sits on the edge of the story, does not simply render the account more acceptable by obfuscating the mother's story; nor does it suggest a different meaning for the female subject. Instead, it taps a dimension of language that is linked to desire, but which is of a different order than that of the rest of the sketch. While one can point to metaphorical and metonymic connections, the reader is hard-pressed to assign a specific meaning to the image. At the same time, the image makes new material available for a more authentic version of the self. It furnishes the substance or symbols with which the narrating subject, through ongoing acts of creation, can evolve her own meaning. This use of the image on the part of Colette's narrator, an image that floats up at the edge of narration, invites a parallel with Atwood's protagonist, who learns to see in the dark. Situated at the edge of light and darkness, where memories float to the surface of consciousness, Elaine Risley is located at the site of expectation which yields new material for the "seeable" and the "sayable."

Of course, the image of the cat is not truly a picture at all; rather it is a figure mediated by language; neither is La Maison de Claudine a "bona fide" retrospective in paint. These are merely illusions encouraged by a particular reading of the text, a reading

that stresses those strategies of the author which share a great deal with elements of visual representation. Moreover, recourse to illusion is an authorized move. After all, while Sido does not advocate lying, she admits to her own act of dissimulation in "La 'fille de mon père'" and signals--without condemnation--that she is also aware of her daughter's chronic lying ("mensonge chronique"). Thus, self-creation in La Maison de Claudine sanctions an art of illusion, with its emphasis on visual, spatial and embedded elements, an illusion that will perpetuate the perception of continuity in the face of language's persistent opposition of subject and object. This illusion is enhanced by Sido's omnipresence in the text. It will be recalled that the first sketch begins with the mother looking for the daughter, but concludes with the daughter's search for the mother. Although the mother has already died, the narrator insists that the mother must in some way still be present, searching for her children. Here the mother's image, like that of the wandering cat, occupies a place of contiguity, tangent to but at the same time beyond the narrative.

The fact that in the first vignette both mother and daughter take on the role of the embedded figure--that which is present while seemingly absent--suggests that Sido is the model for the first "transfigured object," that element in the environment that sends back to the subject a reflection of self. For Milner, this process of "transfiguration" is the hallmark of authentic creation, one that allows the subject to perceive the world as "real." Indeed, after this initial text, the narrator goes on to demonstrate in succeeding sketches that she is adept at the art of "transfiguration." Moreover, her proficiency with this version of the mirror image sharply contrasts with the difficulty Elaine Risley encounters in her search for self-reflection. In Colette's work, the theme of the search is immediately transmuted into a concern with the pursuit of the creative process, while in Atwood's novel the search for Cordelia remains the narrative's sustaining goal.

However, to relegate Sido uniquely to the role of mother-mirror is to dismiss the complexity of her portrait. Susan D. Fraiman acknowledges that Colette's critics for the most part have stressed Sido's role as ideal, insisting on her positive attributes and equat-

ing her with archetypal motherhood and matrilineal wisdom. However, Fraiman points out that Sido has a darker side as the purveyor of patriarchal culture (46-47). Anne Otavi calls attention to the imperious and domineering aspects of Sido's personality, characteristics that inspire the daughter's need to free herself from her paralyzing model (184, 188). This essay has called attention to Sido's insistence on prescribed forms, forms which the daughter abandons as she pursues her own understanding of the creative process.

More significant than mother's multiple facets is Sido's pervasiveness throughout the vignettes that comprise the work. Even the rare sketches that fail to mention her allude to her presence via the themes of maternity and nature. Because she seems to touch on all these texts, Sido additionally emerges as the figure of contiguity. As such she serves as a kind of persistent boundary to what Winnicott theorizes as the "potential space" of play. In "The Place Where We Live," Winnicott posits that the child's relationship with a trustworthy and reliable other provides a tangential presence that allows the child to establish a playful space that is "an infinite area of separation," one that paradoxically is not perceived as separation, because it is always filled with play. When play derives from trust and relaxation, "the question of separation in separating does not arise" because in this environment the child's symbols come to simultaneously represent the watchful other and the phenomena of the outside world. Therefore, "it can be said that separation is avoided by the filling in of the potential space with creative playing...." (108-109).

In this sense, Sido is the boundary figure, contiguous with the space of play, continuous with the symbolized world, yet paradoxically and necessarily separate. The connective conjunction "et" that appears in the titles of six of the vignettes signals this continuity and separation: "Ma mère et les livres," "Ma mère et les bêtes," "Ma mère et le curé," etc.

In a sketch entitled "La Petite," the child imagines a future for herself as a sailor. She has chosen this scenario in defiance of her playmates, who foresee growing up in the image of the familiar village inhabitants. This rigid imitation, the child decides, reveals a decided lack of imagination, and for this reason, she begins to describe to them her future life at sea. However, the narrative loses energy, and soon she is unable to find the right words: "Ils n'évoquent que des pages imprimées, des images en couleur" (22). As the sun sets and the wind announces a storm of true marine ferocity, the child turns toward the house. A lamp has been lit, and, within the circumference of light, she perceives the movement of her mother's hand, capped by a glittering silver thimble. She abandons the unmotivated relationship between author and text with its apparent gap between subject and fictional double; she rejects the story of self as sailor, and heads for home. She chooses instead the figure of continuity as the paradigm for self-creation, a space between self and other that flies in the face of separation. She opts for the silvery illuminated object at the end of Sido's finger that holds the promise of an infinite space to be filled with brilliant treasure.

END NOTES

1. Notions of authenticity have come to be connected with an essentialist concept of selfhood that has been called into question by postmodern theorists. However, as the introduction to this study suggests, when viewed through the lens of Winnicott's theories of play and creativity, the sense of authentic selfhood is a matter of illusion. The link between authenticity and illusion is further explored in this chapter through a discussion of Marion Milner's related conceptions of art and selfhood.
2. Elaine Marks suggests that the protagonist of La Maison de Claudine is a reworking of the Claudine character in her 1960 overview of Colette's work: "If Colette again uses the name "Claudine" [in the title], it is both because she wants to give a new and truer image of her childhood and adolescence, wants the new "Claudine" to replace the old, and because the success of the 'other' Claudines could be advantageous to the sale of the new book" (Colette 202). However, it is Stewart who explores the issue in some detail.
3. These novels include Claudine à Paris, 1901; Claudine en ménage, 1902; Claudine s'en va, 1903--all signed by Willy--and La Retraite sentimentale, signed Colette Willy, 1907. The extent of Willy's contribution to the vastly popular Claudine à l'école has been the topic of much debate, an argument impossible to resolve, since the original manuscript has been lost (Sarde 145).
4. Stewart does not cite the material from Mes Apprentissages in her article; she singles out instead Colette's preface to her Ingénue libertine as evidence of the author's ambivalence toward her early works.
5. Stewart also takes note of Lejeune's exclusion of Colette from his repertory of French autobiography. She concludes that Colette's work is "at best on the fringes of the genre"; nonetheless, she continues to argue that La Maison de Claudine lends a greater sense of unity to Claudine's life story, a sense of unity that is also a feature of autobiography according to Lejeune's definition. In other words, her study, unlike Miller's, does not directly examine the relationship between genre and female subjectivity.
6. In advocating that a reader sift through both fiction and autobiography to uncover an author's articulation of a female self, Miller is careful to stipulate that she is not advocating a return to what she calls "biographical 'hermeneutics'" which would tend to equate the writer's life with her fiction. Miller specifies that what is in question is an "inscription" of female selfhood, "a cultural fabrication that names itself as such" (270-271). Nicole Ward Jouve's book-length study of Colette's work does draw a number of parallels between the author's life and works. However, she likewise cautions that "the toing and froing ought to be inspired by something more than a one-to-one relation. Perhaps the patterns of desire, and self-projection, and the quest for the self in and through language, ought to enter into it" (14).

7. The notion that Colette's text aims to render a spatial continuity between self and other was suggested not only by D. W. Winnicott's and Marion Milner's application of object relations theory to play and creativity, but by Jean-François Lyotard's Discours, figure as well. According to Lyotard, some elements in language seem to defy its system of signification, which signifies by means of opposition, an opposition that functions by leaving a gap between signs. However, expressions that function by means of deictics--terms that refer to another element within discourse--evoke another kind of space. This concept is exemplified by Lyotard's discussion of the word "ici."

Lyotard elaborates: "La détermination de l'ici renvoie bel et bien à celle d'avant, d'arrière, de droite et de gauche, de haut et de bas; mais ces termes ne sont pas avec ici dans une relation comparable à elle qui unit un mot aux mots voisins de la même langue, moins encore à celle d'un phonème avec ses partenaires dans un tableau phonologique; et leur corrélation n'est pas non plus assimilable à celle des éléments d'un discours, par exemple des mots dans une phrase, et pas même des propositions dans un raisonnement....Au contraire, le lieu indiqué, le ici, est saisi dans un champs sensible, comme son foyer sans doute, mais non tel que ses entours soient éliminés comme c'est le cas dans les choix qu'effectue un locuteur; ils restent là, dans la présence incertaine et indéniable, curviligne, de ce qui se tient sur les bords de la vision, référence absolument nécessaire à l'indication du lieu...mais don't la nature est en rupture complète avec celle d'une opération linguistique: celle-ci renvoie à un inventaire discontinu....(38).

In light of Lyotard's analysis, Colette's use of the deictics, the reiteration of the question "where," can be read as a gesture toward continuous relationships that elude the system of signification.

8. As Katherine Hoffman points out in her study of portraiture entitled Portraits of Identity, literature has frequently addressed the blurred boundary between artist and representation, citing Edgar Allan Poe's "The Oval Portrait" and Oscar Wilde's Portrait of Dorian Gray (5).
9. Winnicott cites Milner's work in several of his essays in Playing and Reality, singling out particularly her contributions concerning symbol formation.
10. The application of "epigenesis" to the notion of self-creation was suggested to me by William Kessen's article "The Child and Other Cultural Inventions."
11. Notes to La Maison de Claudine in the edition of Colette's complete works directed by Claude Pichois for "La Pléiade" show that five additional sketches were added to the 1923 edition. These were "La Toutouque," "Le Manteau de spahi," "Printemps passé," "La Couseuse," and "La Noisette creuse." Six texts from the first edition were omitted. They include the five animal portraits and the sketch entitled "Le Veilleur." The definitive 1930 edition, however, reincorporates these six texts (1624-1629).

12. Milner's process bears a striking resemblance to the pursuit of automatic writing by the surrealist writers in the early decades of the twentieth century. However, there are significant differences. Milner does not formulate the notion of authentic creation in completely binary terms by opposing the unconscious to rationality, proposing instead an in-between state. What is more, she insists on an order that emerges from the movement and rhythm of the body as it engages with the medium.
13. "Of the productions or processes one part is called thinking and the other making--that which proceeds from the starting-point and the form is thinking, and that which proceeds from the final step of the thinking is making" (qtd. in Rothenberg and Hausman 34).
14. According to the La Pléiade edition of Colette's *Oeuvres complètes*, published under the direction of Claude Pichois, this vignette went by the title "Jalousie" in the Le Fleuron edition published in 1949, the last edition overseen by Colette herself. All other editions bear the title "Amour" (Notes et variantes 1626-1627, 1632).
15. Milner's version of authentic creation posits an interplay between the rhythmic patterns produced through physical action and a rational elaboration of the forms that are suggested by these patterns. Thus, from a postmodern and a feminist perspective, both of which frequently examine or challenge binary oppositions, Milner's theories seem to perpetuate the traditional mind-body split.

D. W. Winnicott's 1949 article, "Mind and its Relation to the Psyche-Soma," is useful in that it helps to attenuate this division in addition to strengthening the connection between the body and the imagination.

Winnicott questions the popular conception of mind as something localized in the head and brain. He boldly states in his conclusion: "There is no localization of a mind self, and there is no thing that can be called mind" (254). Instead of the traditional mind-body opposition, Winnicott's point of departure is the psyche-soma, with the psyche defined as "the imaginative elaboration of somatic parts, feelings, and functions, that is, of physical aliveness" (Winnicott's emphasis, 244). The care of the psyche-soma is initially perceived to be the function of the environment with which the brand-new individual feels at one. The infant gradually differentiates between self and world by imaginatively maintaining a belief in this perfect environment through illusion (through thumb sucking, transitional objects, etc.) when the disparity between inside and outside prevails. Thus, a continuity of the psyche-soma, which is predicated on this belief, ideally persists. It is only when the disparities are too great, seeming to demand a response from the individual to ward off annihilation, rather than to trust in the physically sustaining environment, that the entity Winnicott deems "mind" develops. While Winnicott unambiguously affirms the need for an adequately functioning brain in order for the psyche-soma to exist, he refuses to separate the mental and the physical, anchoring the experience of a self that feels real in the

individual's sense of mind-body continuity.

Coming at Milner's interplay between mind and body from a Nietzschean perspective, one is tempted to relegate the body to the realm of Dionysian freedom, while the mind assumes the role of ordering this energy with an Apollonian clarity.

16. The novels in question are George Eliot's The Mill on the Floss, Theodor Fontane's Effi Briest, and Kate Chopin's Awakening.

17. Stewart identifies a similar pattern of fusion and integration in "Colette's Gynaeceum: Regression and Renewal," which examines the narrative pattern in Colette's 1939 novel, Le Toutoumier. After her husband's suicide, the heroine returns to an apartment in Paris where she grew up. There, in what Stewart terms a "gynaeceum," amid the reassuring companionship of her sisters and the shared linguistic "code" of their childhood, the protagonist regains her strength prior to any attempt at reintegration into the broader social scenario of heterosexual love. "The gynaeceum," Stewart explains, "is only a provisional source of support, a place of renewal and repose rather than a permanent abode. There is always a male on the horizon...." (668).
 This study, then, echoes Stewart's insights and builds on them by asserting that the pattern of fusion and integration may be even more pervasive in Colette's work than Stewart's article suggests. Moreover, this reading expands the interpretation of the pattern to include the dynamic of creativity, a reworking of the female "Bildung," and the process of coming to selfhood.

18. Colette's approach to self-creation resonates with Santayana's remark concerning the pursuit of truth, in that he asserts that it is impossible for the philosopher to completely and accurately see himself in the picture of truth he is constructing. The philosopher can build a "vast monument," but it will never capture the entirety of the scene he seeks to represent. "He may paint its walls with a panorama of the universe, but he cannot include himself painting it--except perhaps in a playful episode in one corner..." (The Idler 126-127).

 I am indebted to Willard E. Arnett's work on Santayana for introducing me to this text.

19. The characteristics I have used to sort figure from ground in this passage are drawn from the pages Arnheim devotes to this topic in his chapter on space (178-187).

20. Taken at face value, Winnicott's designation of being as the "pure female element" contributes to the reinforcement of the cultural binary that assigns passivity and immanence to female gender and activity and transcendence to the male. However, in the context of Winnicott's article, it is clear that a sense of self for men and women derives from an integration of both being and doing. What is more, Winnicott's understanding of Hamlet's rejection of the "female element" as a means of passage into manhood anticipates later feminist theories that address

women's subjectivity. Jessica Benjamin's discussion of the "repudiation of femininity" in The Bonds of Love is a case in point (159-169).

21. In her chapter on narrative in Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives, Marilyn R. Farwell draws on a variety of critical works to make the point that the female body is frequently represented as a grotesque figure of excess that seeks to transgress prescribed limits. The fact that Atwood does not tell the story of Cordelia's falling apart suggests that it is a familiar one, and that it is both unnecessary and undesirable to repeat it.
22. As Janet Whatley points out in "Colette and the Art of Survival," Colette's work also belongs to a humanist vision. Whatley remarks that "like Montaigne, with whom she has certain affinities, she assumes that any frank self-portrait, consciously edifying or not, is of general use. She is part of the French classical tradition in her assumption that one can generalize about human experience: there are maxims, there are communicable rules about living and about what one can expect from life" (32).
23. The sketches that Forestier includes along with "La Toutouque" as important treatments of this theme are "La petite Bouilloux" and "Le manteau de spahi."
24. In her biography of the poet, Enid Starkie characterizes Baudelaire's descriptions of Jeanne Duval this way: "When we catch glimpses of her, she is always sitting alone in silence, reclining half dressed on a couch, and gazing into the distance with languid, half-seeing eyes" (87).
25. I have already discussed the way in which Colette's sketches restore the art of what Walter Benjamin refers to as story telling by salvaging the textual object, the bit of marginal debris which becomes a kind of "compressed intensity" or "monad" capable of endless unfolding. Here, in Colette's figures of illumination, she seems to likewise restore what Benjamin calls the "aura" of art, a sacred quality that he argues is eliminated by the modern processes of technical reproduction. Benjamin's theory is discussed at length in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction."
26. The possibility of reading this figure as anamorphosis was suggested to me by Bill Readings's Introducing Lyotard, in which Readings explains that for Lyotard the rhetoricity of poetry and anamorphosis in painting evoke the "figural" in representation (24-25).
27. This line of argument leads to a consideration of the affinity between aspects of Colette's work and Jean-François Lyotard's notion of the figural which he explores in Discours figure. The figural, however, is not a system of signification that is alternative to language; rather it is that in language which alludes to another spatial order, the visual, an order that cannot be reduced to signification. In summarizing some of Lyotard's arguments, Bill Readings mentions Lyotard's understanding of the letter as something more than a sign. It is also a plastic entity, formed by the

trace of a line. As such, it "marks a figural space, it has the quality of a trace of the unrecognizable, it evokes an unreadability that is constitutive of the very possibility of recognition" (19).

Readings further explains that Lyotard formulates the figural in part by drawing on the Freudian unconscious as a model; in doing so, Readings asserts, Lyotard rethinks the real and the imaginary, not as mutually exclusive, but rather as co-present but heterogeneous, or "incommensurable" entities. Readings explains that "...desire borders reality anamorphically in that it is present at the edge of reality as different from it without being eliminated" (47-48).

Lyotard's plasticity of line encourages the reader to reconsider the importance of the diacritical mark over the "n" in Ybáñez, whose name frames the sketch "Ybáñez est mort." To what degree does this graphic flourish gesture toward a mode of existence that language cannot contain?

CHAPTER 4

THE ART OF APPROXIMATION: THE SUBJECT AS COLLAGE IN MONIQUE WITTIG'S L'OPOPONAX

Catherine Legrand's herbarium, a collage of flowers and verse, emblemizes Monique Wittig's project of self-creation in L'Opoponax. In an effort to communicate her desire to classmate Valerie Borge, the adolescent student has paired cuttings of broom, a lily and two roses with selected excerpts of text during a session of "travaux manuels," a class supervised by "ma mère de saint Grégoire." Unaware of the ultimate destination of the work, the nun approves of the herbarium project because, she tells Catherine Legrand, "vous ne savez quoi faire" (195-196).¹ Thus, as other students undertake the applied arts of book binding and stitching wallets, Catherine Legrand, in her idleness, can indulge in the pleasure of collage, a process characterized by the delight of juxtaposing found objects (Perloff 6). However, when fellow students transmit the work to Catherine Legrand's beloved ideal reader, Valerie Borge fails to recognize the author's message. She merely passes the herbarium on to other students without realizing that the work is uniquely intended for her.

