

THE TREATMENT OF CHILDHOOD  
IN AUTOBIOGRAPHIES  
OF TWENTIETH CENTURY AMERICAN WOMEN

by

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## Introduction

Autobiography--a formally shaped first person account of all or part of an individual's life--has been a popular literary genre in the western world for many centuries and a genre assiduously analyzed by critics for the last twenty-five of those years.<sup>1</sup> Despite this interest, very few studies have been made of the insights and perspectives autobiographers bring to the specific study of childhood.<sup>2</sup> The childhood experiences of American females, especially, have been neglected. John Stuart Mill, nineteenth century champion of human rights, reminds us,

. . . we may safely assert that the knowledge which men can acquire of women, even as they have been and are, without reference to what they might be, is wretchedly imperfect and superficial, and will always be so, until women themselves have told all that they have to tell.<sup>3</sup>

In order to investigate the perspectives autobiography brings to the study of female childhood, over one hundred autobiographies written by American women in the twentieth century were surveyed, in addition to numerous works on the nature of autobiography, sex-role formation, women's history, and childhood development and history. Many autobiographies which seemed to have polemic, self-aggrandizement, or retribution as their chief reason for being were excluded as inappropriate for this study. Two or three especially interesting "quasi-autobiographies"

have been included. These are based on actual happenings which are not ascribed, for fictional purposes, to the individuals actually involved.

The purpose of this study is to discuss the nature of female childhood experience described in a body of twentieth century autobiographies by American women--in a limited number of subject areas. Most of these women were born after 1890. The study does not contrast male childhood experience or perception of it with female childhood experience or perception of it, nor does it discuss the extent to which the experience of these writers is distinctively feminine.

There are, of course, unique problems in growing up female, just as there are in growing up male. The confusion of sex-role messages discussed in Chapter 4 is especially difficult for female children. If they learn "that their suffering derives from gender rather than from common humanity," as Patricia Meyer Spacks says, they may be especially confused about how to deal with their ambitions and desires.<sup>4</sup>

There are inherent dangers in using autobiographies as sources from which to dredge insights about the nature of childhood. As Dr. William Gilbert points out, "Each book must have its own flavor and its own impact, if read as a whole, and this can be lost or at least weakened by taking incidents and discussing them out of context."<sup>5</sup>

The vicissitudes of memory and purpose, discussed later in this chapter, must also be taken into account. In addition, the psychological distance the adult writer has come from the childhood experience has an important impact on the recounting of childhood experience. This is discussed in detail in Chapter 5. Yet, autobiographies are important to the study of childhood because, as Milgram and Sciana say in their introduction to Childhood Revisited, ". . . they provide a vehicle for the study of the forces at work in childhood that shape and influence the personality."<sup>6</sup> Peter Opie, premier British folklorist who, with his wife, Iona, studied the language and games of children, said that childhood is "the stuff that tells us about the rest of life before a veneer has come over it."<sup>7</sup>

Several criteria were used in selecting works for this study: variety in publication dates; variety in racial, geographic, religious, economic, and social/psychological backgrounds; variety in literary approaches and techniques; emphasis on specific elements of childhood which influenced developing attitudes toward sex-roles, self-worth, and life work; sensitivity to the autobiographical dilemmas presented when writing about child experience from the adult perspective; clarity in describing the people most influential in shaping attitudes and life-experiences; the writer's willingness to treat

childhood as a significant formative period in life; honesty in attempting to analyze self-motivation.

Both the works analyzed in some detail and those surveyed more cursorily deal with four groups of questions which emerged from study of the work of twentieth century American female autobiographers about the nature of childhood. Discussion of these questions provides the subject matter for Chapters 2-5 of this study:

1. How successful is the writer in re-creating the "feel" of childhood? By what literary means does the writer achieve this effect? How does the writer convince the reader that she has accurately described childhood memories?
2. Who were the persons most influential in shaping attitudes and life experiences? What was the nature of the influence?
3. What insights into the way sex roles were developed and perceived does the writer provide? What cultural generalizations can be made about the development of sex roles?
4. To what extent has a writer absorbed the experiences and influences of childhood into adult life? How successful has the writer been in "leaving home" and establishing

an individual identity? What insight does the writer, from her adult perspective, provide to the patterns and cycles of her own maturation, as opposed to the confusing immediacy that once was childhood?

Essential tasks of the autobiographer include sharing with the reader the difficulties, rewards, frustrations, and limitations of trying to do the impossible--fit once again into that outgrown child's skin--while identifying those persons most influential in shaping both life choices and sex roles. To evaluate the perspective from which a writer works and then to decide how successful the writer has been in growing beyond the tasks of childhood is an essential task of the reader.

Autobiographies by American women in the twentieth century generally treat childhood as a significant stage in life. The writers of all the autobiographies discussed in this study spend considerable time dealing both with the maturation process and the impact it has had on adult life. Despite diversity in attitudes, experiences, cultural backgrounds, and approaches taken, the autobiographers are unanimously concerned with trying to give the reader a genuine sense of what growing up in a particular time at a particular place was like.

The autobiographers receiving detailed attention were selected because each spent substantial space and



energy in dealing with a particular issue or because an issue was among the chief concerns in her work. In addition, books were chosen because of the insights they provide into an issue when compared and/or contrasted with another autobiography or autobiographies. Chapters 3 and 4, "Role Models" and "The Development of Sex Roles," respectively, concern themselves most specifically with uniquely female experience. Autobiographies by males could very well be given the same kind of treatment as those discussed in Chapter 2, "Re-creating the 'Feel' of Childhood" and Chapter 5, "Success in Leaving 'Home'."