The herbarium, placed at the heart of the work, appears to function as a *mise en abîme* for the novel's patchwork. The book combines detailed renderings of childhood experience pasted alongside received language--songs, liturgy, poems and so forth--borrowed from the broader culture. While the work's fragmented nature, as well as its "total disregard for conventionally recognizable characters and plot," owe much to the experiments of the "nouveau roman" (Duffy, "Monique" 201), the mixture of gathered objects and appropriated text echoes the herbarium project. The process of combining objects linked to intense memory with dismembered text constitutes a kind of remembering that strikes a resonance with Jessica Benjamin's description of the

psychoanalyst's return to Freudian discourse in Like Subjects, Love Objects. It is perhaps, Benjamin suggests, a means "of satisfying the need to be located in history, in tradition, without feeling that you have simply been enlisted in it: to accept that you have not created yourself without being deprived of creativity" (5).

Wittig's collage, however, extends beyond artistic process to encompass the activity of a second subject, a reader, who knows how to find meaning in the work's juxtaposed elements. In other words, it extends to a encompass relationship with an outside other who will strive to make sense of the collage. As the herbarium episode suggests, such a version of selfhood is not without its risks inasmuch as Valerie Borge fails to understand the herbarium's significance. Only when Catherine Legrand invokes the "opopanax" does she receive the recognition that she seeks.

L'Opopanax, which derives its name from the "opopanax" plant, was Wittig's first novel. Published in 1964 by "Editions de Minuit" which had championed the "nouveau roman" in France, the work won the coveted "Prix Médicis." The initial episode focuses on Catherine Legrand's first day of school, and the ensuing narrative proceeds to recount the accumulation of everyday events that happen to this individual and her cohorts. Although traditional markers that signal the passage of time are omitted, the work's chronological progression is revealed by the increasing sophistication of the subject matter the children study and their evolving social interaction. The setting and the names of the children in Catherine Legrand's entourage also shift, evoking at first a primary school, then a summer vacation spent at an uncle's in the country, and later a convent boarding school. The novel's second half concentrates on the unfolding relationship between Catherine Legrand and Valerie Borge and concludes with an affirmation of their bond.

While one might categorize L'Opopanax as a novel of development, a book about childhood, or fictional autobiography, commentators have also classified the text as an "antibildungsroman." Marguerite Duras describes L'Opopanax as "l'exécution capitale de quatre-vingt-dix pour cent des livres qu'ont été faits sur l'enfance." Indeed, Wittig's

seemingly objective treatment of childhood discounts both sentimentality and nostalgia in favor of a richly detailed surface that resists the reader's attempts to saturate events with significance. Duras celebrates the author's commitment "de n'utiliser qu'un matériau descriptif pur, et qu'un outil, le langage objectif pur" (283).

In her monograph on Wittig's fiction, entitled A Constant Journey, Erika Ostrovsky stresses ways in which L'Opoponax undermines the conventions of the "Bildungsroman." The title, she points out, in no way refers to a specific individual or to an individual's past; its enigmatic nature instead leads the reader to broader expectations. In addition, Wittig displaces the traditional "I" or "she" associated with the genre, cultivating instead the use of the impersonal pronoun "on" which, according to Ostrovsky, "desubjectifies" the narrative. Moreover, Ostrovsky asserts, Wittig has created a work with multiple protagonists rather than a unique heroine, and, in fact, the plural denotation of "on," which can be translated as both "we" and "they" in English, lends some credence to Ostrovsky's interpretation. This suggestion of a collective subjectivity is further enhanced by strings of children's names which function together as a single entity (11-13). During the "travaux manuels," for example, "Marielle Balland Sophie Rieux Nicole Marre Marguerite-Marie Le Monial Denise Causse font de la reliure" (194). These unexpected concatenations produce a visual flood, whose effect is captured in Duras's description of the novel: "Il s'agit de mille petites filles ensemble, d'une marée de petites filles qui vous arrive dessus et qui vous submerge" (284). Finally, Ostrovsky concludes, Wittig's novel does not reflect the typical structure or thematic preoccupations of the traditional novel of development. While the book at first appears to be a solid block of text, the reader discovers that it is divided into seven distinct parts set off by white space on the page. However, these divisions do not seem to represent specific stages of development.² By abandoning paragraph divisions and omitting much of the anticipated punctuation, Wittig has created a kind of continuous narration or textual flow that disrupts traditional narrative boundaries. The overall effect of these choices, coupled with the author's use of

the present tense, "perfectly renders the child's perception of temporal flux as opposed to the adult's insistence on chronological measurement and segmentation." In the end, the work produces a sense of "duration, continuity, endlessness, and an eternal present" (13-14).

The notion that Wittig accurately renders childhood experience in L'Opoponax is encouraged by Claude Simon's reaction to reading the novel: "Je ne suis plus moi," Simon claims, "je ne suis pas non plus une certaine petite fille: je deviens l'enfance" (70).³ However, according to Hélène Vivienne Wenzel, to read L'Opoponax as "a nouveau roman about 'everybody's childhood'"--an allusions to Mary McCarthy's review of the work--is too near-sighted an interpretation. Wittig's "oeuvre," Wenzel asserts:

issues a profound challenge to canonized literary tradition, to the very process of reading as an exercise in community understanding. At the same time, each [book] sets forth a vision of woman, derived from a particular feminist ideology, which poses an equally profound challenge to socially accepted, and very deep-rooted "norms": the vision defies these norms, threatens them, exposes their limitations and their destructiveness, and offers serious alternatives to them. (264-265)

Ostrovsky cites Simon's reaction to Wittig's novel as a rendering of essential childhood in order to show the author's success in achieving an effect of "universalization" (13), a ploy that promotes a wider readership in order that the work might undermine accepted narrative conventions. In an article entitled "The Trojan Horse," Wittig discusses how the writer must work to "universalize" the novel's point of view. To illustrate, she elaborates a literary version of the Greek gift that emphasizes both form and reception. The Trojans, she imagines, initially perceive the eponymous horse in a particular way:

It is barbaric for its size but also for its form, too raw for them...But later on they become fond of the apparent simplicity, within which they see sophistication. They see, by now, all the elaboration that was hidden at

first under a brutal coarseness. They come to see as strong, powerful, the work they had considered formless.... But what if it were a war machine? Any important literary work is like the Trojan Horse at the time it is produced. Any work with a new form operates as a war machine, because its design and its goal is to pulverize the old forms and formal conventions. (Straight 68-69)

Such statements undoubtedly have encouraged critics to focus on Wittig's project of disruption. Concluding her overview of Wittig's fiction, Ostrovsky deems the author's "renversement" of various genres "the fitting accoutrement for a voyage of upheaval, overthrow, and transgression..." (167).⁴ From the prospect of Wittig's later works, Jean Duffy deems L'Opoponax a "deceptively innocent" work, a remark that reinforces Wittig's Trojan Horse theme. He points out that, unlike earlier authors of the "nouveau roman," such as Alain Robbe-Grillet and Michel Butor, Wittig writes from a perspective of political commitment. In Duffy's estimation, Wittig does not strive to formulate "self-conscious reflections upon form itself, but to produce a discourse which exposes and subverts the sexist and heterosexual assumptions underlying the prevalent discourse." What is more, Duffy continues, the "radical and uncompromising nature of Wittig's feminism has precluded a wide general readership or critical vulgarisation" of her work ("Monique," Beyond 201-202).

However, to view L'Opoponax as a uniquely iconoclastic endeavor is to overlook the "serious alternatives" to accepted norms that Wenzel discerns in Wittig's work. Wittig's "Trojan Horse" article itself encourages the reader to search for the "elaboration" and "sophistication" within an apparent "formlessness." Indeed, to focus solely on the destructive and transgressive aspects of this work is to overlook the way in which destruction and creation necessarily function together in the novel. While Ostrovsky consistently describes Wittig's "oeuvre" as a project of destruction and recreation, her work stresses the way in which the author dismantles language, genre, and narrative,

without specifying exactly what Wittig has built from the rubble. This study will examine the intertwined dynamic of these two seemingly contradictory tendencies of the text in an effort to demonstrate a paradoxical yet compelling connection between destruction and the capacity to create.

While Wittig's theoretical writings address the problem of women and subjectivity from a Marxist feminist perspective, the author nonetheless advocates the elaboration of an individual sense of self.⁵ In an article whose title echoes Simone de Beauvoir's formulation, "One is Not Born a Woman," Wittig argues for the elimination of the category "woman," which naturalizes an oppressive, socially constructed phenomenon. However, to adhere to a program that seeks the elimination of this classification is not to define a sense of selfhood. Wittig stipulates, "...one needs to know and experience the fact that one can constitute oneself as a subject (as opposed to an object of oppression), that one can become someone in spite of oppression, that one has one's own identity" (106).

These remarks encourage the reader to appreciate L'Opoponax not simply as a "Trojan Horse" or a representation of childhood experience, but also as a piecing together of a self from the objects at hand in much the same way as Catherine Legrand assembles the found elements of her herbarium. Wittig's project of subjectivity in this work resembles the act of collage, a process involving fragments, gaps and juxtapositions whose principle seems at odds with the fluid textual flow described by Duras and Ostrovsky. I would argue, moreover, that Wittig has managed to have it both ways by creating a paradoxical and playful text simultaneously characterized by both fluidity and fragmentation.

The image of the kaleidoscope in some of Wittig's later writings helps elucidate the role accorded to fragmentation in L'Opoponax. In Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes, co-authored with Sande Zeig and published in 1976, an entry is devoted to these toys. They are "fabriqués avec des éclats de verre, du métal, des papiers de couleur, des plumes et différents morceaux minuscules d'objets.... Les kaléidoscopes qui contiennent les matériaux les plus disparates sont ceux qui permettent les meilleures compositions"

(145). Also included is a description of a fanciful version of the toy which features an auditory rather than a visual constellation composed of "des soupirs, des chuchotements, des longs gémissements, des plaintes sifflantes, comparables aux sons qu'on entend dans certaines grottes et don't il arrive qu'on ne connaisse pas la provenance" (146).

According to Ostrovsky, this later work acts as a "concordance" to Wittig's earlier books. Although Wittig does not make this intent explicit, Ostrovsky argues that Brouillon's entries provide insights to notions introduced in previous texts (117). Such is the case with the kaleidoscope entry which serves as metaphor for the transformation of language, characteristically understood from a postmodern perspective as an immutable given that constructs the subject. Ostrovsky considers the kaleidoscope in Wittig's work to be "the perfect instrument for effecting a change of view, a metamorphosis of given elements, or a series of visions that are never the same." Ostrovsky also stresses that the connection that derives from the kaleidoscope's disparity of elements and the resulting excellence of its finished design gives the reader insight into Wittig's conception of what constitutes a work of art, as does the alliance between auditory and visual components (136).

Wittig's kaleidoscope, moreover, evokes a resonance with other novels in this study. The bits of metal, shards of glass, and small objects of the dictionary entry find an echo in the shiny cigarette papers collected by Cat's Eye's protagonist in the hopes of making "something amazing" (28). The image of the kaleidoscope also suggests a parallel with the "verroteries" and "cailloux polis," the dazzling fragments that constitute the garden wall which serves as a site of play in La Maison de Claudine. The reader will recall that like the nest of the magpie, the wall is the repository of found objects, including the word "presbytère," a bit of language that undergoes a transformation in this playful space.

Thus the kaleidoscope condenses in a visual way the process of self-creation elaborated in earlier texts. While the found objects suggest a particular and already determined history, the toy proposes the possibility of playful transformation; in short, the

image encompasses the notion that while the dream of self-creation is perhaps illusive, the potential for creativity is not. The kaleidoscope image insists on the aspects of chance, process and open-endedness. No teleological vision determines the fall of the pieces into a particular pattern. Nor is the final picture of ultimate significance; rather it is the anticipation of a new arrangement and the playful process of distribution, not the ultimate product, that spur activity. Unlike many other forms of play that involve a sense of finality or closure, the kaleidoscope promises an open set of combinations. It is a game sustained uniquely by an ongoing sense of pleasure.

To read L'Opoponax with the image of the kaleidoscope in mind is to appreciate the work as a series of constellations, changing arrangements of visual and auditory intensities placed playfully on the page. The first chapter, which begins with Catherine Legrand's first day at school, frames a collection of banal yet vivid impressions: the diamond-shaped links of a wire face whose corners trap raindrops; spirals of perfectly peeled orange rind that the nun attaches to the classroom door; snatches of song--"à ma main droite y a [sic] un rosier qui fleurira au mois de mai"--that the children learn in order to distinguish left from right. It includes a classmate's beige wool socks; childhood games, such as "combien qu'il y a de cailloux dans ma main"; stilted schoolroom sentences--"Liliane lave le linge"--aimed at the mastery of phonetics; and the strewn petals of a cherry tree that provoke the perception: "Les fleurs se sont cassées cette nuit, maman" (7-14).

This collection recalls the accumulation of debris in Cat's Eye: the marbles, the bottle tops, the comic books, the turtle heart, the lyrics and rhymes, the twin sets, the catalogue cut-outs, the blue balloon, the red plastic purse, and so forth. At the same time, there is a striking difference in that the objects of Atwood's text are progressively sorted according to gender. As she reflects on her efforts to achieve girlhood, protagonist Elaine sees her younger self compelled to acquire what she once perceived to be the appropriate gender trappings, while other objects are relegated to her brother's realm.

This practice is prolonged into the adult's present as she unsuccessfully tries on dress after dress in an effort to find a costume that will appropriately render the persona of woman artist. Her quest, past and present, is imbued with a sense of hollow illusion in that femininity is a matter of commodity fetish, a question of masquerade and display. The point is rather heavy-handedly brought home when aspiring artist Elaine becomes the love object of her art instructor, who insists on dressing her as the figure of a pre-Raphaelite painting.

In comparison to the objects of Atwood's work, those of Wittig's text resist a similarly gendered reading. This effect is achieved in part by steering clear of the stages of the Bildungsroman whose structure dictates a cumulative and purposeful acquisition of experience and objects. Typically the text's accumulation is brought into focus when seen through the lens of logic and reason, both gained with increasing maturity.⁶ Cat's Eye subscribes to this pattern, with an added attention to the binary logic that divides the world into male and female. In Atwood's book, the narrator recounts her life in retrospect--one will recall that the artist's reflections are prompted by a first retrospective of her work--a move that invites the mature protagonist to examine her accumulated objects through a gendered grid.

By contrast, Wittig's narrative is confined to the present tense, a choice that lends her textual objects both intensity and evanescence. In his overview of Wittig's work, published in the Dictionary of Literary Biography, Duffy asserts that this present tense approach coincides with the world of childhood perception. "Reality," he asserts, "is reduced to discrete fragments perceived by the child and these fragments are juxtaposed in the narrative in a naive and often incongruous manner which defies sophisticated criteria such as logic and verisimilitude" ("Monique," Dictionary 2). One must add to Duffy's remarks the fact that the present tense immediacy obviates the need to read the story through a gendered lens. While Wittig's textual objects are abundant, they resist cumulative categorization. In L'Opoponax, the status of the object remains tentative; it is

a brilliant part of an ephemeral design that will disappear only to be replaced by another when the kaleidoscope is turned once again. In a manner of speaking, the kaleidoscope strategy permits a turning away from the mark of gender by formulating the child's story in terms of presence rather than retrospection. Seen in this light, Wittig's "criteria" seem to equal the "sophisticated" yardstick of logic proffered by Duffy.

However, it would be inaccurate to say that L'Opoponax completely ignores the issue of sexual difference. In fact, it is introduced in the very first sentence when classmate Robert Payen enters the classroom asking "qui c'est qui veut voir ma quéquette," "quéquette" being childhood slang for "penis." While this physical discrepancy between boys and girls provokes Catherine Legrand's curiosity, Duffy asserts that the theme of sexual difference is simply "undeveloped" in the novel. "Significantly," he adds, "the development of heterosexual attraction is totally absent, the novel concluding with the blossoming of an adolescent crush for a member of the same sex." The child simply perceives sexual differences as "relative," he explains, "as opposed to essential, differences which will be eliminated rather than reinforced in time." Duffy continues: "It is just one detail in the very rich fabric of the child's life; it is certainly not something to be dwelt upon and is almost immediately displaced by other demands upon the child's attention" ("Monique," Beyond 203).

Sexual difference, then, is just that--a difference, but not a significant difference with which to organize self and world. In "One is Not Born a Woman," as well as in other non-fictional works, Wittig explicitly states her intention to refashion the world in a manner that eludes heterosexual categories. Wittig understands the term "lesbian society" to mean that which "destroys the artificial (social) fact constituting women as a 'natural group'" (103), because it imagines a space that is remote from a pervasive heterosexual organization. At the close of her essay, the author asserts: "Lesbian is the only concept I know of which is beyond the categories of sex (woman and man), because the designated

subject (lesbian) is not a woman, either economically, or politically, or ideologically" (108).

In a chapter devoted to the lesbian subject in her book Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives, Marilyn Farwell classes Wittig's strategy as one that, in its attempt to turn away from gender as a self-defining category, heralds recent efforts of postmodern and queer theory to articulate the lesbian subject as a site of playful self-creation. To illustrate, Farwell quotes Nina Rapi's work which describes the lesbian as "someone who out of necessity invents herself, fashioning a self in those in-between spaces of the dominant order that have escaped categorization" (qtd. in Farwell 65). Farwell infers that Wittig's stance logically derives from the postmodern continental tradition dominated by Derrida and Lacan, a tradition that conceives of social and linguistic structures as closed systems from which escape or transcendence is the only possible ploy. Nonetheless, Farwell is critical of Wittig's alternative, claiming: "Without the conscious and strategic use of gender or indeed categorization as a measure of interpretation, we will be oppressed by it" (66).

Judith Roof also examines the viability of Wittig's strategy. Roof concedes that Wittig's fiction does appear to challenge the heterosexual restrictions governing subjectivity. These restrictions, Wittig asserts, insist that female subjects enter discourse "in a crablike way, particularizing themselves and apologizing profusely" (Straight 81); these constraints, in short, inhibit women's full access to and participation in language. However, Roof argues, Wittig's texts not only yield a multiple, de-centered and undecidable version of subjectivity that has been typically assigned to femininity in opposition to a centered epistemological certainty; but they also set up an additional binary suggestive of a lesbian identity or essence existing in tandem with the "heterosexual weltanschauung" that must necessarily ground it (51-52).

What is more, assumptions about the ability of language to transparently render experience and thereby to alter and transform ideology underpin Wittig's effort to turn

away from heterosexual categories, according to Roof. It is one thing, she points out, to imagine an existence outside the walls of heterosexuality and quite another to attempt their demolition through language. Roof elaborates:

By eliding the practical difficulty of getting from imagined materiality to representation, Wittig can offer the act of rejecting gender as a way of surmounting it. This utopian gap in Wittig's otherwise perceptive critique of the ideology of gender exposes her very traditional reliance on the originary existence of a subject outside of ideology. (55)

In light of the exceptions taken to Wittig's strategy, it is appropriate to look first at Wittig's statements concerning the relationship between language and her textual project, and then to examine her version of self-creation in L'Opoponax in order to appreciate her undertaking. In "The Mark of Gender," Wittig explains that her choice of the pronoun "on" as the pronoun of preference in this first novel--rather than "je" or "elle"--was motivated by her desire to evoke a subject characterized by an unimpeded access to language, one that did not bear the "crablike" and "particularized" mark of gender. To illustrate, Wittig draws on the image of the kaleidoscope: "One, on has been for me the key to the undisturbed use of language, as it is in childhood when words are magic, when words are set bright and colorful in the kaleidoscope of the world, with its many revolutions in the consciousness as one shakes it" (Straight 84).

From this remark it is easy to understand Judith Butler's observation in Gender Trouble that Wittig supposes a "pre-social ontology of unified and equal persons" (qtd. in Roof 55), a space in time prior to language from which each individual begins with the capacity to use a pure and unmarked idiom. From Butler's postmodern perspective, Wittig's move ignores the problematic "always already" nature of language that immediately shackles the subject to the available positions of discourse. In the face of Butler's argument, Seyla Benhabib has sought to attenuate the iron grip of language on the subject by rescuing the subject's capacity to "rearrange the significations of language" (qtd.

in Shadow Benjamin 83), a ploy that suggests the magic words of Wittig's linguistic kaleidoscope. However, as Benjamin points out in "The Shadow of the Other Subject," Benhabib's position constitutes the subject's return to autonomy which consequently ignores the power of exclusion exercised by the speaking subject (Shadow 83-84).

Rather than pigeonhole Wittig's approach within a particular theoretical camp, I would argue that Wittig's kaleidoscope vision of language requires a degree of nuance that draws in a seemingly incongruous manner on different perspectives: the postmodern conception of the subject as constructed by social discourse, on one hand, and the notion of self as psychological process on the other. These views may initially appear incompatible in that the latter reserves a significant role for agency. Benjamin raises this distinction between "sub-jected" subject and agent in her engagement with feminist theories of subjectivity; she echoes Benhabib's concern to know the process by which the subject takes on the structured positions--the content--assigned by language ("Shadow" 83).

In examining Butler's critique of the statement "I think," which Butler instead construes as ideas, emotions, and so forth "come to me" (qtd. in "Shadow" 87), Benjamin stresses Butler's entirely passive construction. Approaching the problem initially from a Kleinian notion of introjection and projection--from a psychic organization of identification and exclusion--Benjamin argues instead in favor of a "psychic agency." Benjamin, it seems, turns away from the question of origins. It is not essential to determine whether the stimuli that prompt the construction of the subject are internal, instinctually driven impulses or structures in the outside world that in some way impinge upon the individual. Whether or not these impulses are understood as coming from a uniquely external source, the construction of self is an individual matter of sorting the "it" from the "I," a kind of "triage" that is compatible with the notions of activity and ownership.⁷

This sorting process, Benjamin goes on to explain, approaches the subject in a way that is fundamentally different from that of Lacan. The Lacanian subject, underpinned by an initial experience of being that is fragmented and decentered, nonetheless persistently

pursues the illusive wholeness promised by the mirror image, a quest that is continually undermined by its fundamentally splintered and disparate nature.

Calling attention once again to Butler's passive construction, Benjamin emphasizes that from a Lacanian perspective, "the subject is split." However, from an object relations point of view, the self is active; the self splits. "Unlike the 'split subject,' a concept that is set up in opposition to 'unity'--relying on the falseness of its binary Other to generate its oppositional truth--the notion of splitting does not require that we posit a preexisting unity, or an ideal of unity to which splitting gives the lie" (Shadow 89).

These various strands of theory and critique invite the reader to reconsider the weave of Wittig's text. Rather than interpret the kaleidoscope of language as a fundamentally pure point of origin or an unproblematic path to a nongendered discourse--what Roof calls an elision of "the difficulty in getting from imagined materiality to representation"--the kaleidoscope can be read as the site of active process where subject splits world, thereby creating a collage of selfhood. The novel disposes its fragments in a statement of "ownership" that includes its good and bad objects, its identifications and exclusions. These scraps of language are then juxtaposed with bits of social discourse, such that the resulting collage presents the reader with the gaps between these two varieties of text. In short, Wittig's text gestures simultaneously toward the constructed subject of discourse and the self of psychological process, suggesting, by virtue of the gap between the two, the possibility for flexibility, interaction and relationship.

It is significant then, as critics point out, that Catherine Legrand's story begins with her first day at school, where a child's encounter with varieties of social discourse, a vast source of external objects with their potential for constructing or "sub-jecting" the subject, is particularly intense. The "trialogue" of objects must be undertaken in earnest. L'Opoponax includes many passages describing classroom events, interactions that emphasize the clash and consequent gap between authorized language and the child's unauthorized version of things. The geography lesson is a case in point. The class is conducted by Madame La

Porte who is substituting for the students' regular teacher. She decides to have the children recite their lesson: "Pouvez-vous me dire ce que c'est qu'une vallée? Bien sûr Catherine Legrand a déjà remarqué que le relief comporte des bosses et des creux. Les vallées c'est les creux."

Madame La Porte simply laughs at this definition and calls on Françoise Pommier, a kind of teacher's pet who has perfectly mastered the official discourse: "Elle dit qu'une vallée c'est une dépression d'origine soit fluviale soit glaciaire, que la vallée fluviale a la forme d'un grand V, que la vallée glaciaire est plus évasée et a la forme d'un grand U." This definition is met with enthusiastic approval while Catherine Legrand is punished with a bad grade. "Madame La Porte dit à Catherine Legrand, je vous mets un zéro, ses lèvres s'écartent, on voit ses gencives rose pâle, un beau zéro, elle sourit" (74).

What the lesson seems to "teach" is that the transition from materiality to representation, from sense experience to language, is most certainly problematic; the lesson leads us to question Roof's assertion that Wittig elides the difficulties of moving from materiality to representation. The reader's sympathies tend to side with Catherine Legrand, whose definition derives from her own encounter with hills and valleys. The teacher, however, perhaps a little too predictably, favors a second-hand version that has been officially transmitted in the form of scientifically analytical discourse. What is more, Françoise Pommier's definition weaves the very building blocks of written representation, the letters of the alphabet, into geography's official configurations, thereby suggesting the degree to which the materiality of language, its physical trace, is compromised.

The perpetual tension between these two levels of language repeatedly orients the novel's textual pattern. In her discussion of Nathalie Sarraute's fiction, Wittig elaborates on this tension. On one hand, there is the notion of a malleable "first language," a language "which everyone in turn can take, use, bend toward a meaning." On the other, there is social discourse with its vested power relationships and its catalogue of shared meanings, or "common places," whose exchange makes interlocution possible. These two

perceptions of language lead Wittig to consider that in literature alone is it possible "to tear open the closely woven material of the commonplaces, and to continually prevent their organization into a system of compulsory meaning" ("Site" 100).

Wittig's text, then, grapples on a large scale with the same dilemma as Colette's eight-year-old protagonist who magically invests the word "presbytère" with her own meaning, using it to designate a black and yellow snail. Confronted with the word's accepted definition, the child responds by baptizing her favorite place of play as her "presbytère," where she becomes "priest on the wall." In this playful space, language acquires a rare malleability, and in this way the individual reaches an accommodation between reality and dream, between the "sub-jected" subject and self.

Likewise, the juxtaposition of authorized and unauthorized language in Wittig's text does not constitute the entire tableau. One must take the gap between the two into account. In L'Opoponax, the gap is embellished with split objects, both good and bad, that elaborate the child's world. As Madame La Porte reads a story to the students, the attention of the text shifts to a detailed description of the teacher's perpetually smiling and hypocritical mouth, a description that insists on the mouth's materiality:

Ses lèvres se soulèvent bien haut au-dessus des dents. En permanence on aperçoit les gencives rose pâle. La salive de madame La Porte est filante. Elle s'accroche le long des dents, elle fait des fils blancs qui s'y collent ou qui s'étirent et se posent un instant sur la lèvre inférieure puis se cassent comme un élastique trop tendu ou trop mou, il reste un peu de blanc sur la lèvre, une trace. Ça recommence à faire des fils chaque fois que la bouche se ferme et s'ouvre, que les lèvres s'écartent verticalement ou longitudinalement. Madame La Porte a trop de ptyaline. (75)

The mouth has the appeal of an almost scientific accuracy, underlined by its dimensions and the use of the word "ptyaline." The description seems a faithful rendering of a neutral reality. However, despite the controlled and consistent objectivity of the language,

Madame La Porte's mouth acquires a disagreeable yet fascinating allure and expands to occupy a considerable part of the page. It appears to function as a bad part-object, the not-me of the child's intrapsychic drama, and it achieves a prominent place in the story.

Thus, the mouth intrudes between the authorized and the unacceptable geographical definitions. It functions as part of a collage, a third element that disrupts the materiality/representation binary without seeking to resolve it through compromise, as does Colette's text. Instead, as in the art of collage, there is no effort made to establish a linear reading based on the syntax of the various parts. In her elaboration of the parameters of collage, Perloff cites David Antin's definition of this art form as "the dramatic juxtaposition of disparate materials without commitment to explicit syntactical relations between elements" (6). Each part constitutes its own area of interest. Indeed, the comments of Gertrude Stein concerning Picasso's work provide a useful frame for approaching Wittig's text, in that "one corner [is] as important as another corner" (qtd. in Perloff 41).

The image of Madame La Porte's mouth finds its parallel in the hypocritical Mrs. Smeath of Cat's Eye, who features so prominently in the protagonist's paintings. The reader will recall that, like this riveting mouth, Mrs. Smeath, with her pallid complexion, exercises a kind of distasteful fascination that the protagonist Elaine likens to a "phosphorescent mushroom" (58). Read as a split-off bad mother, Mrs. Smeath, whom the artist paints in a variety of lewd or humiliating ways, becomes "an evil that generates art" (Ingersoll 22).

Similarly, the passage devoted to Madame La Porte concludes with a description of her disconcertingly inappropriate behavior. Having finished the story she was reading to the students, Madame La Porte asks them to write about what they have just heard. She moves about the room reading their reactions aloud. However, when she gets to Catherine Legrand, she sweeps the child up in her arms and walks across the room, all the while rocking her like an infant, smiling and repeating "mon bébé, mon gros bébé" (75-

76). Having sadistically insisted on officially prescribed definitions, Madame La Porte now seems unable to distinguish the boundaries of socially proscribed behavior.

However, while both works illustrate interconnections between splitting, art and selfhood, the texts differ in approach. Atwood's text alternates between Elaine's life story and descriptions of her art. The paintings prove an indispensable means of accessing repressed memory, and for this reason infer a privileged link between lived experience and representation. It will be recalled that Elaine agonizes when she admits that this meaningful connection will be lost in the shift from a personal to a social context when the paintings are publicly displayed; she laments: "...I can no longer control these paintings, or tell them what to mean" (409). Nonetheless, the novel itself suggests that, via Elaine's story, the meaning of the paintings can be restored to the public domain by an additional and therefore privileged layer of representation, the novel's narration. From this perspective one might say that the gap between life and art is to some extent repaired.

Wittig, in contrast, by no means accords language and narration this enhancing status. Indeed, Wittig's strategy takes the reader in the opposite direction by insisting on the materiality of language. It is not that Wittig omits the difference between materiality and language, as Roof asserts; rather Wittig blurs the binary division by insisting that literary language, like the clay and wood of the sculptor, is a malleable medium to be transformed by the artist. Language has a dual status. Through its insistence on the physical reality of Madame La Porte's mouth, with its elastic bands of saliva and its ptyalin, Wittig's image plays with the notion of language as an entity that falls somewhere in between representation and the real, because the two share an element of "plasticity" (Straight 78). Since language is already freighted with meaning

...a writer must first reduce language to be as meaningless as possible in order to turn it into a neutral material--that is, a raw material. Only then is one able to work the words into a form. (This does not signify that the

finished work has no meaning, but that the meaning comes from the form, the worked words.) (Straight 72)

This pronouncement throws light on the almost phenomenological portrait of Madame La Porte's mouth which looms large and crowds its way into the chronology of classroom events, insisting on its own formal importance. In this context, Duffy's already mentioned assertion that Wittig's writings do not constitute "self-conscious reflections upon form itself" requires further evaluation.

The emphasis on form, arrangement, materiality and play are brought home by the games of Veronique Legrand, Catherine Legrand's younger sister. The reader is introduced to this pre-schooler through her solitary games which involve the arrangement and rearrangement of scavenged sticks and pebbles. Seated in the yard, she unites found object and narrative: "Elle se raconte des histoires, le petit bout de bois en suit les péripéties en glissant dans sa main, en effectuant tous les mouvements qu'elle veut qu'il fasse" (37). However, in contrast to Atwood's text, the concomitant meaning of the little girl's creation, the narrative, is suppressed. The object-words are reduced to a meaninglessness. What counts in L'OpoPONax is the process, the form, the playful manipulation of the sticks into shifting patterns: "Ils se déplacent suivant un ordre qu'elle établit au fur et à mesure soit en ligne droite, soit deux par deux, soit en foule sans aucun ordre" (38).

Wittig explains that her focus on the materiality of language derives from her understanding of the theories of Russian formalist Victor Shlovsky, who estimated that the impact of literary language could force readers to see things anew. For Shlovsky, she explains, the writer's role "is to re-create the first powerful vision of things--as opposed to their daily recognition. But he was wrong in that what a writer re-creates is indeed a vision, but the first powerful vision of words, not of things" (Wittig's emphasis, Straight 72). By drawing on the formalists, Wittig reinforces her kaleidoscopic vision of language: "Words, their disposition, their arrangement, their relation to each other, the whole nebula

of their constellations shift, are displaced, engulfed or reoriented, put sideways" (*Straight* 82). Véronique Legrand's arrangements, then, emptied of their significance, appear to be part of Wittig's kaleidoscope project.

Having at last arranged the sticks in a circle, Véronique Legrand sucks on the pebbles she has gathered to make them clean and piles them in the center "où ils sont tout blancs les uns à côté des autres" (39). Sucking on pebbles, transforming them by making them white, evokes the physical dimension of the writer's objects, their orality, a dimension captured in the material description of Colette's "presbytère," which is "brodé d'un relief rêche en son commencement, achevé en un longue et rêveuse syllabe..." (29).

A similar affirmation of the oral materiality of object-words surfaces during a description of a school outing to the countryside. The passage suggests a counterpoint of dictated form and spontaneous, unauthorized pattern, of social regulation alternating with open-ended play. While the children set off in ordered pairs following the path of the highway, it is not long before individuals begin to break rank and test boundaries. Reine Dieu, who has been paired with Catherine Legrand, breaks off stalks of tall grass, sticks them up her nose and down her partner's blouse. Dirt ends up in shoes and under fingernails. "Mademoiselle" reestablishes order as the children sing a well-known marching song, whose homogenizing influence is not lost on the narrator: "On chante, un kilomètre à pied ça use ça use... Quand on dit gauche on doit être sur le pied gauche. Il faut rejeter l'autre en arrière en faisant un petit saut pour se mettre dans le bon ordre de marche" (41).

However, the "authorized" form does not prevail for long. Soon the two girls are looking for bits of debris along the edge of the highway and tugging at each other's clothing to see who will fall down first. Eventually the children come to a field dotted with pink and sky blue wildflowers, whose contours lend the scene "un aspect géométrique." Yet once the students engage with the object world, the careful grid is disrupted and replaced by a kaleidoscope configuration:

On cueille des fleurs en prenant toute la longueur des tiges. Reine Dieu coupe les corolles à ras et les met dans sa bouche. Elle arrache les fleurs en courant sans s'arrêter pendant qu'elle crache les premières pour les remplacer par d'autres. Reine Dieu se bourre de fleurs, s'étouffe, on voit les lambeaux bleus de pétale écrasés sur les lèvres coincés entre les dents. On fait lever des papillons qu'on ne voit pas, qui sont de la même couleur que les fleurs de lin ou bien les aconits. (43)

The grid of the field is altered through play. The kaleidoscope has been turned to proffer a new pattern dominated by a mouth covered in blue petals. This good object that bespeaks creative abundance reconfigures the canvas; it is pasted in opposition to the image of the previous pages, to that of the smiling, hypocritical mouth of Madame La Porte, reinforcer of social discourse.

L'Opoanax's gallery of brilliant objects, divorced as they are from reader expectations of a story that endows them with meaning, posed problems for reviewers when the work was initially published. John Weightman's assessment is sensitive to the importance of Wittig's arrangements, calling the text "a kaleidoscopic flurry of incident," but also expresses disappointment at the lack of meaning assigned to them. He complains that "the jumble of vivid, physical description of childhood is not enough" and adds: "All the penumbra of childhood emotion...has been removed from these bright little sentences, which become rather tedious when one realizes that they are not going to have any further dimension" (25).

Anna Balakian's review raises similar objections. The book's "vivid canvas of colors, forms and movements," Balakian asserts, falls short of any organized perception and, for this reason, strains the text's believability. To be credible the child of the fiction must go beyond mere observations of the world, must feel "the need to put some meaning into them...." She laments that Wittig, in typical "nouveau roman" fashion, has deprived

childhood of its magical quality; instead, "sensations are acting like a drug that numbs the artist instead of releasing a series of affective illuminations of his [sic] universe" (33).⁸

The comments of these critics beg the question of whether the notion of illumination at all applies to Wittig's novel as it does to the two novels discussed earlier in this study. Both Weightman's and Balakian's treatments of the novel link textual significance to a somewhat Romantic perception of the world reminiscent of idealist philosophy, where reason discerns a meaningful pattern in the individual's accumulating catalogue of sense experience. From this perspective, it is the logic of narration that confers meaning, and, to follow Balakian's argument, consequently illumines the text.

However, in both Atwood's and Colette's novels, the illumined quality of the text is not entirely attributable to narrative logic. The theme of illumination in Cat's Eye is an explicit and overdetermined one; it is a knot whose meaning, temporarily captured in the painted brilliance of art, repeatedly unravels to reveal a substratum of chaos. Meaning is always illusive. The shiny objects the artist paints, for example, create an impression of "delaying time," an impression that only masks its disintegration (119); love, like a glowing still life, "a plum in sunlight, richly coloured, perfect in form" (341), ebbs "like a tide going out" exposing the chaos of debris, "broken bottles, old gloves, rusting pop cans, nibbled fishbodies, bones" (372). Thus--to borrow from the fundamental binary of Nietzsche's Birth of Tragedy--Atwood's narrative repeatedly invests or "enlightens" its objects with Apollonian meaning only to plunge them once again into a dark Dionysian confusion. The project of selfhood likewise balances precariously on the razor-thin edge between the two. Contemplating the retrospective of her work, Elaine concludes: "Whatever energy they have came out of me. I'm what's left over" (409). While the narration of the artist's life story lends meaning to her work, these are only brief moments of illumination, tenuous points of light on a ground of obscurity.

La Maison de Claudine insinuates an even greater distance between the concepts of illumination and meaning. It will be recalled that in this work it is the abundance of

description, the excessive decorative surface of the work that inundates the story and its generalizations in much the same way that the gorgeous letters of illuminated manuscripts overwhelm the text. It was earlier concluded that as a consequence of this predominance of decorative surface over meaningful depth, the demarcation between the figural and the textual in Colette's work is significantly blurred. By means of the almost visual treatment of the surface, the precious object is "transfigured," or "made real" by virtue of its brilliance.

By comparison, Wittig's treatment of objects is closer to Colette's than to Atwood's. *L'Opopanax*'s gathered objects crowd the text like so many illustrations. In fact, some of them are illustrations, like the frightening image of the red, yellow and blue totem pole in Alain Trévisé's picture book, an object that Catherine Legrand imagines may come swooping down from the sky to attack her. There is also a representation of Charlemagne in the children's history book, in which he is surrounded by male children, an aspect that is not lost on the students of Catherine Legrand's all-girls school.