The issues discussed in Chapters 2-5 of the study arose from thorough readings of the primary sources; many autobiographies included discussion of several or all of the issues in Chapters 2-4, and thus illustrations from these books are sometimes spread throughout the chapters. This is particularly true of issues relating to the "feel" of childhood on which Chapter 2 focuses. Chapter 3 concerns the importance of role models, Chapter 4 discusses the development of sex roles, and Chapter 5 discusses the extent to which four autobiographers can be judged to have left "home."

Part of the reason for the neglect of autobiography as a source of insights about childhood, a concern previously mentioned, lies in the materials from which autobiography is formed. Accustomed to empirical vali-

dation of judgments, the modern student of childhood may feel uncomfortable with a non-fiction genre based on an often unreliable source--memory--from which a writer can retrieve only bits and pieces of information. Furthermore, as art, autobiography is deliberately shaped by its writer toward some partially or wholly preconceived end, even if the technique appears to be fragmentary and discontinuous. Such shaping may appear to distort the evidence.

In "Some Versions of Memory/Some Versions of Bios: The Ontology of Autobiography," [sic] James Olney describes two ways in which memory can be conceived: ". . . as the narrative course of the past becoming present" and "as the reflective, retrospective gathering up of that past-in-becoming into this present-as-being."<sup>8</sup> The first is a common definition of memory; the second is very close to a definition of autobiography itself because of the emphasis on the shaping process brought deliberately to bear, from a present perspective, on the materials of the past. It is necessary to discuss briefly here both memory as a source of autobiography and the shaping involved in writing autobiography.

Memory, as a source of autobiography, is frequently unreliable. Olney says, ". . . memory does virtually everything but what it is supposed to do: that is, to look back on a past event and to see that event as it

really was."<sup>9</sup> The fact that memory brings back some items while neglecting others suggests to Olney that we are collections of different selves rather than "continuous,"<sup>10</sup> without much connection between the parts; we are carried away from ourselves as well as from others, "continuously dying to our own passing selves."<sup>11</sup> As the great innovator of modern dance, Isadora Duncan, says in her autobiography, My Life, these memories "are less tangible than dreams. Indeed, many dreams I have had seem more vivid than my actual memories."<sup>12</sup>

To the writer of autobiography this process of becoming some self other than the self one has been is endlessly fascinating. Olney finds this a unique aspect of autobiography as a literary genre since autobiographers "are forever talking about what they are doing, even as they do it."<sup>13</sup>

Only the rare person sees a clear day-to-day shape to life; that shape is supplied by retrospect only. In her autobiography, Blackberry Winter, anthropologist Margaret Mead explores the functioning of memory in her own life; she explains that each place she lived during her many years of field work felt like home to her. Why? Mead says, "Each small object I have brought with me, each arrangement on a shelf of tin cans holding beads or salt for trade or crayons for the children to draw with becomes the mark of home."<sup>14</sup> Thus she achieves

this feeling of home symbolically--each object is representative of aspects of her former life (also shaped at a former time by the symbolism of objects) and reminds her of it constantly. An object similar in appearance or use to one used formerly might have the same effect. The memories evoked by such objects give shape and continuity to existence, make her feel "at home" in widely disparate circumstances.

In Memories of a Catholic Girlhood novelist Mary McCarthy describes a childhood in which she rarely felt at home. The book is unique among autobiographies; published as separate chapters in The New Yorker and Harper's Bazaar over a period of years, it was finally published as a whole in 1946. McCarthy's commentary on the autobiographical material she presents is the book's most distinctive feature. Memories of a Catholic Girlhood begins with a long italicized chapter, "To the Reader," in which McCarthy discusses her and her family's background, especially the McCarthy family's Catholicism and her own falling away from it. With the exception of the ninth chapter, each of the other chapters is followed by an italicized epilogue in which McCarthy deals with the "authenticity" of the material she has just presented.

McCarthy allows the reader to re-trace her memory processes with her, discussing the problems she encount-

ered in remembering and recounting her experiences and her solutions to the problems presented as she goes along. "To the Reader" begins with a discussion of a charge frequently made against McCarthy as the chapters appeared in periodicals--that McCarthy, a noted fiction writer, was inventing stories. She admits that in writing autobiography the temptation to invent is strong because it is hard to remember the details of an event or precise conversations and sometimes difficult to know whether or not one is fabricating memories. Also, since she was an orphan, "The chain of recollection--the collective memory of a family--has been broken."<sup>15</sup> Systematically McCarthy deals with the way she resolved--to her own satisfaction--each problem.

In a perceptive discussion of Memories of a Catholic Girlhood appearing in The Female Imagination, Patricia Meyer Spacks says that McCarthy ". . . achieves a harmonious interchange of subjective and objective, recognizing and dealing with her own desire for an imaginative heightening of experience . . ." by means of elaborate explanations about her own composing process.<sup>16</sup> McCarthy's work, according to Spacks, ". . . is to control her experience not only by converting it to myth but by commenting on her own myth-making: criticism the crucial dimension."<sup>17</sup>

Such criticism is evident everywhere in the italicized

epilogues. At the end of "The Blackguard," for instance, McCarthy says, "In short, the story is true in substance, but the details have been invented or guessed at."<sup>18</sup> After "C'est la Premier Pas Qui Coûte" she says, "This story is so true to our convent life that I find it almost impossible to sort out the guessed-at and the half-remembered from the undeniably real."<sup>19</sup> After discussing events which still contain unexplained puzzles to her, McCarthy identifies the puzzles that remain and gives several possible solutions to them. Memories of a Catholic Girlhood, therefore, is not only a fascinating study of an orphan child and her brothers struggling to survive in an often-hostile environment; it is also a superb study of the problems memory presents to the autobiographer.