Likewise the brief vignettes of the children's activities stand out with an equal intensity due to the fact that their narration is often abruptly cut short at a point of heightened energy. These episodes range from the terrifying to the jubilant. One incident ends when Véronique Legrand, who is scared of automobiles, flattens herself against the roadside barrier and screams as two headlights approach. The recounting of a meal turned food fight terminates when Catherine Legrand squeezes an entire tube of toothpaste all over Vincent Parme. Later youngsters smear themselves with purple juice as they gather berries which they ultimately dump on the ground in a gesture of childish potlatch. Overcome with contagious laughter, they fling their containers into the nearby quarry: "...on les entend tomber les uns contre des souches les autres contre des pierres jusqu'à ce qu'il n'y ait plus de mûres plus de framboises plus de bidons" (138-139).

Other images manifest a persistent, static quality. There are, for example, the colored shadows that appear behind the little girl's eyelids as she tries to go to sleep, red

ones and green ones that are pierced by yellow lines. There are the distant apartment buildings that glow in the setting sun, "une masse unique de rouge et de feu," whose distant inhabitants appear tiny and covered with blood in the dying light (49).

The novel's abundance of heightened imagery finds a parallel in The Waves by Virginia Woolf, a work that has also been likened to the art of collage by Mary Ann Caws. Caws cites Woolf's decision, revealed in the author's journal writing, to select for this work elements indicative of "being" at its most intense. Caws surmises that Woolf selected images as if composing a picture. They would render moments of heightened individual consciousness, which would in turn suggest a relationship between the self and a greater humanity. The imagery would be indicative of some "collective essence wherein each is a fragment of the whole..." (52). The work, Woolf decided, "was to be concentrated in its language, fully 'saturated' in its intensity" (qtd. in Caws 52), a description that seems to equally capture the images of Wittig's text. Caws's understanding of Woolf's object world in The Waves evokes Wittig's meticulous renderings in L'Opoponax as well: "The shape of things, their edge and mass, their proportions and distortions, are presented as themselves and in themselves, objects for a painter's eye; they rise, as from the deep, to the visible surface" (Caws 53).

Indeed, the brilliant and varied topography of L'Opoponax dominates Wittig's project. Like The Waves's sea patterns which serve as interludes to underline the passage of time, drawing the reader away from the narrative of various individuals "back to the surface," L'Opoponax emphasizes the play of objects on the canvas. Thus, Caws's application of a term traditionally reserved for the visual arts to The Waves, the notion of "not losing the surface," is appropriate for Wittig's text as well (54).

In the case of L'Opoponax, then, the notion of illumination might best be rendered by that of the eidetic image. Like the colored shapes that appear when Catherine Legrand shuts her eyes, L'Opoponax's imagery manifests a persistence that is not dependent on narrative. When compared to the relationship between surface and depth in Atwood's

work, that of L'OpoPONax strikes the reader as distinctly different. In Cat's Eye, the shiny and seemingly impenetrable surfaces of Elaine's paintings belie the deeply buried repressed memories that prompt their creation. The juxtaposed objects that constitute the surface of L'OpoPONax also appear drawn from memory's depths and share with Elaine's art the intensity of a personal gallery of good and bad objects, yet they remain unanchored by the weight of narrative. They bear a closer relationship to those of The Waves, whose essence for Caws is captured by this work's image of a lady writing in a clearing at the Elvedon forest. That which "underlies and sustains" the image, according to Caws, is "the realization of the stubbornness of the picture as a picture of life and of a lady author writing, doomed, but for the image" (59). The project of self-creation in L'OpoPONax seems to cultivate a similar textual approach, to wit, the process of written picture production.

The pictures produced in L'OpoPONax share a number of points with the art produced by the first collage makers of the early twentieth century and echo some of this art form's assumptions. The novel's paratactic organization of images and episodes, accompanied by its omission of elements that traditionally organize the text by means of a predictable linear logic, recall the tactics of, say, Pablo Picasso or Georges Braque. In "The Invention of Collage," Marjorie Perloff describes the structure of this art form, whose number of elements is open-ended; objects can be added or subtracted, she points out, "without, so to speak, spoiling the plot" (8). Collage, she continues, suggests that "expository linear discourse cannot convey all the desired meaning" (10).

What is more, by emphasizing the materiality of language, Wittig creates word pictures that evoke the found objects of collage artists who stuck pieces of wood and scraps of newspaper onto the picture surface. In this way, the novel continually gestures toward a realm outside language, insisting on the text's simultaneous yet ambiguous membership in both the representative and the real. This playful flirtation with both realms

calls to mind Jean-François Lyotard's discussion of the letter as something more than representation, as a visual phenomenon connected to the body, to the eye.

In Discours, Figure, Lyotard asserts that the experience of reading a highly legible text is closer to the experience of hearing than of seeing. The reader ignores the graphic dimension of the text in the pursuit of units of meaning ("unités significatives") and engages with the written word beyond the act of inscription ("par delà l'inscription"); that is to say, the reader engages primarily with signification, as if participating in the act of interlocution with a speaker. It is the illegible text, he surmises, that calls attention to the figural nature, the physical and visual aspect, of writing: "On peut poser en principe que moins une ligne est 'reconnaissable', plus elle est à voir; et ainsi elle échappe davantage à l'écriture et se range du côté figural" (217).

The tension between the discursive and the figural pervades L'Opoponax in a manner such that the reader is repeatedly required to both "see" as well as read the text. For example, when Catherine Legrand must learn to write with a pen instead of a pencil, her struggle with this new medium renders her signs unrecognizable. The nib digs into the surface of the paper, trapping fibers and producing doubled strokes. Ink drips onto the surface and onto hands which then leave a trail of fingerprints as her efforts proceed. The result is a notebook full of ink blots and holes where the pen has torn through, "une véritable porcherie," the teacher proclaims. The figural character of Reine Dieu's efforts are even more pronounced as the teacher examines her notebook:

Il a beaucoup de taches et de trous comme celui de Catherine Legrand. Il a aussi des dessins autour de quoi Reine Dieu a écrit les lettres comme on lui a demandé de le faire. Elle a essayé de gommer quelque chose par-ci par-là. Ça fait un amalgame à moitié en relief sur lequel on a envie de passer les doigts. (36)

Here the letters become decorative elements of Reine Dieu's drawing in a confusion of the discursive and the figural; moreover, its textured surface lures the reader away from a

sense of logic to a logic of the senses, inviting the viewer to experience this creation materially by touching the surface of the drawing.

On a formal plane, the text repeatedly exhibits an "unrecognizable" quality as well and thereby defies legibility in an even more pervasive way. Episodes that begin as narrative sequences are often interrupted before they reach an identifiable "dénouement." The description of Véronique Legrand, abruptly halted at the moment when she is pressed against the roadside barrier, screaming as headlights approach, does more than suggest intensity. When the narrator halts at this moment, the reader can't help but wonder what happened "at the end," because there is no end. Véronique Legrand is simply left screaming. It is as if the anecdote's conclusion has been torn off.

This procedure constitutes a mainstay of the narrator's stock-in-trade as the various stories in L'Opoanax are repeatedly interrupted at their most intense moment, at their climax or crisis point. The physically ecstatic game of jumping from the barn loft into the freshly harvested hay below, for example, peaks when Pascale Fromentin impales her hand on the teeth of the harrow that is leaning up against a nearby wall:

Pascale Fromentin retire la main, on n'entend pas qu'elle dit quelque chose
mais on voit la déchirure au moment où elle sépare la main de l'acier
immédiatement recouverte par un jet de sang, on voit que Pascale
Fromentin est toute blanche alors on se met autour d'elle. Il pleut. On est
dans la cabane qu'on s'est faite dans la forêt. Véronique Legrand et Janine
Parne font cuire des pommes sur le four en glaise. (145)

The abrupt halt of one story followed by another seemingly unrelated one which is begun without transition is characteristic of the novel from beginning to end. Traditional narrative expectations here prompt the reader to wonder what has happened to Pascale Fromentin. How can the narrator simply leave the child bleeding on the page only to take up the story of a new game about cooking apples on a rainy afternoon?

This shredding of the narrative evokes the material nature of inscription as well as the forcefulness of the creative process and is not without its parallel in early collage efforts. Perloff calls attention, for example, to Picasso's use of newspaper fragments in his 1913 work, Still Life with Violin and Fruit, in which it is possible to read portions of the scraps that are juxtaposed on the picture's surface. Torn fragments of several "faits divers" prove "illegible" in that it is impossible to read the story from beginning to end. One effect of this procedure, Perloff notes, is the problematization of referentiality; while the words refer to a world beyond the frame, "the cutting up and fragmenting of the newspapers forces us to see them as compositional rather than referential entities" (12). Perloff's observations, which tip the balance from content to form, recall Wittig's assertions in the "Trojan Horse" essay, where she insists on the materiality of language. The stress, the author asserts, is formal rather than referential: "...the meaning comes from the form, the worked words" (72).

David Rosand also ponders the nature of the fragment in collage, whether cut or torn. Those that are torn "evoke the energies of their destructive creation"; they suggest vitality, movement, and instability. The jagged edge of the tear "mischievously frustrates legibility" and places greater demands on the viewer's "flexibility of response." Rosand concludes: "The torn edge, then, returns us to the gestures of rendering, of creation in time" (134).

These parallels between art and novel indicate not only an affinity between the visual and the discursive in L'Opoponax; they also point to the overdetermined quality of the textual tear. While critics have rightly insisted on the text's fluidity, it is also the case that these moments of illegibility trip or arrest the eye, thereby fragmenting the text. In other words, Wittig manages to have it both ways, producing a simultaneously continuous and jagged surface.

As a consequence of the tear, the narrative is destroyed or dismembered, but a new creation is left in its wake. The reader visually stumbles as the torn edge of Pascale

Fromentin's wound collides with the consecutive anecdote; frustrated in its search for meaning, the eye must stop to contemplate and interrogate the formal disjunction. Bill Readings elucidates this phenomenal dimension of reading in his explication of Lyotard's theories. Suddenly the reader sees, rather than reads, the line. It becomes "a figure on a ground" and thereby acquires a certain "opacity" or "resistance" (18).

L'Opoponax, then, like the texts previously examined in this study, gestures toward the visual through a virtual picture gallery of words, conjuring the effect, if not the form, of a plastic re-membering by invoking language's material dimension. In this way, the paste-up of the text overwrites (but does not erase) the narrator's paste-up of the past, as form and content mutually reflect the limits as well as the possibilities of language and memory.⁹

The issue of memory and its limits in L'Opoponax invites a comparison with the treatment of this theme in Cat's Eye. One recalls that, in Atwood's novel, the protagonist begins painting "things that aren't there," images that serve as a vehicle for accessing a repressed portion of her past. As memories surface, Elaine works to disentangle the knot of gender and selfhood through her art. Self-creation becomes a matter of recovery and restoration realized through the pursuit and artistic interpretation of the lost object. This project is both limited and enhanced by the the artist's ability to "see in the dark," to perceive and represent that which floats to the edges of consciousness; thus the self-creating artist must always teeter on the boundary of the "seeable" and the "sayable."

L'Opoponax's re-membering differs from Cat's Eye's in that its gallery of objects is not motivated by loss and recovery. Its mood is energetic and affirmative. It lacks the bittersweet flavor of nostalgia that pervades Atwood's novel. At the same time, as McCarthy points out in her assessment of L'Opoponax, Wittig's book conjures the limits of memory. By renouncing the flashback, the present tense narration relates events as if they were being relived in the present, McCarthy states. However, the text is relived "as if it happened to somebody else" (McCarthy's emphasis). McCarthy elaborates: "It is clear

that between 'me' remembering and my previous self, there is a separation, as in the Einsteinian field theory, so that if I write 'I' for both, I am slurring over an unsettling reality." McCarthy concludes that the "on" assumed by the narrator effectively renders this indeterminate space between a "she" of the past and an "I" of the present (104).

As in Atwood's work, then, memory in L'Opoponax does not provide an easy clue to the riddle of self. Elaine concludes that she is not the equivalent of her paintings; neither is it accurate to say that she is entirely that which is left in obscurity. L'Opoponax's torn memories, like the brilliant images of Elaine's paintings, persist with an eidetic intensity similar to that of the coveted blue balloon, the cat's eye marble, or the artist's canvases in Atwood's work. Yet, without waxing nostalgic, the tear reminds the reader of the missing conclusion, of the unsaid and the unseen. Not surprisingly, the text is frequently rent at a point where language would need to spill over into vague abstraction if the story were to continue. For Véronique Legrand's predicament, discourse would need to represent terror. For Pascale Fromentin's, it would have to render pain with an added suggestion of death and mortality, states that elude concrete representation. Other episodes stop on the verge of of shame or the ecstasy of play. As Catherine Legrand and Reine Dieu sneak away from their classmates to join each other behind the chapel, there is the intimation of sexual pleasure. Finally, there are the runny ink stains in Catherine Legrand's notebook to express the still liquid possibilities that connect these states, or the domain of the ineffable, to the writing process. Thus, as is the case of with Atwood's work, there is the suggestion of a remote and chaotic Outside whose doubled nature lurks at writing's boundaries, an implication that is reinforced by the doubled nature of the subject pronoun, the individual and collective meanings of "on," an Outside that nonetheless hovers on the torn edge of the text, intimating new possibilities.

The terror of the edge and its relation to artistic production is frequently invoked in Atwood's work as well. The reader will recall that, in this work, the ecstasy of play and artistic production, understood as passages to selfhood, are connected to notions of

falling, of "letting oneself go," of coming apart. For the protagonist of Cat's Eye, for example, the wooden bridge is the frightening boundary between the destructive chaos of the ravine below and the starlit sky above, the source of creativity and visionary images for the little girl who has learned, in a figurative sense, to "see in the dark." As an adult, the artist deplores culture's attempt to deny the similarly scary and uncontrollable sense of dispersion, the terrifying edge, that are part and parcel of her self-creating endeavors. She is repelled by the neutral gallery setting where her retrospective will take place, a space that has been "rendered safe and acceptable. It's as if," Elaine continues, "somebody's been around spraying the paintings with air freshener, to kill the smell. The smell of blood on the wall" (86).

While both Atwood's and Wittig's texts capture the frighteningly permeable nature of self-creation's boundaries, Cat's Eye rarely celebrates its exuberant, ecstatic nature. In contrast, the children in L'Opoponax, with Catherine Legrand in the lead, delight in spilling over traditional limits and do so with Rabelaisian excess. At play in the countryside, the children's wanderings take them to a vineyard, where Catherine Legrand attempts to identify the portion of cultivated land belonging to her uncle. There, she assures her playmates, they can eat as many grapes as they like. After some hesitation, the girl identifies her uncle's field and the children greedily stuff themselves. They don't even bother to gather the bunches of fruit; instead, they pull the grapes from the vine with their teeth "comme si on n'avait pas de mains pour ressembler à Rémus et à Romulus quand ils sont en train de téter la louve" (141).

Suddenly Catherine Legrand realizes that she is mistaken. This is not her uncle's field. So, the children scamper on, crawling at times through the wires that support the vines, until they reach a section that the girl recognizes as belonging to her uncle. The childish bacchanalia continues as the youngsters consume green and blue grapes by the handful. However, once again Catherine Legrand discovers she has made a mistake and the feast moves on from field to field with the inevitable results that come from having

eaten too many grapes. Suddenly the children must look for broad vine stocks behind which they can squat. As the band hurries home, an odor begins to permeate the entire space and eventually precedes the group on their way. On this note, the episode abruptly ends.

On one hand, this anecdote, with its lavatorial humor, illustrates Wittig's striving for "universalization." Conventional wisdom grants to childhood a delight in bodily functions, the commission of the socially taboo, and a disruption of spatially organized practices--all of which characterize this incident. On the other hand, however, the passage appears to comment on the practice of writing as well. Catherine Legrand fails to recognize the boundaries of her uncle's vineyard--the markers of patriarchal property--which stretch along the hillside, not unlike lines of text. The children spill bodily into the gaps between these lines as a result of their ecstatic play, much as Catherine Legrand's uncontrollable ink spills onto the surface of her notebook, undermining the clarity and propriety of form. The content of the story, moreover, recalls Wittig's preoccupation with restoring materiality to writing inasmuch as excrement is commonly rendered in French as "matières." In the end, it is the smell that "overwrites" the text, suspended as it is over the entire vineyard and preceding the children on their way. The story, interrupted at this most pungent point, recalls Elaine's comments concerning the sterilization of art and the gallery's metaphorical attempts to spray around her paintings with air freshener in order to kill the smell. In short, Wittig's torn textual objects do more than destroy narrative expectations; like Elaine's paintings, her textual collage brings back "the smell of blood on the wall."¹⁰ If there exist a number of parallels between the painting of Cat's Eye and the collage of L'Opoponax, is it then possible to compare their artists? The answer is not a simple "yes." Cat's Eye can be easily classified as a "Künstlerroman" with a specific protagonist. If the boundaries of Elaine's subjectivity are rendered indistinguishable, dispersed as they are because of the attraction exerted by the force fields of surrounding objects, they appear highly stable next to the indefinite "on" of L'Opoponax.

Commentators tend to agree that the narrator's use of "on" obliterates the traditional notion of protagonist. McCarthy decides that the effect of the pronoun is "to desubjectify Catherine Legrand to the limit of possibility, so that she would become a kind of 'on dit,' a generally accepted rumor" (104). Ostrovsky agrees with this assessment and underscores Wittig's pronoun choice as a tactic for undermining the "Bildungsroman." Duffy states that *L'Opoponax* has "no conventional protagonist," but concedes: "One character, Catherine Legrand, is, for reasons of narrative clarity and economy, elected as a token point of reference" ("Monique," *Dictionary* 2). Y. Went-Daoust explores the implications of Wittig's "on" at length and points out: "'On' inclut 'Catherine Legrand' qui peut être considérée comme le personnage principal." Nonetheless, Went-Daoust continues, portions of the text "réalisent une totale imbrication des sujets les uns dans les autres..." (359). Wittig designates "on" as a "strong device" that enables the writer to "locate the characters outside of the social division by sexes" and emphasizes its malleability; "it was a delegate of a whole class of people," Wittig explains, "of everybody, of a few persons, of I (the 'I' of the main character, the 'I' of the narrator, and the 'I' of the reader)" (*Straight* 82-84).

The protean quality of "on" can also accommodate a self- as well as a socially-created subjectivity. McCarthy suggests that a speaking subject finally emerges from the collectivity at the end of the book. This emergence is signalled when the narrating voice quotes sixteenth-century poet Maurice Scève, whose verse furnishes the concluding words of the novel, "je vis." McCarthy proposes that this shift from "on" to "je" is prompted by Catherine Legrand's love for Valérie Borge, an aspiring poet singled out by her classmate as love object.¹¹ According to this reading, then, the "je" indicates the expression of authentic individual desire. Went-Daoust's article calls attention to yet another possible signification of the pronoun "on," pointing out that it equates with the couple and stands in for "elles" (359); indeed, in the book's final section, the two young women are on occasion

referred to as "Valerie Borge Catherine Legrand," a single subject with a plural verb, or, I would argue, as selves in relation.

This intersubjective dimension of Wittig's narrating voice merits further examination. Unlike Colette's vignettes, which challenge the reader to locate the subject's hidden figure, the boundaries of L'OpoPONax's collage artist are almost impossible to discern. Moreover, the book's gallery of objects comprises both an intrapsychic and an interpsychic dimension, the latter enhanced by the very nature of collage, which requires both artist and viewer (or reader) to consider the relationship of objects.

The distinction between the intrapsychic and interpsychic dynamics of selfhood invites a review of D. W. Winnicott's conception of object relating and object use. According to Winnicott, object relating entails the processes of projection and identification (Playing 88) and therefore belongs to the realm of the intrapsychic; the outside object becomes meaningful because it is perceived to be a part of the self, an outside that mirrors an aspect of the inside, and, for this reason, a sense of merger or sameness between outside and inside results. Thus, the notion of splitting, discussed earlier in this essay, qualifies as object relating and encompasses not only objects of identification, but also objects that are split off as the "not-me," which are in some way threatening, other, or different, with Madame La Porte's mouth as a narrative case in point. Elaborating on the intrapsychic nature of splitting and identification, Benjamin maintains: "The object may be assimilated as like or opposite, taking the form of the split unity, in which self and other are assigned complementary parts that can be switched, but never held together" (Shadow 95).

Benjamin's elucidation of this dynamic, with its irreconcilable poles, recalls the way in which splitting is narratively played out in Cat's Eye. In Atwood's novel, the Elaine-Cordelia configuration seesaws between self-other, active-passive, victim-victimizer, as if the protagonist longed to surpass this seemingly ineluctable duality by locating Cordelia and restoring a sense of unity. Winnicott describes a self derived from the unique perspec-

tive of object relating as a restrictive "self-enclosed self" (Playing 88), or what Benjamin designates as a "closed energy system" (Shadow 91).

In light of these theories, the process of idealization also falls within the realm of object relating, in that the individual seeks to achieve identity with the idealized object. However, Winnicott expands the territory of self formation by exploring the hypothesis of object use. The concept of object use differs from that of object relating by stressing a reality that is shared by subject and object and by emphasizing a relationship in which the object is beyond the subject's control; the subject must recognize the object "as an external phenomenon, not as a projective entity..." (89). To make the move from object relating to object use, the subject must "destroy" the object in fantasy in order to realize that the other, having survived the imagined destruction, is not merely "a bundle of projections" (88-90). "In these ways the object develops its own autonomy and life, and (if it survives)," Winnicott concludes, "contributes-in [stet] to the subject, according to its own properties" (90).

Winnicott's turn of phrase, "to contribute-in" suggests a change in substance as well as a change of direction. Under the conditions described by Winnicott, the other is no longer a product of that which is projected from the inside outward; the other no longer matches with individual fantasy, can no longer be rendered in terms of sameness. The object becomes truly other, a subject in its own right, one that brings difference, "its own properties," into the transitional space. Here the raw material of creative play is characterized not by its sameness, but by its otherness.

This formulation of object use furnishes a framework for exploring a selfhood that develops along interspsychic lines, between two subjects, rather than between a subject and an object. Much of Benjamin's work, in fact, focuses on an examination of the possibilities introduced by Winnicott's notion of object use. This area of investigation, termed "intersubjectivity," --a designation borrowed by psychology from the work of philosopher Jürgen Habermas--is defined by Benjamin as a "zone of experience or theory in which the

other is not merely the object of the ego's need/drive or cognition/perception but has a separate and equivalent center of self" (Like 30). Benjamin asserts that the successful negotiation of an infant's destruction fantasy by the mother and child--a fantasy that is not met with rejection, withdrawal, or retaliation--constitutes an experience of love. Benjamin specifies that the experience is not merely one of accepting a reality imposed by an outside other. It is also the pleasure of discovering reality; "...it is a continuation...of the infant's original fascination with and love of what is outside, her appreciation of difference and novelty" (Like 41).

However, while both Winnicott and Benjamin emphasize the joy of learning that the object has survived the fantasized destruction, making possible the love for a real, outside other--rather than a projection of one's self--the process is not without its risks. In order for the subject to successfully process this symbolic destruction, Benjamin explains, the outside other must in some way catch, receive or hold the fantasized negation, rather than ignore it, deflect it, withdraw from it, or in some way retaliate against the subject as a result of the negation. By acting in this manner, the outside other registers the impact of the fantasy, thus signaling a recognition of the subject's agency; in other words, destruction or negation is "revalued" by virtue of this positive communication between subjects. In addition, the other manifests her own survival, thereby disrupting the subject's intimations of omnipotence. Because of this constancy, the other is perceived by the subject as both "outside control and nonthreatening." If, as Benjamin suggests, omnipotence is only experienced "retroactively," when confrontation with another subject disrupts the self-enclosed self (Shadow 94-96), then a sense of self may be seen to derive from an ongoing and reiterated "tension" between intrapsychic and interpsychic worlds.

This version of destruction in turn suggests a particular understanding of the novel's collage, an art form whose cut and torn edges evoke a certain destructive violence. Formal dismemberment of the text features prominently, for example, in an episode in which the class of girls attends a mass. The Latin liturgy has been cut into recognizable

pieces--"in nomine patris et filii," "introibo ad altare Dei," and so forth--and scattered throughout the story. However, the narrative focuses on the games and pastimes the children pursue while the mass is taking place. Reine Dieu drops one of two pieces of hard candy on the floor and must crawl along under the pews, dodging her classmates' kicking feet in an effort to recover it. When she is unable to recover it, Catherine Legrand, smaller and thinner, goes in search of the desired object. She returns with her trophy, "un bonbon à la framboise poisseux et plein de poussière" (86). Reine Dieu then makes her friend a present of the dusty piece as she swallows the other.

This episode echoes a number of motifs that appear in the story of the children's romp through the vineyards. There is the transgression of a socially organized space; here there is a grid of pews, instead of cultivated rows, and a dismantling of the mass, a trespass that likewise negates the framework of an institutionalized patriarchal discourse, whether it governs property, religion, or narration. There is also the pursuit of the desirable object--candy rather than grapes-- with which one can ultimately merge by means of internalization. The episode of the mass, however, prominently features the intrapsychic dimension of the artist's collage with the inclusion of Reine Dieu--which translates literally as "Queen God"--a name that superbly captures a sense of omnipotence. In this episode, Catherine Legrand strives for identity with her classmate, duplicating her moves in pursuit of the same object. Only a hint of disparity is introduced when Catherine Legrand is awarded her comparatively sullied prize.

Another difference between the two episodes derives from the fact that the pursuit of the candy is punctuated by elements of discourse--in this case, the mass--that have been cut into identifiable pieces. I would argue that these elements differ from the collage elements discussed earlier, torn narratives that suggest the materiality and fluidity of language. In his article on collage entitled "Cut, Paste and Plane," Rosand suggests that the viewer read cut and torn components differently. Clear edges, he argues, enhance readability and establish certain expectations; "the clarity of the edge attests to the

deliberateness of the act, and its implicit anticipation of the reconstitutive processes of collage" (134).

I suggest that the cut elements in L'Opoponax place the reader in the position of the outside other who must catch, hold, or receive the elements of the symbolic destruction--those of socially constructed discourse--and reconstitute them, not as the internalized substance of subjectivity, but as the now marginal frame to a story of intrapsychic agency, a story that consists of an inventory of its objects. What is more--as is the case with many a "nouveau roman"--the reader must be able to "survive" the destructive endeavor by refusing to withdraw (close the book) or retaliate (dismiss or condemn the work). Instead, the reader must agree to play the game of reconstitution, thereby registering the impact of the negation and recognizing the subjectivity of the artist.

Catherine Legrand engages in a similar symbolic destruction when she creates her herbarium. Having pieced together cut flowers with favorite fragments of verse, she sends her work to Valerie Borge in the hope that the object of her desire will play the game of reconstitution. Ideally Valerie Borge, herself an aspiring poet, will recognize Catherine's creative act and its message of desire. Unlike Reine Dieu, whom Catherine simply seeks to emulate, Valerie Borge, as author, is more than a projection. Rather she is a poet and therefore considered to be "equivalent center of self." By virtue of her role as a writer, she becomes an agent and is therefore perceived to be capable of holding or catching the symbolic destruction, the collage, and thereby conferring recognition on Catherine Legrand as subject. Valerie Borge is deemed capable of reconstituting and comprehending the work's message, much as the reader must do with L'Opoponax. However, in this episode the process does not result in the desired "survival." Instead, Valerie Borge does not "receive" or "hold" the herbarium in a manner that permits a reconstitution and an effective communication of the message. She simply ignores Catherine Legrand's efforts and hands the herbarium to other classmates.

It is only through Catherine Legrand's creation and deployment of the opoponax that the symbolic destruction is successfully processed within the narrative. The opoponax, which makes its first appearance in the middle of the novel, bears a certain resemblance to the cat's eye marble of Atwood's title, because of its richly overdetermined nature. However, while the hard, shiny, blue object suggests a certain sustained imperviousness and inaccessibility, the malleable opoponax proves a useful but ephemeral invention once it has opened the subject's intrapsychic world to the realm of intersubjectivity, to a selfhood that evolves in relationship.

The opoponax comes to life in the context of language, writing, and desire. It surfaces in the fifth section of the book in which Valerie Borge is likewise introduced, initially as one of many other classmates in a convent school setting. While language figures--in both senses of the word--throughout the novel, it is at this midpoint that Catherine Legrand's individual desire for self-expression clearly unfolds.¹² It is within this context of creativity and self-exploration that collage and relationship, what one might call "the arts of approximation," crystalize in a way that lends meaning to the novel's patchwork pattern.

As budding artist, Catherine Legrand initially vacillates between drawing and writing. Her class is studying the Chanson de Guillaume, whose verses are, like the excerpts from the mass, pasted throughout the episode in collage fashion. The excerpts feature the wife of Guillaume d'Orange, Guibourc, who, decked out in helmet, sword and chain mail, defends the city against the infidel. The initial excerpt is juxtaposed with a description of the student's notebook opened to a grid of tiny squares, each destined to contain an individual letter. However, some letters just won't fit, and the girls are drawn to the margins where they sketch a different kind of figure:

Catherine Legrand essaie de dessiner Guibourc avec le haubert le heaume
et l'épée en se demandant s'il faut faire sortir la robe au bas du haubert pour
montrer que c'est une dame. Catherine Legrand laisse un blanc pour les

jambes et pour les pieds ou pour la robe à laquelle on pourrait faire une traîne par derrière. Catherine Legrand dessine chaque maille du haubert ça ressemble à des écailles, Guibourc est un poisson sans queue avec un oeil plus gros que l'autre sous le heaume ce qui fait que Catherine Legrand efface Guibourc et dessine les créneaux de la tour d'Orange. (154-155)

Dissatisfied with her art, a dissatisfaction prompted in part by the problematic of gender and visual representation, Catherine Legrand undertakes a new tactic that combines the figures of drawing and language:

Alors Catherine renonce à dessiner l'oeil arabe de Guibourc ou le nez camus de Guillaume. C'est plus facile de commencer le chapitre avec une lettrine. On fait la première lettre tarabiscotée, autour on tortille des lignes de toutes les couleurs ça ressemble de loin à de l'enluminure et on est content comme ça. (163)

The geology lesson, which also precedes the creation of the opoponax, suggests a preoccupation with determining the appropriate medium for authentic self-expression. Read as a metaphor for language, the geography lesson indicates Catherine Legrand's fascination with a substance that seems at once both solid and liquid. As the girl draws the different layers of the earth's crust, the teacher calls attention to obsidian: "...elle ressemble à du verre noir et brillant mais elle a l'air peu rigide elle a l'apparence d'un liquide qui se tient immobile à cause de son poids" (170). As Catherine Legrand contemplates the volcanic origin of this substance, she sketches the earth's different strata and envisions the location of the volcano within the earth: "...la tache noire dans le dessin, là quelque chose bouge, c'est le lieu de la plus grande modification, c'est le noeud de l'action terrestre." She imagines a tunnel piercing the earth from one point on the equator to another where there would appear "une constellation de zones noires," places where ancient volcanos erupt once again. These black, liquid stars would be joined by the eruptions of new, previously undetected volcanos, whose black liquid expands across the

surface: "...puis il n'y aurait plus sur le dessin qui représenterait le sol qu'un magma noir et brillant une surface de verre à peine refroidi." The earth is thus transformed into a brilliant black marble. "Si on jouait alors aux billes avec les sphères qui sont dans l'espace," she concludes, "on rangerait la terre dans les agates on dirait, c'est la plus belle, elle est en quoi, devinez, elle est en onyx" (171).

The inky black surface of this beautiful object, less impenetrable and more malleable than Atwood's blue cat's eye, announces both transformation and transfiguration through its luminosity, making it akin to the illuminated objects of Colette's text. These qualities find an echo in the creation of the "letrine," the initial figure of the text the student has written on Guibourc, a figure that lends the child's work a resemblance to "enluminure," or illuminated manuscript. In short, the obsidian is an object invested with optimism, endowed with a potential for change of planetary dimensions, with the capacity for illumination.

A third incident that precedes the opoponax's creation seems to predicate Catherine Legrand's eventual predilection for figured language. During class, the teacher notices Valerie Borge's efforts to cover what she is writing with her arm. Although Valerie Borge refuses to show the teacher her notebook, she is quickly denounced by Laurence Bouniol, who reveals that Valerie Borge is writing verse. With her head and arms clamped firmly on top of the notebook on her desk, Valerie Borge protects her poetry. As if to divert attention, Catherine Legrand stands and begins to recite: "et déjà devant moi les campagnes se peignent." At the sound of these words, Valerie Borge raises her head and turns to meet Catherine Legrand's gaze as she continues to recite: "du safran que le jour apporte de la mer." Laurence Bouniol, who can now see the previously hidden notebook, announces that these are the very same verses that Valerie Borge has written. As she witnesses this communication between the two girls, the teacher chides: "...ce sont de très beaux vers, Valerie Borge, pourtant ils ne sont pas de vous." Valerie Borge now takes her notebook in her arms and runs from class (174).

This incident is important inasmuch as the episodes of L'Opoponax's collage invite the reader to place the textual objects in relation to one another. Episodes that turn on the themes of self-expression and relationship are placed in proximity, a ploy that coaxes the reader of collage to make connections. The creation of the opoponax might be seen to be based on both the search for self-expression and on the concomitant desire to establish a "shared reality," in this case the realm of the written word, between Catherine Legrand and Valerie Borge. This shared reality, according to Winnicott, constitutes an essential condition that enables the capacity for object use. How Catherine Legrand came to discover the contents of Valerie Borge's notebook is not even considered; it is without significance. What appears central is the enclosure, as well the disclosure, of the shared poetic space, the mutual arena of play, that is revealed by Catherine Legrand's recitation.

The teacher misses this point when she insists on the notion of origins by pointing out that Valerie Borge is not the poem's author. Here it is important to recall Winnicott's insistence that it is inappropriate to determine whether the object of play is created by the child--originates on the inside--or is found in the outside environment. In the domain of play, the sustained paradox that the object is both created and found is central to establishing the capacity for object use (Playing 88). It is not the creation of verse that is at issue, but rather the creation of a playful relationship between equivalent subjects, the instigation of intersubjective communication.

Like the story of Guibourc and the geology lesson, Catherine Legrand's initial rendition of the opoponax begins as a drawing. During a retreat at the convent, the girls are given the freedom to choose an individual activity: crafts, reading, sewing, drawing or writing. This unstructured situation within a safe space bears a certain resemblance to Winnicott's "unintegrated" state discussed previously, a state which provides the necessary context for the emergence of authentic desire. It is in this setting that Catherine Legrand attempts the portrait of a creature she calls the opoponax. However, these efforts are soon abandoned, as Catherine Legrand shifts from lines to words. The opoponax, she

writes: "...peut s'étirer. On ne peut pas le décrire parce qu'il n'a jamais la même forme. Règne, ni animal, ni végétal, ni minéral, autrement dit indéterminé. Humeur, instable, il n'est pas recommandé de fréquenter l'opoponax" (179).

This description is followed by a "petite histoire des manifestations de l'opoponax." The creature proves a mischievous agent of chance and disruption. It is responsible for the desk lid that obstinately refuses to close, the faucet that persistently drips although it has been turned off. It is also a dark, shadowy form that one perceives at the point of its vanishing, an indistinct face in the mirror that disappears when intercepted by one's gaze.

It is in part the question of origins that encourages commentators to insist on the destructive or transgressive nature of L'Opoponax. Ostrovsky, for example, describes Wittig's treatment of several of the textual elements--the inclusion of verses by Charles Baudelaire and Maurice Scève, for example--in terms of appropriation and incorporation, a swallowing, digestion and re-projection of the object. This interpretation continues to restrict subjectivity to the intrapsychic dimension. I would argue, instead, that the capacity for creation explored primarily in the second half of L'Opoponax via the relationship between the two adolescents goes beyond the act of taking the outside inside, a process that merely leaves the self-enclosed self intact. Perhaps the notion of approximation rather than appropriation might prove a fruitful way of discussing Wittig's collage effects. Approximation falls short of identity; the word's etymology, moreover, deriving from "ad proximare," to come near or approach, introduces the possibility of bringing close rather than enclosing, of leaving a space that both acknowledges the presence of a separate and equivalent subject and signals a shared reality, a space in between the two, in which both subjects can indulge in intersubjective play.

L'Opoponax's fifth chapter, then, establishes a context of creativity and adds an intersubjective dimension to the project of selfhood. The chapter also illustrates the risks involved in intersubjective play, because it is shortly after the invention of the opoponax that Catherine Legrand transmits her herbarium to Valerie Borge, who fails to recognize

its message of desire. In fact, Catherine Legrand's efforts to establish a shared reality in this section of the novel end on a note of failure. Having searched for Valerie Borge, she finds her reading in the garden. With a stick she writes lines of poetry in the sand of the garden path. However, Valerie Borge responds in the same way that the teacher responded to her own copied verses, stating "ce n'est pas toi qui as inventé ces vers..." (201). Her focus on origins preempts the poetic space, ignoring the potential for a shared reality that this scrap of verse represents. What is more, Valerie Borge fails to acknowledge that she found a note in her desk that contained these very same verses. In other words, she falls short of Catherine Legrand's fantasy of the perfect reader or the ideal beloved by failing to "receive" this gesture of artistic destruction.

That Catherine Legrand anticipated a different response is suggested by her selection of verses by Charles d'Orléans for inclusion in the herbarium; its very first page reads "tout a part moy en mon penser m'enclos et fais chasteaulz en Espagne et en France" (197). These verses evoke the enclosure of objects and their transformation within the intrapsychic domain. However, Valerie Borge resists intrapsychic enclosure and idealization and thus affirms her status as an outside subject with the power to both grant and withhold recognition.

It is important to emphasize that a shifting from intrapsychic to intersubjective modes of self does not constitute a definitive linear progression; as Benjamin stresses in "Recognition and Destruction," opening the world of fantasy to playful interaction with an equivalent subject truly situated outside the self announces an ongoing "interplay" or "tension" between these different manners of self-construction. One dimension of this adolescent love will persist in the dimension of intrapsychic fantasy. For example, as Catherine Legrand daydreams through the drone of Latin class, she realizes that Valerie Borge also appears to be lost in thought; she is "...ailleurs, on ne sait pas où." Because Valerie Borge cannot reveal her whereabouts, Catherine Legrand encloses her within an

idealized fantasy of her own invention. She imagines her beloved soaring through a night of darkness without end:

...à plat ventre sur un cheval sauvage noir blanc gris...on dit que ses cheveux non attachés sont sur le vent on la voit les doigts dans les crinières et les genoux nus, toute couverte de sueur...On se dit que possible elle est ailée, tirée par des mouvements d'étoiles elle dérive, on la voit s'éloigner, c'est un gel brillant qu'on regarde tourner sur soi, elle voyage à la place d'une galaxie. (216-217)

Parts of this lyrical passage will remind the reader of Socrates's description of the lover in Plato's Phaedrus; common elements include the lover's equine vehicle of ecstasy, the heightened physical state, and the upward voyage to the heights of a pure enlightened Being where, in Plato's work, a glimpse of truth enables the lover to find its echo in the earthly beauty of the beloved. In L'Opoanax, however, it is the beloved, not the lover, who makes the journey. Seen in relation to the Phaedrus, Wittig's rendition seems a fable of identification in which the beloved imitates the lover, as if, as Socrates predicts, the beloved has fallen in love with his own beauty as mirrored in the lover's eyes (Phaedrus 105). Thus, read intertextually, this erotic rider embodies the self's idealized projection.