There are other kinds of problems with memory one must be aware of in using autobiography as source material revealing the nature of childhood, in addition to those alluded to by McCarthy. One of these is "childhood amnesia," Sigmund Freud's concept that we cannot understand what it is like to be a child because we find it impossible to remember what our own childhoods were truly like. In How It Feels To Be A Child Carole Klein says,

For when we look back at our own early pasts, we don't so much remember as reconstruct. I who remember am not the person I am remembering. I am an adult woman, with scars and fears, with needs and interests and goals far different from those I had when I was four

or six or even fourteen. Yes, of course, I can remember events out of the past--chronological signposts that thread through the years, tying together significant times in my life--but I cannot feel the climate of the country that I traveled.<sup>20</sup>

Klein, like other adults, is unable to remember the "emotional essence" of the event.<sup>21</sup> Earnest Schachtel in "On Memory and Childhood Amnesia" finds that this "discrepancy between experience and word is a productive force in man as long as he remains aware of it, as long as he knows and feels his experience was in some way more than and different from what his concepts and words articulate. . . ." <sup>22</sup> Art, he says, is "the ability to narrow the gap between experience and words. . . ." <sup>23</sup>

Like others recently studying the nature of memories of childhood, Schachtel struggles to understand why adults remember so little about the first years of life. He hypothesies, "The categories (or schemata) of adult memory are not suitable receptacles for early childhood experiences and therefore not fit to preserve these experiences and enable their recall."<sup>24</sup>

Calling early memory "an island without a background," Esther Salaman, author of A Collection of Moments, a study of the nature of childhood memory, describes "the intrinsic objects in such a memory" as "not merely indispensable but immoveable, and invariably precious."<sup>25</sup> It isn't until much later that one acquires the habits and customs which root these objects to a specific time

and place (Salaman, p. 33).

Novelist and short story writer Nancy Hale in her autobiography, A New England Girlhood, views adult forgetfulness of childhood experience as the natural result of a frenzied adult schedule with no "time to go staring at views or basking in the sun."<sup>26</sup> The adult world is not only quantitatively, but qualitatively, different from that of childhood experience.

Another problem with using memory as source material involves involuntary memory. Esther Salaman is concerned with the difference between involuntary and conscious memory. What she describes as "widespread and dense ignorance" (Salaman, p. 1) especially surrounds involuntary memory--that which comes back "unexpectedly, suddenly, and brings back a past moment accompanied by strong emotions, so that a 'then becomes a 'now'" (Salaman, p. 11). Apparently such a memory, of which Salaman gives numerous literary examples, is triggered by memories of similar impressions in childhood.

She cites an example from her own experience. She had left Russia in 1920 to become a student in Berlin. Two years later she began suffering severe bouts of homesickness, though her father had died and the remainder of the family had emigrated from Russia. This homesickness was not like that she had felt as a child because "it did not come at twilight, or at any definite time; I



did not pine: on the contrary it was as if something came to me, bringing a sense of mystery, magic, and loss" (Salaman, p. 14). Since her childhood had not been very happy, Salaman was surprised by "these intimations of a paradise lost" which shared certain characteristics: they came suddenly, brought much joy, and allowed her briefly to forget the present and live in the past (Salaman, p. 15). These memories helped to sustain her and give her courage as an emigre.

Years later Salaman realized that her homesickness had been not so much for Russia as for the past. She says, "We are all exiles from our past" (Salaman, p. 16). But these memories, however painful at times, provided "temporary scaffolding, while a new building was going up," the new building containing her new self (Salaman, p. 20). The time gap, she says, "was needed to reach a state of mind, a stable position, to become a new self which could recreate the young self who left Russia like a sleep-walker" (Salaman, p. 20). Salaman emphasizes that "the involuntary memory. . . made the past moment into a present one" (Salaman, p. 22). She describes summoning these involuntary memories years later by simply dwelling at length on a conscious memory, what she calls "piecemeal transference of material from the unconscious into the conscious mind. . ." (Salaman, p. 24).

The further in years she got away from these memories (Salaman cites many writers whose most powerful, direct remembrances of their own childhoods have come quite late in their lives), the easier it became to summon them in detail; they differed substantively from the conscious memories of younger days because "memories which, earlier in life, had brought me guilt, shame, fear, no longer distressed me" (Salaman, p. 29). Further, "general explanations, rationalizations, excuses were replaced by the direct, specific reactions to the original complex experience of the individual child" (Salaman, p. 29). Real understanding of the nature of the experience had replaced the emotion-ridden immediate response to the experience.

This understanding "reveal[s] strands in our character," (Salaman, p. 91) says Salaman, who has arrived at this conclusion by sifting her own memory for a "strand running through. . . [it]":

without knowing I put some people into the category of good people. Sooner or later one of the good people gives me a shock: What I do then is to make allowances: I become more tolerant, without giving up my faith in the good person. (Salaman, p. 95)

She discovered many other kinds of strands also and concludes that "the recovering of memories does not result in our altering our pattern, but in recognizing it" (Salaman, p. 95).

Jessamyn West, the novelist, for example, in her

autobiography Hide and Seek: A Continuing Journey, is particularly skillful at seeing the real design in the network of lives interwoven with her own, especially those of her family. She has the ability to comment on her own behavior as a child--much of it boorish--while at the same time both re-creating what it felt like to be a child and analyzing (with admiration) her parents' patience with her. At twelve, for example, she wrote the line, "My mother is a slattern," in one of her notebooks, which her mother read.<sup>27</sup> Though she thought her mother was untidy, "'slatternly'" was a dirty word for her [her mother], and for a child to have used it about a play-acting mother making do for an audience with a dignified husband and four small children was cruel" (West, p. 170).

Despite Jessamyn West's collection of personality oddities, West's mother did not degrade her for them. The present West is irate at her former self who longed for a "square parent" (West, p. 171). She demands,

Who did this girl think she was? William S. Hart, The Girl of the Golden West? What was her sex? She obviously didn't know. She knew she wanted a square mother. It was lucky for her she didn't have one. (West, p. 173)

Calling her child self "a hippie in reverse," West describes refusing to accompany her family on many of the trips in which they delighted so much. This pained her parents deeply since they were inherently so generous that "They could not look on greatness with pleasure

unless they shared their pleasure with their children" (West, p. 162). Though she has no children of her own, West, nevertheless, recognizes how loving her parents were, even when she was causing them great pain. She is angry at her former self for causing them pain, yet her desire to do things "her own way" has been a powerfully shaping attitude throughout her life.

Likewise, in Butter at the Old Price, her autobiography, Marguerite de Angeli not only evokes memories of her childhood strongly but also ties that girlhood to the larger adult life pattern. She grew up to become a magazine illustrator and both a writer and illustrator of children's books, winning the Newbery and Caldecott awards. Chapter 1 of her autobiography begins:

My earliest memory is of morning stillness, the sun creeping through a little alcove touching the edge of a barrel top and shining on boxes that stood about the room as if done from a photograph. All around that edge it was unfinished. . . . I used every color in the box on the empty corner nearest me.

What excitement to feel that soft touch on the canvas, to see the bright mark it made. Pink, fiery red, orange, violet, cool blue, and green. What wonder! I could not stop till I had tried them all. Even the gentle but serious talk my father gave me with my little hands in his could not erase the joy of that first experiment with color. From that day to this, eighty years later, the urge to draw and to paint has run like a bright thread through my life as the purple thread runs through heather, now found, now lost.<sup>28</sup>

For her, the child self compulsively finishing the unfinished picture her father began is synonymous with

that eighty-plus autobiographer self for whom "the urge to draw and to paint has run like a bright thread through my life. . . ." Her choosing to begin her autobiography with the incident reveals the fact and underscores it. It also underscores that autobiography is artifact, shaped to be, as William L. Howarth in "Some Principles of Autobiography" calls it, "an artful invention."<sup>29</sup> de Angeli could clearly discern in her earliest memory of creation a thread of her entire life only after she reflected on the course of a long, productive artistic life.

George Gusdorf in "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography" asserts that because ". . .autobiography is a second reading of experience, . . .it is truer than the first because it adds to experience itself consciousness of it."<sup>30</sup> One might argue with Gusdorf's use of the words "truer" and "consciousness" here; clearly, to Gusdorf psychological reality takes precedence over physical reality. Further, he seems to presume that consciousness of an experience is entirely retrospective when, in fact, it is present, in a different form, at the time of the experience itself. For him consciousness seems to be placing an experience in context with many other experiences retrospectively. But Gusdorf's idea that interpretation--i.e. shaping these materials--enchances the original experience is key to any understanding of autobiography.

So is Stephen Spender's concept in The Making of a Poem that autobiography involves "the history of himself [the autobiographer] observing the observer. . . ."31 Though there is a life chronology based in memory, much of the real life, James Olney tells us, "extends down to the roots of individual being; it is atemporal, committed to a vertical thrust from consciousness down into the unconscious rather than to a horizontal thrust from the recent into the past."32 The problem the autobiographer has in writing about this "vertical thrust from consciousness down into the unconscious . . ." is based on a paradox which Spender defines: "The effort to create form and objectivity in literature is detachment; and whoever writes of that which is most close to him--himself--is unlikely to achieve detachment."33 Out of the tension produced both by the struggle to be detached and to explore deeper levels of the unconscious comes autobiography.

The individual shaping autobiography is clearly influenced by his view of himself and others' view of him; he is influenced, also, by the cultural assumptions which shape him. Barrett J. Mandel in the article, "Full of Life Now," calls these "the assumptions from which the illusions of the past are carved."34 These unstated assumptions "act as a foil against which the autobiographer's uniqueness can be discerned."35 Many of the autobiographers discussed in this study, especially those

writing in old age, try to describe the cultural assumptions operating during their childhoods, contrasting these with those of their present. These assumptions are often so ingrained that only unusually perceptive individuals can specifically identify them.

Much critical discussion of autobiography revolves around an understanding of the term coherence as it is applied to autobiography. Wilhelm Dilthey in Pattern and Meaning In History says, "The person who seeks the connecting threads in the history of his life has already, from different points of view, created coherence in that life which he is now putting into words . . . ."36 James Olney says that in organizing "out of the flux of events a coherent pattern," the autobiographer "discovers in the particular, and reveals to us, the universal."37 Universality is not a side-effect but the central product of a desire to see parts comment on each other.