The advent of the opoanax, with its ability to stretch into different forms and shapes, extends the boundaries of self and desire beyond these intrapsychic boundaries of projection and identification. When Valerie Borge refuses to "hold" or "receive" Catherine Legrand's shreds of poetry and pursues an increasingly intimate relationship with Anne-Marie Brunet, the opoanax takes action. Shortly after a lesson on Corneille, during which the students learn that "la passion peut devenir agissante" (222), Valerie Borge receives a note in red ink that reads: "Je suis l'opoanax. Il ne faut pas le contrarier tout le temps comme vous faites." The opoanax goes on to reveal its power and omnipresence. It can provoke tangles in the hair and a severe attack of itching just as

one is about to go to sleep. In conclusion, it demands a written response to be placed behind the piano in the "salle d'étude" (230).

Thus, the destruction fantasy has shifted from the subtlety of torn verse to an explicit form of menace. Catherine Legrand watches as Valerie Borge reads the message, then quickly tucks it in among her belongings to avoid detection by an approaching teacher, Mademoiselle Caylus.

This time the message of destruction has clearly been received, read, and retained; yet only compliance with the demand for a written response will definitively corroborate that the fantasy has been held. It is the reception of a confirming response that heralds recognition by an outside other, Benjamin asserts. However, intersubjective relationships exceed the bounds of simple self-affirmation through recognition, she continues, to include the experience of pleasure, the pleasure of a response that is "not entirely predictable and assimilable to internal fantasy" (Like 32). The subject achieves more than the mere reassurance that the subject has survived the destruction fantasy; the individual delights in the discovery of the other subject as part of the outside world, an experience that Benjamin paraphrases in the sequence: "'I destroyed you!' 'I love you!'" (Like 40).

Indeed, discovery, delight and ecstasy color the passage that follows the episode of the opoponax's first message. Catherine Legrand wanders alone through a field of tall grass in the late afternoon, reciting "la nature t'attend dans un silence austère l'herbe élève à tes pieds son nuage des soirs" (233). Her perceptions of the natural world are intense and acute. She shouts her own name, then the names of her classmates over and over, but omits the name of Valerie Borge. Stretched out on the earth, she perceives her surroundings as empty and silent:

On n'entend pas un bruit. Les végétaux sont immobiles...On voit que le ciel est vide de nuages sauf à l'horizon où le soleil est en train de disparaître. Catherine Legrand est saoule à cause de l'odeur des foin...On ne voit pas une maison. Les vaches les génisses les taureaux ne sont pas dans les

champs...On n'entend pas de meuglements. Tout est immobile. La lumière se retire des herbes. (236)

As the light fades, Catherine Legrand stands and begins to run toward the sun, her heart beating in her head, the sun beating like her heart, until sun and heart appear to explode as she tumbles face down in the grass. When she looks up again, the sun has disappeared; there is only the wind that one can see in the trees, smell in the grass, a wind one can hear.

This passage, "pasted" next to the account of the opoanax's first message, opens up new dimensions in Catherine Legrand's evolving subjectivity. She wanders in a setting that approximates the lyrical intensity of the poetry she recites, affirming her sense of self and that of her female classmates by shouting their names aloud.¹³ However, the name of Valerie Borge is explicitly omitted. This reticence may be the mark of the ineffable, of a "hidden, unspoken love" that is most powerfully conveyed by means of silence (Ostrovsky 19). However, the omission may also convey her stature as outside other, elusive in that she cannot be entirely enclosed or contained. While Valerie Borge is clearly a revered figure in the novel, not only because she writes poetry, but because she is also sought out by her classmates as a captivating storyteller, she remains a rather flat character, given her status as the beloved.

In this passage, her scant characterization reinforces her outside status, but also conveys the notion of an ideal that is singularly unimpinging. The text in no way reads as an effort on the part of Catherine Legrand to emulate or submit to an idealized figure. Indeed, I would argue that Valerie Borge functions in a manner that differs significantly from that of the traditional idealized other. In a brief overview of the erotics of transference, entitled "What Angel Would Hear Me?," Benjamin calls attention to the historically traditional understanding of idealization, whether personal or political, elaborated by Freud in his discussion of narcissistic love. It is a process, she points out, that has often been understood to involve a potentially dangerous and irrational submission to the idealized figure (Like 146). Benjamin's contention is that intersubjective theory can prove

fruitful in revaluing various aspects of this process, claiming that idealization, explored intersubjectively, can have a salutary dimension.

What is striking about the excerpt from Wittig's text is the overall silence, the aloneness, that leaves Catherine Legrand free to elaborate her own poetic world. While Valerie Borge figures as idealized other, the potential for intersubjective relationship, signaled by the reading and retention of the opoanax's note, has opened a potential creative space for language between lover and beloved that need not be filled with inauthentic imitation or other form of submission to the ideal. The anticipation precipitated by the act of "holding" and containment, with its promise of recognition and exchange, engenders a liberating space where Catherine Legrand can now enjoy her own engagement and symbolization of the outside. Here the beloved's absence is not articulated as lack, but as the opportunity for self-exploration.

According to Benjamin, interaction with an idealized other perceived as an idealized figure of holding or containment, rather than an omniscient one, leads the subject to a perception of space between self and other. This perception, Benjamin asserts, finds a parallel in Winnicott's notion of play that is linked to being alone in the presence of another. Benjamin elaborates:

I have observed that the unfolding of woman's desire has been linked to images of such aloneness, an intersubjective space that allows the self to come alive. In the solitude provided by the other the subject has a space to become absorbed with internal rhythms rather than reacting to the outside; this space is a counterpoint to the image of phallic penetration in the erotic experience of being known. (Like 161).

Valerie Borge, then, for all her linguistic prowess, is not characterized as the one who knows. As a figure of holding or containment, she offers an alternative to the typical idealized figure, eroticized through the power of omniscience in the discourse of psychoanalysis. Benjamin proposes an alternative to Lacan's formulation of the idealized

analyst as the "one supposed to know" by suggesting that the idealized figure in an intersubjective setting be deemed "the one who knows me" (Benjamin's emphasis, Like 159). Benjamin also points out that women perceived to be powerful "are not commonly imbued with eroticism and do not evoke a parallel experience of the Ideal." In keeping with the arguments of Luce Irigaray, she surmises that this is the case because such a figure has been "excluded from conscious representation" (159). What is striking about Wittig's text, then, is the articulation of Valerie Borge as a powerful idealized figure of containment that is at the same time unequivocally erotic.

This formulation of the ideal, however, does not entirely obviate the desire for submission to or the potential drive for self-annihilation through the ideal, as evidenced by Catherine Legrand's race toward the sun. What is more, as in this passage, the sun must always set. The ideal turns out to be truly outside, only intermittently present, although genuinely real. Perhaps most significant is the fact that Catherine Legrand survives her ecstatic encounter with the light to enjoy the lesser intensity of the wind, as if savoring her own breath.

In terms of intersubjective theory, Benjamin contrasts the difference between an eroticism that turns on a dynamic of recognition through forced submission and one of "free surrender" in an unimpinging context as the difference between "empty goodness" and "good emptiness." This distinction provides a frame for reading L'Opoponax in that the child's progressive mastery of language is to some degree a matter of forced submission. The teacher's description of Catherine Legrand's untamed script as a "porcherie" and Madame La Porte's scornful rejection of the child's definition of a valley both serve to illustrate the point. The intense sensations, the gleeful childhood antics, and the rebellious transgressions of the novel's first four sections, while vividly wrought, do in fact strike the reader as so much "empty goodness." While the text manages a number of gaps which are produced for the most part by tearing the narrative, gaps that elude the

dictates of the already said and seen, Catherine Legrand barely emerges as subject before she is once again immersed in or subjected to the dictates of narrative discourse.

However, with the advent of her infatuation and romance, a different space, one that might be characterized as a "good emptiness," opens up, one that revalues lack or absence. While Valerie Borge is not present during the bucolic interlude cited above, the presence she exerts results in a solitary stillness that bespeaks the unfolding of a heightened creative capacity. Thus, with the introduction of Valerie Borge in the book's last three sections, the reader senses with progressively greater assurance that Catherine Legrand is indeed the work's protagonist, a subject who evolves a sense of self through her creative acts.

As Catherine Legrand walks through the dormitory, she is reminded that her rival, Anne-Marie Brunet, occupies the bed adjacent to that of Valerie Borge. The opoponax has still not received a reply, so Valerie Borge gets a second and more menacing note. The opoponax promises a demonstration of its power, the consequence of failing to comply with the opoponax's demands. As Valerie Borge reads the message behind her desk lid, a flame appears at the window. The students fear the building is on fire, although the flames prove to be nothing more than a reflection that resulted from the metal melting processes at a neighboring foundry. In yet another note, the opoponax claims the apparent conflagration was merely a warning and once again demands a reply, which this time is forthcoming. The destruction fantasy is "held"; the beloved survives and goes on to recognize the writer, an equivalent subject and author in her own right. In this manner, the stage is set for the collage of the final chapter.

The combination of intersubjective theory and the context of self-expression that fosters the creation of the opoponax suggest that the creature is more than a vehicle of destruction, a literary Trojan Horse, or a war machine. Ostrovsky emphasizes that the opoponax is a "threatening force," the means by which Catherine Legrand drives away her rival, Anne-Marie Brunet. The opoponax, she adds, is also "a text addressed to a reader

(the beloved) and designed to have a particular effect--to force the reader to have a desired response" (19). While both interpretations are valid, they insist on the opoponax's destructive aspect and on its ability to actualize the intrapsychic fantasy of the ideal reader in which the reader is coerced to adopt a foregone interpretation. Ostrovsky supposes a reader who will respond in a manner that duplicates the writer's wishes. However, seen as a destruction fantasy, one that desires the survival of that which it seeks to destroy, the opoponax is also the anticipation of pleasure, of the unpredictable response of another self, a "real" rather than an idealized reader, of the discovery of the outside; it is the possibility of falling in love with difference--which is to say, with one who is not "self-same," with someone who is something other than the product of intrapsychic projection.

It is important to add that commentators suggest that the opoponax is a figure of lesbian desire. McCarthy refers to the creature as "the love that dares not speak its name" (110), while Ostrovsky intimates as much by stating that the opoponax's "primary function is to express an intense feeling--without however naming it" (18).¹⁴ Wittig herself identifies the opoponax in this manner: "First 'on' completely coincides with the character Catherine Legrand as well as with the others. Then the opoponax appears as a talisman, a sesame to the opening of the world, as a word that compels both words and world to make sense, as a metaphor for the lesbian subject" (Straight 88). Wittig's statement evokes Benjamin's contrast between "empty goodness," which entails a submersion of self in the ideal, and "good emptiness," where idealization opens into creative space. Here Wittig signals the opoponax as the key to the creation of an open space for authentic expression. As a figure, the opoponax occupies an arena of play where its elaboration is witnessed and, to a certain extent, shared by the beloved. Once the possibility of this "two-body" relationship has been opened, the figure is no longer needed and disappears from the text. Leaving aside the question of whether it is possible or desirable to formulate the nature of lesbian desire or subjectivity, we can say that Wittig's explanation of the opoponax has a good deal in common with Benjamin's intersubjective understanding

of an evolving selfhood with its emphasis on the importance of spatial metaphor, the capacity to create, and the keystone of relationship. Nonetheless, the lesbian status of the characters is not to be dismissed. It is central to Wittig's project that the reader realize that by leaving the heterosexual paradigm, one arrives not simply at a narrative of marginal interest, but rather at a version of love with much broader implications. She claims to strive for an "understanding both global and particular, both universal and unique, brought from within a perspective given in homosexuality..." (Straight 88).

The final section of L'Opoponax differs in several ways from the preceding six. Here the predominant collage element consists of Baudelaire's poem, "L'Invitation au voyage," which has been cut into five sections and distributed throughout the chapter. The entire poem is reproduced, with the exception of its famous refrain--"Là, tout n'est qu'ordre et beauté, / Luxe, calme et volupté" (Baudelaire 53-54)--which has been omitted. The poem's initial verses introduce the chapter, preceded by "on dit," as opposed to "on dit que," indicating a shift from indirect to direct discourse. This move suggests the presence of a speaking subject no longer burdened by the "forced submission" to language once experienced by the child, who had such trouble defining "une vallée."

While the other chapters consist primarily of a collage of narrated, realistic events rendered in an objective register, the opening pages of this final chapter are descriptive and impressionistic. Occasionally the narrative sequences in this chapter are interrupted by a few brief lines that recall the open space or the moments of solitude explored in the previous one. These lines, for example, are "glued" between two longer episodes: "On dit qu'il fait nuit que Catherine Legrand se couche dans l'herbe mouillée qu'elle reste là à regarder les étoiles" (264-265). Thematically, this section is also more unified. The collage of short episodes repeatedly returns to the topic of "voyage." The events appear to be realistic, with the exception of one seemingly imaginary trip that Catherine Legrand and Valerie Borge have undertaken by themselves, a trip that concludes with a gesture of ingenuous, adolescent intimacy. Water becomes a dominant motif. There is a class outing

by train to a river; a silent backseat car ride in the rain; a storm that inundates the courtyard and garden with ankle-deep rivers. The final episode, a teacher's funeral to which the school children travel by bus, takes place amid a shower of melting snow, mud and wet poppies. The chapter concludes with the final lines of Baudelaire's poem, followed by a quote from the sixteenth-century poet, Maurice Scève: "On dit, tant je l'aimais qu'en elle encore je vis" (281).

Ostrovsky maintains that the incorporation of Baudelaire's poem and Scève's single verse constitutes an appropriation of patriarchal discourse, an act of both destruction and recreation (23). While this analysis is both pertinent and in keeping with the work's collage form, the process may be more complex than the simple act of appropriation, of taking the outside inside. Instead, the text's formal arrangement might be understood as a work of approximation.

"L'Invitation au voyage" proffers an escape to an idealized space of luxuriance and tranquility that resembles the beloved. The site is an erotic, utopian playground where all desires can be realized. The poem evokes a rich and peaceful interior juxtaposed with a serene and watery exterior of sleeping vessels, quiet canals, and radiant sunsets. Thus the poem, with its canonical status, functions as a literary ideal. However, given Catherine Legrand's experience of the ideal figure as one of containment and the fostering of creative space, the goal is not one of imitation or appropriation, inasmuch as these would constitute acts of submission to dictated form. Instead the ideal has been dismembered, as if by a fantasy of destruction; yet the poem survives almost in its entirety; these scraps of poetry, distributed throughout the chapter, leave large pools of space within which the budding author can create her own authentic versions of the "voyage." Baudelaire's poem, then, functions as an idealized figure of containment.

The various trips that unfold in these intervals differ markedly from the "voyage" of the Baudelaire poem. As Catherine Legrand waits for letters during summer break, she formulates "projets de voyage" to far-off places: the temples of Mexico, Colorado's

orange valleys, the yellow dust of Chinese deserts. However, once the girls are reunited as school resumes, the trips, real and imagined, lose their exotic details. During an outing to the countryside under a pale blue sky, the girls tumble together on the grass, discover the home of a field mouse, and pry a cricket from its hole. These events seem likely; but, in the evening, the two return in a covered truck, holding hands underneath the blanket that they share. This detail, which suggests an intimate escape from the convent school, makes the trip appear improbable. Its status is ambiguous. The reader wonders whether it is real or imagined. Another trip, this time a drive through the rain to an unknown destination, duplicates the "good emptiness" of creative space. Seated in the back with her sister, Véronique, Catherine Legrand is absorbed by the effects of the water: the glistening highway, the spray that tires send as high as the windows, the sodden fields where water lies even with the tips of the grass. No one is on the streets. The village windows are all closed. Water drips from the trees and the electric wires. There is one solitary and immobile bird.

Thus, in part, these forays suggest imagination, process and flow, rather than an ultimate and fully elaborated destination like that of "L'Invitation au voyage." Spoken by Catherine Legrand, the words "mon enfant, ma soeur," the first four words of the poem, designate not only Valerie Legrand, but also a "holding" environment of creative space as well as a resemblance to, rather than an identity with, the ideal. Instead of attaining a "projective identity" through an imitation or appropriation of Baudelaire's famous poem, the final collage appears to aim for what Benjamin terms "mimetic resonance, in which two separate minds are felt to be present" (Like 91). In contrast to Baudelaire's "voyage," it is not the destination that matters. Indeed, it might be argued that only later, in Wittig's Le Corps lesbien, with its own idyllic version of Cythera, is a final destination more fully imagined. However, here in L'Opoponax, with its approximation of Baudelaire's ideal, author Catherine Legrand learns to set sail.

A third trip, this time by train, takes Catherine Legrand and Valerie Borge, along with their classmates, to a river bank. This site invites a variety of play typically associated with a plunge into nature--tree climbing, the pursuit of snakes and fish, polished off with a swim in icy water up to the neck. It is the feasibility, the realizable quality of most of these journeys that sets them apart from Baudelaire's artificial destination. Wittig's down-to-earth version of self anchors the lesbian subject, Catherine Legrand, in a context that encompasses the standard Western construction of childhood experience. This movement from border to center contrasts not only with remote, exotic world of the poems, but also with Baudelaire's representation of the lesbian in Les Fleurs du mal, specifically in "Femmes damnées," which Farwell characterizes as a marginal figure of monstrosity:

At the same time that Baudelaire writes this figure as an object of male erotic fantasy, he also writes the lesbian as an anomaly, outside of and therefore a challenge to cultural demands. In Les Fleurs du mal, his shocking challenge to bourgeois culture, Baudelaire depicts lesbian love as monstrous, excessive, and seductive. Almost because of her monstrosity, the lesbian becomes the ultimate male image of cultural disruption. (76)

The rather ordinary simplicity of L'Opoponax's version of subjectivity contrasts markedly with Baudelaire's monstrous notion of lesbian relationships. In the novel's final elaboration of the creative space in which Catherine Legrand's selfhood unfolds, Wittig has distanced herself from a marginalized, excessive, or exotic seduction. Her common garden-variety version of a playful, exuberant innocence that is nonetheless sexually charged argues against interpreting the inclusion of Baudelaire's text as a wholesale appropriation.

At the same time, the shimmering luxury of Baudelaire's setting, painted in colors of hyacinth and gold, offers an appealing alternative to the grim and chilly rain that falls during the funeral of the closing pages. Once again, Wittig manages to have it both ways; she neither swallows Baudelaire's poem whole, nor does she merely write in opposition to

it. She does not completely reject its brilliance and its plenitude. Wittig's concluding chapter lacks the completeness or exactness of imitation, yet it achieves a resemblance or approximation to the text she cites.