Estelle Jelinek in her Introduction to Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism, however, disputes this assumption that all autobiographers "shape the events of their life into a coherent whole."38 She contends that "irregularity rather than orderliness informs the self-portraits of women," which are "disconnected, fragmentary, or organized into self-sustained units rather than connecting chapters."39 Jelinek contrasts this description with a description of the autobiographies

of men: "By means of a chronological, linear narrative they unify their work by concentrating on one period of their life, one theme, or one characteristic of their personality."<sup>40</sup> These generalizations are a response to various categories into which autobiography has been traditionally classified, using the autobiographies of males almost exclusively as examples. Jelinek seems to identify the variety of techniques and approaches in women's autobiographies, untraditional as many are, with a lack of coherence. Coherent in this study on the treatment of childhood in autobiography, however, means that an autobiographer has thought about the ways various strands in her life intersect, overlap, and even get in the way of each other. She has thought about the ways various parts of her life are juxtaposed against each other and has sought to interpret these juxtapositions. Works composed of separately composed parts, such as Mary McCarthy's Memories of a Catholic Girlhood, too, are seen as coherent because the parts comment on different aspects of a life; when read together they give a sense of a complete life experience.

A reader who feels that a writer is coherent will be keenly aware of what Elizabeth Bruss in Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre calls an autobiography's "own devices . . . the progress it is making in unfolding its tale . . . ."<sup>41</sup> This is



true, Bruss says, because" . . . autobiography must . . . embody as well as record evidence of its author's character and sensibility."<sup>42</sup> The reader, therefore, must bring hard critical judgments to bear on autobiography, measuring the unspoken against the spoken. Porter and Wolf in their textbook, The Voice Within: Reading and Writing Autobiography, describe well-written autobiography as a "search for a way of expressing that self in language that is faithful to . . . [the] sense of experience."<sup>43</sup> If that search is successful, an autobiography is coherent.

Stephen Spender proposes an intriguing thesis: "If all men really have a point of view that looks from inwards outwards, then the true history of the world would be perhaps a sum of autobiographies . . . ."<sup>44</sup> He concedes, however, "This is not quite true, because there is an objective life of society that in our public actions drives us along, disregards our subjective nature, and makes a philosopher, a printer, a writer, where the auto-biographer says 'this unique and unknown I'."<sup>45</sup>

This is closely related to the contention of the Spanish philosopher Miguel de Unamuno y Jugo that there cannot be a "philosophy" attributed to a given thinker without some sense of "biography" incorporated in the study of such a thinker.<sup>46</sup> Spender's concept of history as a "sum

of autobiographies" points to a key attribute of autobiography related to the cultural assumptions underlying an individual autobiographer's work, its universality.

Peter Abbs in Autobiography in Education says that there is no better way "to explore the infinite web of connections which draws self and world together in one evolving gestalt than through the act of autobiography . . . ."47 No person defines herself without reference to the minutiae of the surrounding world or to the multitude of individuals with whom she has to deal. This is true regardless of sex, religion, national origin, or race. James Olney in "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment" discusses the unique ways autobiographies offer insight into American or black or female or African experience; they reveal "the experience and the vision of a people, which is the same vision lying behind and informing all the literature of that people . . . ."48 People are grouped in many other kinds of ways: by sex, by age or developmental stage, by occupation, by social status, by recreational or intellectual pursuits. These categories, too, can be illuminated by the study of autobiographies. When one reads many autobiographers, patterns of interest, emphasis, and perspective begin to emerge, often in surprising ways.

What do writers of autobiographies which focus on childhood experience hope to gain from having written

about their lives? Their own answers vary widely. Margaret Mead has found herself claimed by "young people, young enough to be my own great-grandchildren. . . ." as one of them.<sup>49</sup> She says that she is not, never can be, though she and they seek many of the same goals. But she says she can do something: she can, she says, ". . . try to explain, . . . try to lay my life on the line . . . ." <sup>50</sup> Mead, in laying out pictures side by side of her own grandmother as a young woman and an old woman, her daughter and her granddaughter, "found that all these pictures echoed each other. Each was a picture of a person at a particular moment, but spread out before me I saw them as the pattern my family made for me."<sup>51</sup> That pattern had a tremendous influence on her life, one which will be discussed later in this study.

Writer Emily Kimbrough in How Dear To My Heart, an unusually perceptive book describing what it feels like to be a child. denies that she is writing autobiography at all or even a "historic chronicle of a period," though the book, in its own way, clearly is both. Kimbrough says that she writes as "an effort to say aloud some of the things which the smell of burning leaves in the Fall brings back to my mind every year."<sup>52</sup>

Co-founder of the Catholic Worker movement, Dorothy Day, compares writing autobiography to going to confession because both acts involve "giving yourself away."

Day describes herself as "impelled to write, about man and his problems, his relation to God and his fellows."<sup>53</sup> She feels justified in spending the long hours required to write her autobiography rather than engaged in relieving human suffering because she needs to "give an account of myself, a reason for the faith that is in me . . . ." Her need to write is not egocentric since "all man's problems are the same, his human needs of sustenance and love . . . ." <sup>54</sup>

Novelist Elizabeth Borton de Treviño, realizing that soon her "little flame, too, dies away into ashes" feels a real sense of responsibility to preserve memories of the early part of the twentieth century.<sup>55</sup> Like several other autobiographers discussed in this study, she is keenly aware that the present is cut off from this century's early days by the chasm of rapid change. Unless she and others like her "tell about those times, they will soon be totally forgotten, for almost nothing of them remains in our present-day culture."<sup>56</sup>

What all these comments from autobiographers about their tasks have in common is the sense that dealing with the materials of the past, especially childhood, will help to make these experiences coherent not only for the writer but also for the reader. To study childhood from an autobiographical perspective clarifies it in a unique way and clarifies the adult who once was the

child.

Distorted as it often is, memory and the shaping of memory into autobiography (self-life-writing) provides insights about the nature of childhood which are different than those provided by empirical studies. In her book, How It Feels To Be A Child, Carole Klein debunks the myth of happy childhood. The real truth, she says, is that "it is incredibly difficult to become a person."<sup>57</sup> This study bears that out.

Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 all follow a similar organizational pattern. Each chapter begins with a general introduction to the topic of the chapter, drawing upon a variety of autobiographies and other sources for examples. Then each chapter extensively analyzes from two to four autobiographies in which the main concern of the chapter is centrally embodied. These analyses are followed by brief observations.<sup>58</sup>

Brief background information follows on the autobiographies and their writers which are analyzed in the second half of each chapter. Chapter 2, "Re-creating the 'Feel' of Childhood," includes a comparison of Seven Houses: A Memoir of Time and Places by Josephine Johnson, How Dear To My Heart by Emily Kimbrough, and A Quaker Childhood by Helen Flexner. These three books were published across a span of thirty-three years--A Quaker Childhood in 1940, How Dear To My Heart in 1944, and

Seven Houses: A Memoir of Time and Places in 1973.

Both Josephine Johnson and Emily Kimbrough are established writers with many books to their credit. An eclectic writer of many different types of literature, Josephine Johnson won a Pulitzer prize for her first novel, Now In November, published in 1934. Emily Kimbrough has long been a widely-loved writer, especially of light-hearted books which detail trips she has taken. Our Hearts Were Young and Gay, written with actress Cornelia Otis Skinner, is among the best known of these. Eleanor Whitall Thomas Flexner, member of a distinguished family, became a leader in the women's suffrage movement as a member of the Equal Franchise Society of New York and vice-president of the College Equal Suffrage League of New York City from 1905-1909.

Chapter 3, "Role Models" includes discussion of I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings by Maya Angelou and Black-berry Winter by Margaret Mead. Both books have been widely acclaimed and discussed--Angelou's as a poignant example of the best of the black autobiographical tradition, Mead's as an insight into an international author-anthropologist whose career helped to define modern anthropology. Both writers were shaped by strong parent and grandparent models.

Maya Angelou had a varied career as a dancer, singer, actress, dramatist, and lecturer on several continents

before the publication of I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings in 1970. She followed this, her most widely acclaimed work, with a series of autobiographies detailing her life into her thirties; the most recent is The Heart Of a Woman published in 1982.

Margaret Mead published her first book in 1928, Coming of Age in Samoa, a book so popular that it has gone through seven editions in as many languages. When she died in 1978 she was the best-known anthropologist in the world--and the most controversial. She remains that today.

Chapter 4, "The Development of Sex Roles," includes discussion of The Woman Warrior by Maxine Hong Kingston and Fifth Chinese Daughter by Jade Snow Wong. Maxine Hong Kingston won the 1976 National Book Critics' Circle Award for The Woman Warrior, an autobiographical account of growing up in Stockton, California. Because she was the female child of Chinese parents, she was caught between a Chinese culture, which devalues women even as it celebrates the ideal woman warrior, and the American culture, which sends mixed signals to women about their worth. Kingston published another highly acclaimed book, China Men, in 1981.

Thirty-one years earlier potter Jade Know Wong had published Fifth Chinese Daughter, her account of growing up as a Chinese-American female child, caught between

the Chinese and American cultures, also; her autobiography deals largely with familial interactions rather than with the mythic construct out of which those interactions evolved. Wong published No Chinese Stranger in 1975, an account both of the last twenty-five years of her career as a potter in Chinatown and of her travel to China in 1972, soon after travel restrictions were lifted.

Though both books offer an extreme view of the struggles of Chinese-American female children to free themselves from cultural strictures against women, the attitudes they embody have much in common with those held by other American female autobiographers without Chinese backgrounds. The contrast between the mythic setting of much of the Kingston book and the domestic setting of the Wong book provides insight into two main "fronts" on which cultural attitudes about sex roles are shaped.

Chapter 5, "Success in Leaving Home," compares Looking Back by Joyce Maynard, Home To The Wilderness by Sally Carrighar, Facts of Life by Maureen Howard, and The Hearthstone Of My Heart by Elizabeth Borton de Treviño. These four autobiographies were published within a period of seven years--Looking Back in 1970, Home To The Wilderness in 1973, Facts of Life in 1975, and The Hearthstone Of My Heart in 1977.



Joyce Maynard published Looking Back when she was a nineteen year-old Yale student. Elizabeth Barton de Treviño is a novelist, a well-known writer of children's stories, and a writer of books describing her life in Mexico with her husband. Sally Carrighar, author of Home To The Wilderness, is widely known as a nature writer of classics such as One Day At Beetle Rock and Wild Heritage. Maureen Howard is one of the most critically acclaimed novelists in the U.S. today, but her works have yet to claim a large popular following. These include Bridgeport Bus and Before My Time.

## NOTES

1 This study uses the word autobiography inclusively to mean book-length works which purport to tell the factual story of an individual's life, as well as interpret that story to the reader from the adult writer's perspective. It does not draw distinctions between terms such as memoirs, remembrances, autobiography, and life story, but it does exclude diaries, journals (even if written deliberately for publication), letters, and other fragmentary autobiographical pieces.