At the end of the book's final chapter, Catherine Legrand and her classmates travel by bus to attend the wake, the funeral mass, and the burial of their teacher. Baudelaire's poem, Ostrovsky asserts, offers "a powerful contrast" to "the burial of an old maid," *Mademoiselle Caylus*. This contrast, Ostrovsky continues, stands in opposition to "abstinence, lack of fulfillment, absence of love, and death" as does "the blossoming love relationship of two young beings at the peak of life..." (23).

However, to conclude the book with such a somber incident at first seems a curious choice that clashes with the rest of the text. Taken as a whole, the novel describes the children's exuberant engagement with an abundance of objects that leaves little space for loss. However, the presence of the torn narratives, sites where gaps open to ineffable moments of injury or terror, counters this initial impression. Moreover, it is striking that at least one death occurs in every one of the book's chapters. Duffy notes that the account of these incidents in no way differs from the more quotidian: "Traumatic occasions are framed by descriptions of banal childish activities; death and childish games are treated in the same neutral and unemphatic style" ("*Monique*," *Dictionary* 2). For Duffy, this equal treatment is an example of the way in which Wittig flouts narrative conventions, conventions which dictate that momentous events must lend stories their characteristic shape. However, for Ostrovsky, the objective language used to treat the traumatic and the banal alike in no way results in "emotional flatness or indifference." Reticence or silence in the face of death, she concludes, creates a more forceful impact than one that can be realized through language (26).¹⁵

The episodes that deal with death can be understood as one more example of torn narrative, sheared off at the moment when language begins to spill into the realm of the ineffable. In the first section, for example, once the children learn that classmate Robert

Payen had died, they go "en masse" to peer into his house as his family sits around the dinner table. Perceiving the children, the father shoves back his chair, begins to shout, and slams the window shut with such force that the glass trembles. Here the episode stops with a gesture that quite literally cuts it short. This anecdote is followed by the children's whispered anxiety concerning the holes along the highway that lead to the sewers: "Des égouts c'est là pour sucer, ça fait mourir" (20). Here the content mirrors the narrative gaps into which language threatens to spill.

It might be argued, then, that despite the overall impression of continuous and energetic play in which the children embrace an ongoing stream of appealing objects, these episodes provide a faint counterpoint, a reminder of lurking chaos that can spoil the game. However, at the same time, it is important to keep in mind that, as elements of collage, these episodes are raw materials that enter into the productive process of creation. In this sense, Wittig's text can be seen as part of a project that Elizabeth Grosz terms "refiguring desire." Grosz proposes an understanding of desire that draws on a strand of Western thought derived from the work of Spinoza, Nietzsche, and Deleuze and Guattari and views desire as a matter of production. In this reconfiguration, desire is not equated with attaining the elusive, absent, or transcendent object. "Desire," she explains, "is the force of positive production, the energy that creates things, makes alliances, and forges interactions between things." Desire is both immanent and "inherently full." Indeed, aspects of Grosz's description find an echo in the art of collage, which uses objects at hand to fill a space, to produce an art that "forges" relationships between its elements. This perspective stands in contrast to that of Freud, who understands desire as driven by a sense of lack (Grosz 74-74).

Wittig's text is not so much driven by a search for the ineffable or unattainable as it is a matter of artistic production. Gaps that suggest the imminence of chaos, an Outside that troubles language's ordered logic, become important collage elements, part of the artwork's formal play, a negative space that insists on being read. Indeed, space between

objects, between elements of collage, is the essential ingredient that obligates the reader to seek a relationship between them. The scary edges produced by torn narrative are so much grist for the artist's mill, for the creation of the attainable, which often lurks at the edge of the gap, of the un-seeable or un-sayable.

With these thoughts in mind, the funeral episode acquires additional meaning. It is one more collage element to be read in relation to the adjacent scraps of text, in this case, the excerpts drawn from Baudelaire and Scève. If, as has been argued, the final chapter represents the approximation, rather than the imitation, of a literary ideal--a collage figured by glimpses of the writer/ beloved (Valerie Borge) interspersed with bits of Baudelaire's dismembered poem--then this final death may imply the "fall from paradise" that is inherent in every ideal. In other words, the chapter figures both a creation and a demise, and thus shares common ground with Atwood's rendition of self-creation as points of light on a ground of chaotic darkness. This reading, moreover, is encouraged by the inclusion of Scève's concluding line, inasmuch as the "carpe diem" theme is an implied element, a "sous-entendu," of sixteenth-century love poetry. While the funeral of Mademoiselle Caylus, with its chilly, damp setting, makes the young and vibrant love between the two girls stand out in relief, it also intimates the inevitable demise of the idealized object.

The wake and funeral episode grates against the perfection of Baudelaire's glowing sunset which follows on its heels. "Ma mère de saint Jules" pushes the girls toward the cadaver which they kiss on the forehead and cheek. The girls are silent, unable to take their eyes off the body. Their reaction is not so much one of repulsion or indifference as one of disbelief: "On se demande si c'est vrai qu'elle est morte" (277). When the cadaver's jaw drops open slightly, Catherine Legrand and Valerie Borge remain fixed, waiting for Mademoiselle Caylus to speak. On the way to the funeral, the couple forms a quiet, intimate space on the bus. Valerie Borge's head rests on Catherine Legrand's shoulder, as the latter gathers her beloved's hand in her own. Around them the girls joke and clown, proposing that they divide Mademoiselle Caylus's possessions among them. Someone will

take her dentures, another will take her cane. Like Baudelaire's poem, she will, in a sense, be dismembered. At the cemetery, the poppies droop. The crosses that once marked the graves have fallen to the ground. The graves, without identifying inscriptions, bespeak anonymity.

Thus, while it is possible to read the final episode as the triumph of the girls' desire over an old woman's sterile existence, as does Ostrovsky, it is also possible to read the young artist's brush with mortality as a fitting farewell to idealization. Idealization begs resolution of which there are several possibilities. One is an ongoing belief in the ideal, which entails a desire driven by lack, an interminable striving for that which cannot be obtained. A second possibility consists in internalizing the ideal, which is tantamount to appropriation, or a submission to that which is imposed from the outside. This option, from Benjamin's point of view, leads to a state of "empty goodness" that obstructs the creation of space required for self exploration. A third avenue involves admitting to the impossibility of the ideal's perfect existence, which includes acknowledging the inevitability of loss so much in keeping with the reminders of death that both punctuate and conclude the novel. This final option involves the realization, Benjamin states, that it is possible "to find a way to survive outside paradise..." (Like 172).

Wittig's novel, then, might be understood as the study of a subjectivity outside paradise, one that flourishes in the pursuit of artistic production. To read L'Opoponax as the story of selfhood created through a version of idealization understood in terms of containment and creative space is to interpret the final episode as a resolution of that idealization. In this case, Winnicott's understanding of transitional space, the space of creative play, is entirely pertinent. As Benjamin points out, in Winnicott's theory, transitional space "is not internalized as structure but rather becomes distributed in creative and cultural activity." Benjamin continues: "In being given up as 'the real thing, out there' the Ideal must be preserved as an inner capacity for certain states of concentrated being." What is gained is the individual's awareness "of her or his own creativity..." (173).

In conclusion then, it would appear that, in this interpretation, the use of Scève's final line as the ultimate collage element, involves more than an appropriation of the male poet's voice by a female speaker, as Ostrovsky suggests (23). The words, "tant je l'aimais qu'en elle encore je vis," render the ideal in terms of space, the creative space of language and poetry. In short, "je vis" asserts an individual subjectivity that surfaces not in opposition to death, but perhaps because of a certain kind of death, a death that transforms submission to the ideal, an "empty goodness" or "paradis artificiel," as it were, to an ongoing capacity for "good emptiness," a "paradis réel," where living is the celebration of an ongoing creativity.

END NOTES

1. In L'Opoponax, author Monique Wittig consistently refers to her characters by both their first and last names, a choice that produces a particular stylistic effect. For that reason, I maintain that designation in lieu of the more economical and less jarring practice of shortening the reference to the character's first name.
2. The "classic conception" of the "Bildungsroman" was formulated by Wilhelm Dilthey in the early twentieth century. Dilthey maintains that the genre consists of stages of development, each with "its own intrinsic value," and serving as "the basis for a higher stage." (qtd. in Abel, Hirsch and Langland 5-6). Accordingly, a successful pattern of development "requires the existence of a social context that will facilitate the unfolding of inner capacities, leading the young person from ignorance and innocence to wisdom and maturity" (6).
3. I am indebted to Ostrovsky's work for calling my attention to these remarks.
4. Ostrovsky understands each of Wittig's fictional works to constitute a reworking of a particular genre or literary classic. While L'Opoponax disrupts the conventions of the "Bildungsroman," Les Guerrillères is a "declaration of war" aimed at the epic (33); in Le Corps lesbien the author "appropriates (and subverts)" the Biblical "Song of Songs" (79); Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes, written in conjunction with Sande Zeig, takes on the authority of the dictionary (110); and in Virgile, non, Wittig undertakes the "destruction and recreation" of Dante's Divine Comedy (140).
5. Paul Smith's book, entitled Discerning the Subject, takes issue with Marxism's traditional understanding of the individual as an entity uniquely determined by a social context, as a reflection of class traits. Smith's argument proceeds from the conviction that Marxism has something to gain from revisiting the notion of individual subjectivity. Smith sets out to explore the proposition that indeed "the subject/individual exists in dialectical relationship with the social but also lives that relationship alone as much as interpersonally or as merely a factor within social formations; alone at the level of the meanings and histories which together constitute a singular history." Smith's formulation helps to throw light on Wittig's project in L'Opoponax. Despite her professed Marxism, in this first novel Wittig appears to focus on a process by which the female subject of narrative might constitute her own identity.
6. In Season of Youth. The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding, Jerome Buckley asserts that Keats's contribution to the literary paradigm of development includes the passage from unorganized perception to rational thought. Keats, he explains, uses the analogy of the "many-chambered mansion" to develop this idea by designating development as a movement from the "infant or thoughtless Chamber" to the "Chamber of Maiden-Thought." It is in the latter, Buckley continues, that the thinking principle is asserted. It is here that the individual's

"new-found delight in ideas, the joyous liberty of speculation, is shadowed by his [sic] perception of the world's misery and pain, an

awareness which gradually darkens the bright chamber and at the same time opens new doors..." (1-2).

7. Benjamin further argues that the elimination of psychic processes from an articulation of subjectivity leads to an unfortunate reduction. If, she reasons, the notion of "an agent or self that precedes the act...is rejected, the psychological relations that constitute the self collapse. They become indistinguishable from the epistemological and political passions that constitute the subject of knowledge or history" ("Shadow" 87).
8. To some extent, the apparent lack of significance attributed to the novel's objects is a function of the experiments undertaken by writers of the "nouveau roman." According to John Sturrock, authors like Alain Robbe-Grillet and Michel Butor strive to take the "psychologism" out of narration, attempting to render instead a version of consciousness, the way in which the mind perceives and processes experience. The result, in part, is an increased demand on the reader to generalize about the data the author is presenting. Sturrock explains:

The mode of narration is an implicit one, the narrator remains silent on the explicit significance of the image of which the novel is an inventory. The responsibility for abstraction is surrendered to the reader, who can at least be confident that each one of these images is significant...(29).

The purpose of the narration, Sturrock continues, is a hidden but not a gratuitous one, and its implicit form must be discovered by the reader. "The picture," he explains, "demands the presence of the Other in order for its form to become explicit" (29).

9. As Readings's understanding of Lyotard's theories makes clear, the figural does not constitute an alternative form of representation; neither is the figural representation's absolute opposite. It is not a question of contrasting line and letter. "If we try to evoke a pure coporeality of the line ('real space'), Lyotard will remind us of the potentially arbitrary signifying function of the line (its work of demarcation)" (20). Thus, even the line will in some sense always serve signification. In Wittig's work, I suggest, the tear effectively renders this in-between status of the text, simultaneously evoking discourse and figure.
10. L'Opoanax's repeated evocation of the body at the limit of the torn text--the screams, the blood, the excrement--should not be equated with efforts to represent an alternative feminine libidinal economy that is associated with Hélène Cixous's "écriture féminine." Hélène Vivienne Wenzel elaborates on the differences between Wittig and Cixous in her article entitled "The Text as Body/Politics: An Appreciation of Monique Wittig's Writings in Context."

However, this novel's insistence on the body's materiality announces a central preoccupation of Wittig's 1973 work, Le Corps lesbien. This later text constructs the female body through extensive lists of physical and anatomical components that are graphic in both their explicit, often scientific content and as well as in their form, inasmuch as they extend across facing pages in large face, bold print letters. If these works do not seek to articulate a specific female libido, their assertion of the concrete appears to conjure an alternative to what Nancy K. Miller terms women's "status in representation as representation" (Miller's emphasis, "Woman of Letters" 230). Wittig's books challenge the heterosexually selective and idealized version of the particular.

Additionally, the vision of relationships proffered in these works does not so much articulate a binary opposite, a lesbian alternative to heterosexuality; rather, in keeping with Wittig's theoretical statements, they attempt to constitute a "universal" rendition of subjectivity unfettered by heterosexual strictures. In the 1984 "Trojan Horse" article, for example, Wittig suggests that Proust succeeded in his attempt to "universalize" a point of view by "turning the 'real' world into a homosexual-only world." Proust, she continues, shows "that for him the making of writing is also the making of a particular subject...So that characters and descriptions...are prepared, like so many layers, in order to build, little by little, the subject as being homosexual for the first time in literary history" (Straight 74).

11. This reading is echoed by Ostrovsky (31) and admitted by Duffy, although the latter finds this issue peripheral to the book's theme of language acquisition ("Language" 290).
12. In an article entitled "Language and Childhood: L'Opoponax by Monique Wittig," Duffy asserts that "the childish acquisition of language" is a theme that organizes the book's progression as the youngsters acquire increasing linguistic independence and sophistication. However, Duffy suggests that Wittig is describing a collective rather than an individual phenomenon that applies to a budding author. While he concedes, in agreement with McCarthy, that the "je" at the end of the text signals Catherine Legrand's emerging individual desires and preferences, he at no point suggests that L'Opoponax be read as a "Künstlerroman."

I would argue, however, that, once again, Wittig manages to have it both ways. The progressive, linear mastery of language skills in the novel is featured in tandem with an effort to undo a sense of linearity by insisting on the fluid and malleable nature of language's material. In addition, I would assert that Catherine Legrand surfaces from the collectivity, what Duras called "une marée d'enfants," in the role of self-creating author and collage artist. In this manner, Wittig's novel once again proves similar to The Waves, in which Woolf constructs a dynamic of emersion and submersion, a collage of the individual and the collective.

13. This passage anticipates the long litanies of names that are interspersed throughout Wittig's second novel, Les Guerrillères.

14. The vaporous nature of the opoponax lends credence to one of the central assertions of Terry Castle's work, The Apparitional Lesbian, in which she asserts that the lesbian "has been 'ghosted'--or made to seem invisible--by the culture" (4). The opoponax is described as something of an elusive shadow: "...on est seul et qu'on surprend une forme noire qui est en train de glisser, qui est en train de finir de disparaître. Ou bien on se regarde dans la glace et il recouvre la figure comme un brouillard" (180-181). A few pages later, Denise Causse informs Catherine Legrand that "il y a un fantôme dans le dortoir," and that Valerie Borge was the first to speak of it (186). Part of the project of L'Opoponax, then, can be seen as a textual embodiment that lends substance to this ghostly figure by means of the materiality of language.

15. The notion that silence speaks louder than words may serve to explain the omission of Baudelaire's refrain from the final collage. In Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes, co-authored with Sande Zeig, the term "volupté" is equated with orgasmic pleasure and an excerpt from Baudelaire's refrain, "Luxe, calme, et volupté" is cited to contextualize the expression. Thus, like the torn narratives of the novel, the omitted refrain constitutes a gap that alludes to the ineffable. In addition, the omission of the refrain enhances one's understanding of Wittig's art of approximation, in that approximation is always an incomplete version of the original.

CONCLUSION

The time has come for my own retrospective, for a backward glance at this triptych of essays, which can be seen as a collage composed of description, theory, and interpretation--a disposition of found objects that have undergone my own attempts at the art of approximation. By bringing into proximity text and theory, I have tried, not to imitate the contributions of object relations theory, but rather to set up a "mimetic resonance" between some of its salient concepts and selected features of these narratives. The process of dismembering and remembering the elements of both has, I hope, produced a set of game board patterns with its own characteristic configurations.

One of these patterns renders an image of the female subject as artist engaged in the continuous project of self-construction. To some extent, this image mitigates earlier judgments by critics who focus on the difficulties experienced by female writers attempting to tell stories about women artists. Grace Stewart, for example, suggests that narrative traditions anchored in myth have inhibited women's ability to produce such a story. "Patriarchal myths, her own family relationships, and an ambivalent self-image unite to mold or to mute [the literary woman's] creation of the artist as heroine" (179). Marianne Hirsch has also stressed the lack of narrative patterns available to women writers who undertake the creation of a Künstlerroman that features a female protagonist. Such undertakings, she states, frequently turn out to be about "the potential artist who fails to make it" ("Spiritual" 28). This study argues that, with a shift of focus to narratives of creative process or to formal experiment, the image of the female artist acquires energy and exuberance.

The novels in question here, however, do gesture toward the insufficiency of traditional narrative for the purpose of telling the stories at hand. These textual gestures result in another pattern which I have referred to throughout this study as the illuminated

text, one that makes the reader aware of language's discursive edge where writing as figure ever points toward an elusive visual dimension. I suggest that the three works evoke the strategy of the illuminated manuscript where pictures and words both play a part. Atwood resorts to the use of a "figural discourse," descriptions of the artist's paintings that both illustrate the story and "illuminate" the depicted objects by infusing them with emblematic and imagistic intensity. Colette's strategy is one of verbal decoration that covers narrative with its brilliant surface. Abundant description transfigures the object, rendering it precious by virtue of a textual elaboration that becomes visually significant. Wittig has created a kaleidoscopic text of perpetually shifting images that take precedence over narrative. The narrative's frequently torn quality hints at writing's material dimension, which in turn evokes the visual art of collage. The overall impression is one of a series of eidetic images, of a bountiful and vigorous written picture production.

However, these approaches do not render the Künstlerroman completely unproblematic. While the protagonists sustain an intense engagement with their objects, the issue of sexual desire in Cat's Eye and La Maison de Claudine is moved to the margins or treated obliquely. In Atwood's novel heterosexual relationships either sap or block artistic endeavors, or, as is the case with the protagonist's second marriage, simply remain peripheral to the narrative. In Colette's work, the protagonist keeps a safe distance from the heterosexual romance or marriage plot. For example, in one vignette, Colette first portrays the encounter between the provincial Bouilleux girl and a dashing Parisian from the glowing perspective of a young adolescent observing a rustic, lantern-lit version of the fairy tale ball. Later, however, an older narrator, who signals her own success by returning to her native village in an automobile, reveals the young seamstress's story to be that of a failed Cinderella, whose Prince Charming has never returned--a story that the older narrator has seemingly managed to escape. It is only in L'Opoponax, a lesbian narrative that explores the possibility of an intersubjective relationship, that the desiring

artist/subject attains an explicit and successful sexual dimension that proves vital to her art. This interpretation of Wittig's novel seems significant, given that even literature's most striking female artists, such as Lily Briscoe in Virginia Woolf's To the Lighthouse, are perceived as escaping the heterosexual plot only by virtue of suppressing sexuality (Saxton xii). While identifying the persistence of certain narrative constraints, this reading locates in these works a persistent pattern of agency, albeit an attenuated one, that identifies these female subjects in these texts as both determined and determining. As Jessica Benjamin points out, the subject, constructed in terms of certain aspects of object relations theories, can be understood to process the exterior world through its object choices, rather than to passively and wholly internalize the structures it is presented. This is not to say that the choices are always self-affirming. The artist's paintings of Mrs. Smeath in Cat's Eye, for example, indicate that object choice can also signal a reactive negation--an attempt at self-definition by asserting that which the subject is not. Nonetheless, I would argue that these negative choices are the exception rather than the rule in these texts. Colette, for example, transforms the significance of her mother's Indian cashmere shawl, the precious gift from a wayward husband, intended as a gesture of restitution to his captive bride. She includes the shawl in her gallery of objects, removing it from its context of heterosexual romance, and transforming it from decorative treasure into a set of comfortable and useful cushions.