2 See Edith Cobb, "The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood," Daedalus, 88 (Summer, 1959), 537-548. (A longer book version called The Ecology of Imagination in Childhood (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1977) was published posthumously); Phyllis Greenacre, "Early Physical Determinants in the Development of the Sense of Identity," in Emotional Growth: Psychoanalytic Studies of the Gifted and a Great Variety of Other Individuals (New York: International Universities Press, 1971); Patricia Meyer Spacks, "Stages of Self: Notes on Autobiography and the Life Cycle," Boston University Journal, 25, No. 2 (1977), 7-17, rept. in Albert E. Stone, ed., The American Autobiography (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1981) pp. 44-60; Albert E. Stone, Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pa. Press, 1984).

3 John Stuart Mill, "The Subjection of Women" in Alice S. Rossi, ed., Essays on Sex Equality (Chicago: The Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 152.

4 Patricia Meyer Spacks, The Female Imagination (New York: Avon Books, 1975), p. 201.

5 William Gilbert, Univ. of Kansas. Letter to author. March 1984. See Gordon Allport, The Use of Personal Documents in Psychological Science (New York: Social Science Research Council, 1942), pp. 125-142.

6 Joel I. Milgram and Dorothy June Sciarra, eds., Childhood Revisited (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1974), p. xviii.

7 Jonathan Cott, "Finding Out Is Better," The New Yorker, 4 April 1983, pp. 84-87.

8 James Olney, "Some Versions of Memory/Some Versions of Bios: The Ontology of Autobiography," in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), p. 241.

9 Olney, "Some Versions of Memory/Some Versions of Bios: The Ontology of Autobiography," p. 254.

10 James Olney, Metaphors of Self (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1972), p. 24.

11 Olney, Metaphors of Self, p. 29.

12 Isadora Duncan, My Life (Garden City, N.Y.: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., 1927), p. 2.

13 James Olney, ed., "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment: A Thematic, Historical, and Bibliographical Introduction," in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), p. 25.

14 Margaret Mead, Blackberry Winter (New York: Pocket Books, 1975), p. 12.

15 Mary McCarthy, Memories of a Catholic Girlhood (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1957), p. 5.

16 Spacks, p. 231.

17 Spacks, p. 232.

18 McCarthy, p. 97.

19 McCarthy, p. 124.

20 Carole Klein, How It Feels To Be A Child (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), pp. xvii-xviii.

21 Klein, p. xviii.

22 Ernest G. Schachtel, "On Memory and Childhood Amnesia," in Psychiatry, 10 (1975), 1-26; rept. in Memory Observed: Remembering in Natural Contexts, ed. Ulric Neisser (San Francisco: W.H. Freeman and Co., 1982), p. 197.

23 Schachtel, p. 197.

24 Schachtel, p. 192.

25 Esther Salaman, A Collection of Moments: A Study of Involuntary Memories (London: Longman, 1970), p. 33. All further references to this work appear in the text.

26 Nancy Hale, A New England Girlhood (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1936), p. 22.

27 Jessamyn West, Hide and Seek: A Continuing Journey (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Inc., 1973), p. 170. All further references to this work appear in the text.

28 Marguerite de Angeli, Butter at the Old Price (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1971), p. 1.

29 William L. Howarth, "Some Principles of Autobiography," in New Literary History 5 (1974), 363-381; rept. in Essays: Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), p. 86.

30 Georges Gusdorf, "Conditions et limites de l'autobiographie" in Formen der Selbstdarstellung: Analekten zu einer Geschichte des literarischen Selbstportraits, ed. Gunther Reichenkron and Eric H. Haase (n.p.: Duncker and Humblot, 1956); rept. "Conditions and Limits of Autobiography," in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, trans. and ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), p. 38.

31 Stephen Spender, "Confessions and Autobiography," The Making of a Poem (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 1962); rept. "Confessions and Autobiography" in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), p. 116.

32 James Olney, ed., "Some Versions of Memory . . .," p. 239.

33 Spender, p. 118.

34 Barrett J. Mandel, "Full of Life Now," in Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical, ed. James Olney (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), p. 67.

35 Mandel, p. 68.

36 Wilhelm Dilthey, Pattern and Meaning in History (New York: Harper and Row, 1961), p. 86.

37 Olney, Metaphors of Self, p. 45.

38 Estelle Jelinek, ed., Women's Autobiography: Essays In Criticism (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1980), p. 17.

39 Jelinek, p. 17.

40 Jelinek, p. 17.

41 Elizabeth Bruss, Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. 164.

42 Bruss, p. 166.

43 Roger J. Porter and H.R. Wolf, The Voice Within: Reading and Writing Autobiography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1973), p. 5.

44 Spender, p. 119.

45 Spender, p. 119.

46 The Introduction to Mario J. Valdes and Maria Elena de Valdes, An Unamuno Source Book (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1973), is a concise summary of the elements of Unamuno's dialectic and key concepts of persona and yo.

47 Peter Abbs, Autobiography In Education (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1974), p. 6.

48 Olney, "Autobiography and the Cultural Moment," p. 13.

49 Mead, p. 5.

50 Mead, p. 5.

51 Mead, p. 6.

52 Emily Kimbrough, How Dear To My Heart (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1944), Foreward, n.p.

53 Dorothy Day, The Long Loneliness: The Autobiography of Dorothy Day (New York: Harper and Bros., 1952), p. 10.

54 Day, p. 10.

55 Elizabeth Borton de Treviño, The Hearthstone of My Heart (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1977), p. 4.

56 de Treviño, p. 4.

57 Klein, p. xiv.

58 The problem of tense consistency when quoting from autobiographies has been handled throughout this study in the following manner: If the autobiographer is discussing the insights she gained, as an adult, from

reflecting on past experience, present tense is used. If the autobiographer is simply recounting information about her past experience, past tense is used.