The collected objects of each text, when understood as an artist's retrospective, have a use value in their own right. To interpret these objects as artistic productions, rather than private treasures of personal significance, moves them to a broader, public domain where they enter the realm of social discourse. In Bonds of Love, Jessica Benjamin critiques the model of the autonomous self that strengthens separation between subject and object. She specifies that one consequence of this paradigm is the relegation of intersubjective exchanges--where individuals strive to recognize one another as equal subjects--to the private domain. She states: "The public sphere, an arrangement of

atomized selves, cannot serve as the space between self and other, as an intersubjective space; in order to protect the autonomy of the individual, social life forfeits the recognition between self and other" (197).

To understand these novels as stories of creative process, then, returns intersubjective space to the public sphere. To make this move is to sympathize with the anxiety of Cat's Eye's protagonist as she attends the opening night of her retrospective, as she realizes that those who scrutinize and evaluate her art may not share her interpretation. However, the importance of her art lies perhaps in the fact that she has opened the realm of a relation-based subjectivity to public discussion.

WORKS CITED

- Abel, Elizabeth, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland. The Voyage In. Fictions of Female Development. Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1983.
- Ahern, Stephen. "'Meat as You Like It': The Production of Identity in Atwood's Cat's Eye." Canadian Literature 137 (1993): 8-17.
- Aristotle. Metaphysica. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1928. Vol. 8 of The Works of Aristotle. Ed. and trans. W. D. Ross. 2nd ed.
- Arnett, Willard E. George Santayana. The Great American Thinkers Series. New York: Washington Square Press, 1968.
- Arnheim, Rudolph. Art and Visual Perception. 1954. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1960.
- Atwood, Margaret. Alias Grace. New York: Anchor Books, 1997.
- . Bodily Harm. Toronto: Bantam Books, 1983.
- . Cat's Eye. Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1988.
- . Survival. A Thematic Guide to Canadian Literature. Toronto: Anansi, 1972.
- . The Circle Game. Toronto: Anansi, 1966.
- Balakian, Anna. "Child's World Without Wonder." Rev. of The Opoponax, by Monique Wittig. Saturday Review. 2 July 1966: 33.
- Baudelaire, Charles. Oeuvres complètes. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Vol. 1. Paris: Gallimard, 1975.
- Benjamin, Jessica. Like Subjects, Love Objects. Essays on Recognition and Sexual Difference. New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1995.
- . Shadow of the Other. Intersubjectivity and Gender in Psychoanalysis. New York: Routledge, 1998.

- . The Bonds of Love. Psychoanalysis, Feminism, and the Problem of Domination. New York: Pantheon Books, 1988.
- Benjamin, Walter. Illuminations. Ed. Hannah Arendt. Trans. Harry Zohn. New York: Schocken Books, 1969.
- . Reflections. Ed. Peter Demetz. Trans. Edmund Jephcott. New York: Schocken Books, 1986.
- Bennett, Donna and Nathalie Cooke. "A Feminist by Another Name: Atwood and the Canadian Canon." Approaches to Teaching "The Handmaid's Tale" and Other Works. Ed. Sharon R. Wilson, Thomas B. Friedman, and Shannon Hengen. New York: MLA, 1996. 33-42.
- Board, Marilyn Lincoln. "Constructing Myths and Ideologies in Matisse's Odalisques." The Expanding Discourse. Feminism and Art History. Eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard. New York: Harper Collins, 1992. 358-379.
- Bogue, Ronald. "Foucault, Deleuze, and the Playful Fold of the Self." The Play of the Self. Ed. Ronald Bogue and Mihai Spariosu. Albany: SUNY Press, 1994. 3-21.
- Bouson, J. Brooks. Brutal Choreographies. Oppositional Strategies and Narrative Design in the Novels of Margaret Atwood. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1993.
- Brown, Lyn Mikel. "Telling a Girl's Life: Self-Authorization as a Form of Resistance." Women, Girls and Psychotherapy: Reframing Resistance. Eds. Carol Gilligan, Annie G. Rogers, and Deborah L. Tolman. New York: Haworth Press, 1991. 71-86.
- Brydon, Diana. "Beyond Violent Dualities: Atwood in Postcolonial Contexts." Approaches to Teaching "The Handmaid's Tale" and Other Works. Ed. Sharon R. Wilson, Thomas B. Friedman, and Shannon Hengen. New York: MLA, 1996. 49-54.
- Buckley, Jerome. Season of Youth. The Bildungsroman from Dickens to Golding. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993.
- Castle, Terry. The Apparitional Lesbian. Female Homosexuality and Modern Culture. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.
- Caws, Mary Ann. "Framing, Centering, and Explicating: Virginia Woolf's Collage." Plattel 51-78.
- Colette. La Maison de Claudine. 1922. Paris: Hachette, 1990.

- . La Naissance du jour. 1928. Paris: Flammarion, 1984.
- . La Vagabonde. 1911. Paris: Albin Michel, 1990.
- . Mes Apprentissages. 1936. Editions du Fleuron. Paris: Flammarion, 1949. Vol. 11 of Oeuvres complètes de Colette. 15 vols. 1949-1950.
- . Oeuvres. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Ed. Claude Pichois. Vol. 2. Paris: Gallimard, 1986.
- . Sido suivi de Les Vrilles de la vigne. 1929 and 1908. Paris: Hachette, 1961.
- Cowart, David. "Bridge and Mirror: Replicating Selves in Cat's Eye." Postmodern Fiction in Canada. Ed. Theo D'haen and Hans Bertens. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1992. 125-136.
- Dante Alighieri. "The Letter to Can Grande." Literary Criticism of Dante Alighieri. Ed. and trans. Robert S. Haller. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1973.
- Davey, Frank. Margaret Atwood: A Feminist Poetics. The New Canadian Criticism Series. Vancouver: Talon Books, 1984.
- Dehon, Claire. "Colette and Art Nouveau." Eisinger and McCarty 104-115.
- Deleuze, Gilles. Foucault. Ed. and trans. Seán Hand. Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 1988.
- Djwa, Sandra. "The Where of Here: Margaret Atwood and a Canadian Tradition." The Art of Margaret Atwood. Essays in Criticism. Ed. Arnold E. Davidson and Cathy N. Davidson. Toronto: Anansi, 1981. 15-34.
- Doan, Laura, ed. The Lesbian Postmodern. New York: Columbia University Press, 1994.
- Duffy, Jean H. "Language and Childhood. L'Opoponax by Monique Wittig." Forum for Modern Language Studies. 19.4 (October 1983): 289-300.
- . "Monique Wittig." Beyond the Nouveau Roman. Essays on the Contemporary French Novel. Ed. Michael Tilby. New York: Berg, 1990. 201-228.
- . "Monique Wittig." Dictionary of Literary Biography. Vol. 83: French Novelists Since 1960. A Brucoli Clark Layman Book. Ed. Catharine Savage Brosman. Gale Research, 1989. 330-344. Literature Resource Center. The Gale Group. Los Angeles Public Library, Los Angeles, Ca. 19 May 1999//www.gale.com/servlet/Lit...+Wittig&PX=0000107578&DT=Biography

- Duras, Marguerite. "Une Oeuvre Eclatante." Postface. L'OpoPONax. By Monique Wittig. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1964. 283-287.
- Eisinger, Erica and Mari McCarty, eds. Colette: The Woman, The Writer. University Park and London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1981.
- Evans, Martha Noel. "Colette: The Vagabond." Masks of Tradition: Women and the Politics of Writing in Twentieth Century France. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987. 34-74.
- Farwell, Marilyn R. Heterosexual Plots and Lesbian Narratives. New York: New York University Press, 1996.
- Ferrier-Caverivière, Nicole. "Preface." La Maison de Claudine. By Colette. Paris: Hachette, 1990.
- Flax, Jane. Thinking Fragments. Psychoanalysis, Feminism and Post modernism in the Contemporary West. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990.
- Forestier, Louis. Chemins vers "La Maison de Claudine" et "Sido". Paris: Société d'Édition d'Enseignement Supérieur, 1968.
- Foucault, Michel. The Uses of Pleasure. Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage, 1990.
- Fraiman, Susan D. "Shadow in the Garden: The Double Aspect of Motherhood in Colette." Perspectives on Contemporary Literature 11 (1985): 46-53.
- Gargiulo, Gerald J. "D. W. Winnicott's Psychoanalytic Playground." Marcus and Rosenberg 140-160.
- Gernes, Sonia. "Transcendent Women: Uses of the Mystical in Margaret Atwood's Cat's Eye and Marilynne Robinson's Housekeeping." Religion and Literature 23.3 (1991): 143-165.
- Gilligan, Carol. In a Different Voice. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Goodhand, Robert. "Apollo and Dionysus: Bedfellows of Colette's Vagabond." Contemporary Literature 24 (Summer 1983): 190-203.
- Grimshaw, Jean. "Anatomy and Identity in Feminist Thinking." Feminist Perspectives in Philosophy. Eds. M. Griffiths and M. Whitford. London: Macmillan, 1988. 90-108.

- Grosz, Elizabeth. "Refiguring Lesbian Desire." Doan 67-84.
- Hancock, Emily. "Growing Up Female." An Intricate Weave. Women Write About Girls and Girlhood. Ed. Marlene Miller. Laguna Beach, California: Iris Editions, 1997. 148-151.
- Hirsch, Marianne. "Spiritual 'Bildung': The Beautiful Soul as Paradigm." The Voyage In. Fictions of Female Development. Eds. Elizabeth Abel, Marianne Hirsch, and Elizabeth Langland. Hanover, New Hampshire: University Press of New England, 1983. 23-48.
- . "The Novel of Formation as Genre: Between Great Expectations and Lost Illusions." Genre. 12 (Fall 1979): 293-311.
- Hoffman, Katherine. Concepts of Identity. Historical and Contemporary Images and Portraits of Self and Family. New York: Harper Collins, 1986.
- Holman, C. Hugh and William Harmon. A Handbook to Literature. 6th ed. New York: Macmillan, 1992.
- Howells, Coral. "Cat's Eye: Elaine Risley's Retrospective Art." Margaret Atwood: Writing and Subjectivity. New Critical Essays. Ed. Colin Nicholson. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1994. 204-219.
- Huffer, Lynn. Another Colette. The Question of Gendered Writing. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991.
- Ingersoll, Earl G. "Margaret Atwood's Cat's Eye: Re-Viewing Women in a Postmodern World." Ariel 22.4 (1991): 17-27.
- Jouve, Nicole Ward. Colette. Key Women Writers Series. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 1987.
- Keith, W. J. Introducing Margaret Atwood's "The Edible Woman". Canadian Fiction Series 3. Toronto: ECW Press, 1989.
- Kessen, William. "The Child and Other Cultural Inventions." The Child and Other Cultural Inventions. Eds. F.S. Kessel and A. W. Siegel. New York: Praeger, 1983. 26-47.
- Kristeva, Julia. "A Question of Subjectivity--An Interview." Modern Literary Theory: A Reader. Eds. Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh. London: Edward Arnold, 1986. 128-134.

- Lastinger, Valérie C. "La Naissance du jour: la désintégration du 'moi' dans un roman de Colette." The French Review 61.4 (March 1988): 542-551.
- Lecker, Robert. "Janus through the Looking Glass: Atwood's First Three Novels." The Art of Margaret Atwood. Essays in Criticism. Ed. Arnold E. Davidson and Cathy N. Davidson. Toronto: Anansi, 1981. 177-203.
- Le Petit Robert. Paris: Le Robert, 1989.
- Lyotard, Jean-François. Discours, figure. Paris: Klincksieck, 1971.
- Makwar, Christiane. "Colette and Signs: A Partial Reading of a Writer 'Born Not to Write'." Eisinger and McCarty 185-192.
- Mallet-Joris, Françoise. "A Womanly Vocation." Trans. Eleanor Reid Gibbard. Eisinger and McCarty 7-15.
- Marcus, Paul and Alan Rosenberg. Psychoanalytic Versions of the Human Condition. New York: New York University Press, 1998.
- Marks, Elaine. Colette. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1960.
- McCarthy, Mary. "Everybody's Childhood." The Writing on the Wall and Other Literary Essays. Mary McCarthy. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970. 102-111.
- Mercier, Michel. "Notice." Oeuvres. By Colette. Bibliothèque de la Pléiade. Ed. Claude Pichois. Vol. 2. Paris: Gallimard, 1986. 1279-1292.
- Miller, Nancy K. "Woman of Letters: The Return to Writing in Colette's The Vagabond." Subject to Change. Reading Feminist Writing. Gender and Culture Series. Nancy K. Miller. New York: Columbia University Press, 1988. 229-264.
- . "Women's Autobiography in France: For a Dialectics of Identification." Women and Language in Literature and Society. Eds. Sally McConnell Ginett, Ruth Barker, and Nelly Furman. New York: Praeger, 1980. 258-273.
- Milner, Marion. On Not Being Able to Paint. 1957. New York: Jeremy Larcher/Putnam, 1983.
- . "The Role of Illusion in Symbol Formation." New Directions in Psychoanalysis. Eds. Melanie Klein, Paula Heimann, and R. E. Money-Kyrle. New York: Basic Books, 1957. 82-108.
- Moore, Burness E., M.D., and Bernard D. Fine, M.D., eds. Psychoanalytic Terms and Concepts. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

- Nietzsche, Friedrich. The Birth of Tragedy. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Vintage, 1967.
- Ostrovsky, Erika. A Constant Journey. The Fiction of Monique Wittig. Carbondale, Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991.
- Otavi, Anne. "La Figure maternelle chez Colette et Virginia Woolf." Annales de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences humaines de Nice 22 (1974): 181-191.
- Perloff, Marjorie. "The Invention of Collage." Plottel 5-47.
- Piercy, Marge. "Margaret Atwood: Beyond Victimhood." Critical Essays on Margaret Atwood. Ed. Judith McCombs. Critical Essays on World Literature. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1988. 53-66.
- Plato. "Ion." The Great Dialogues of Plato. Ed. Eric H. Warmington and Philip G. Rouse. Trans. W.H.D. Rouse. Markham, Ontario: Penguin Books, 1984. 13-27.
- . Plato's Phaedrus. Ed. and Trans. R. Hackforth. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952.
- . "Symposium." The Works of Plato. Ed. Irwin Edman. Trans. Benjamin Jowett, 3rd ed. New York: Random House, 1927. 333-393.
- Plottel, Jeanine Parisier, ed. Collage. New York Literary Forum Vols. 10-11. New York, 1981.
- Readings, Bill. Introducing Lyotard. Art and Politics. Critics of the Twentieth Century. London: Routledge, 1991.
- Relyea, Suzanne. "Polymorphemic Perversity: Colette's Illusory 'Real'." Eisinger and McCarty 150-163.
- Roof, Judith. "Lesbians and Lyotard: Legitimation and the Politics of the Name." Doan 47-66.
- Rosand, David. "Paint, Paste, and Plane." Plottel 121-138.
- Rosowski, Susan J. "Margaret Atwood's Lady Oracle: Fantasy and the Modern Gothic Novel." Critical Essays on Margaret Atwood. Ed. Judith McCombs. Critical Essays on World Literature. Boston: G. K. Hall, 1988. 197-208.
- Rothenberg, Albert and Carl R. Hausman, eds. The Creativity Question. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1976.

- Rubenstein, Roberta. "Pandora's Box and Female Survival: Margaret Atwood's Bodily Harm." Critical Essays on Margaret Atwood. Ed. Judith McCombs. Critical Essays on World Literature. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1988. 259-274.
- Santayana, George. The Idler and His Works and Other Essays. New York: George Braziller, 1957.
- Sarde, Michèle. Colette, Free and Fettered. Trans. Richard Miller. New York: William Morrow, 1980.
- Sass, Louis A. "The Self and Its Vicissitudes." Constructions of the Self. Ed. George Levine. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1992. 17-58.
- Saxton, Ruth O., ed. The Girl. Constructions of the Girl in Contemporary Fiction by Women. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1998.
- Simon, Claude. "Pour Monique Wittig." L'Express. 30 November 1964: 70-71.
- Slawy-Sutton, Catherine. "'Où sont les enfants?': Aspects du silence dans La Maison de Claudine." The French Review 64.2 (December 1990): 299-308.
- Smith, Paul. Discerning the Subject. Theory and History of Literature 55. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1988.
- Spariosu, Mihai I. Dionysus Reborn. Play and the Aesthetic Dimension in Modern Philosophical and Scientific Discourse. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989.
- . God of Many Names. Play, Poetry, and Power in Hellenic Thought from Homer to Aristotle. Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1991.
- Starkie, Enid. Baudelaire. 1958. New York: Paragon House, 1988.
- Stewart, Grace. A New Mythos. The Novel of the Artist as Heroine 1877-1977. Monographs in Women's Studies. St. Alban's, Vermont: Eden Press, 1979.
- Stewart, Joan Hinde. Colette. Updated edition. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1996.
- . "Colette's Gynaecium: Regression and Renewal." The French Review 53.5 (April 1980): 662-669.
- . "The School and the Home." Women's Studies 8 (1981): 259-272.
- Sturrock, John. The French New Novel. London: Oxford University Press, 1969.

- Weightman, John. "The Indeterminate I." Rev. of The Opoponax, by Monique Wittig. The New York Review of Books. 1 Dec. 1966: 24-26.
- Weeks, Kathi. Constituting Feminist Subjects. Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1998.
- Weir, Allison. Sacrificial Logics. Feminist Theory and the Critique of Identity. New York: Routledge, 1996.
- Went-Daoust, Y. "L'Opoponax ou le parcours de on." Neophilologus 75 (1991): 358-366.
- Wenzel, Hélène Vivienne. "The Text as Body/Politics: An Appreciation of Monique Wittig's Writing in Context." Feminist Studies 7.2 (Summer 1981): 264-287.
- Whatley, Janet. "Colette and the Art of Survival." Eisinger and McCarty 32-39.
- Winnicott, D. W. Playing and Reality. 1971. London: Routledge, 1989.
- . The Maturation Processes and the Facilitating Environment. Studies in the Theory of Emotional Development. Madison, Connecticut: International Universities Press, 1965.
- . Through Paediatrics to Psycho-Analysis. London: Hogarth Press and The Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1975.
- Wittig, Monique. L'Opoponax. Paris: Editions de Minuit, 1964.
- . The Straight Mind and Other Essays. Boston: Beacon, 1992.
- Wittig, Monique, and Sande Zeig. Brouillon pour un dictionnaire des amantes. Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1976.
- Worthington, Kim. Self as Narrative. Subjectivity and Community in Contemporary Fiction. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996.