## Chapter 2: Re-creating the "Feel" of Childhood

Probably the most powerful insights about the nature of childhood provided by autobiography concern the remembered feelings of childhood, inaccurate though these may sometimes be. Carole Klein says that we find "The intense emotional experiencing of a child's world . . . out of place in this no-nonsense, achievement-oriented, grown-up world we now call home" and, so, tend to look at children as "quaintly foreign-visitors from another country."<sup>1</sup> This is true even if we, like autobiographers, are looking at our own childhood experience. Despite this reservation, however, many autobiographers try very hard to communicate what it felt like to be a child. It is almost as if this attempt is key to feeling a sense of continuity in their own lives.

Patricia Meyer Spacks says, ". . . if childhood is the state of least social power, it is also that of most intense feeling . . . ." <sup>2</sup> This comment describes the dichotomy which characterizes childhood. Children are subjects in a world run by adults, and they respond, as subjects always have, by fashioning an internal world, which the conquerors can rarely enter. As author Jessamyn West says, "The young do not discover the world. They discover themselves . . . ." <sup>3</sup>

What is meant here by ". . . the state of least social power" is that children operate at the behest of adults who control not only physical aspects of life

but also attempt to shape their social, psychological, and religious make-up or allow that make-up to be shaped by environmental factors. (Of course, most children do affect, alter, or even schedule the lives of adults close to them, though autobiographers are privy to this information only secondhand.)

Adults set up the parameters of the child's world and punish the child for crossing those boundaries. Children become adroit at concealing their real feelings toward these adults. Pulitzer prize-winning author, Josephine Johnson, in Seven Houses: A Memoir of Time and Places, describes such feelings she had while growing up in Kirkwood, Mo., a suburb of St. Louis, from 1910-1930: "Sometimes I had murderous childhood dreams of everybody else sponged out and myself in command of all the world and its material possessions. What did one want as a result of this lonely power? I do not know."<sup>4</sup> Johnson remembers coveting the little bell on her teacher's desk: "The power structure of that symbol. Not to destroy it. Oh no. But to be the tapper of that little bell. To make others Rise, Turn, Face the aisle--a power incarnate under my fat grubby finger!" (Johnson, p. 57).

Johnson says that she, like her sisters, was afraid of their father and, therefore, "learned to woo, to fake, to be silent or to sidle away into books. An acceptable quiet child. A rather stout slow child. Bomb-shaped,



but slow-burning, long-fused" (Johnson, p. 48). Though Johnson gives few reasons for fearing her father, she can find no evidence that her father loved his children (Johnson, p. 48). The garden where the children played at one of the houses in Kirkwood, Mo. had a small lily pond which her father promptly fenced off after they moved in. She rails at him in memory, saying the fence "was hideous and inappropriate and typical. A row of ugly iron spears and a chain overprotection . . . overprotection. I see little tadpoles peering through the spears," these tadpoles symbolizing her own overprotection (Johnson, p. 62).

Author Emily Kimbrough in How Dear to My Heart remembers one of her Grandmother Wiles' Christmas presents with venom because the gift doll was deliberately designed to underscore Emily's own social powerlessness. Grandmother Wiles had the doll especially made for Emily by her own dressmaker, who dressed it,

from the skin out . . . and every article was sewn on tight, even the shoes. When callers came, during her Christmas visit, she would ask me to show them 'Josephine,' as I called the miserable wretch, and she would smile and bend her head in stately satisfaction as they twittered over the exquisite underclothes . . . . I was, of course, forbidden to cut off the clothes, but after a while I think she sensed my venomous feeling toward it . . . . Shortly after, she suggested putting Josephine away until I was older, when I would appreciate her more. I have never appreciated more that cold, white kid body stuck through with stitches of her 'handsome finery,' nor the implacable, 'hand-painted' French head.<sup>5</sup>

Kimbrough's language here virtually spits at the reader the ire she felt at both her grandmother and her grandmother's gift--"miserable wretch," "sewn on tight," "cold, white kid body stuck through," "implacable." Emily had been given a beautiful doll, which was deliberately designed so that she could not enjoy dressing and undressing it; this was an act of adult control so blatant that "for a time after that I hated her [grandmother] with almost as deep concentration as I hated the doll" (Kimbrough, p. 76).

Helen Woodward, writer and businesswoman, in Three Flights Up, describes her childhood fear of a broken doll, a fear which her aunt Esther used to make her "feel small, silly and cowardly."<sup>6</sup> Woodward isn't sure when her fear of a broken doll originated,

But, however it began, my horror of a wounded doll was so black that I dared not touch any doll . . . . A doll that was whole seemed nice enough, but how did I know that, if I took it in my hand, a finger mightn't come off, or the eyes that opened and shut wouldn't fall down inside the head? Rag dolls might as well have been broken dolls. They had the same ugly meaning to me. A doll without a head was worse than any. When I saw a child take a bite out of a chocolate doll or a candy dog I would shrivel up inside. (Woodward, p. 8)

When Woodward's family moved to Little Rock, Arkansas her aunt Esther, who hated the family and was cruel to them, quickly found out about the doll phobia; one day Esther, finding Helen alone,

stuck out her hand toward me. And with chill horror I saw what she held--a doll from whose body all the sawdust had leaked out . . . . Slowly she waved the limp thing back and forth in front of my face. In all my life before and since, I have never been so cold with fear. Nothing I have seen or heard has done to me what Esther did with that soft and crippled thing. (Woodward, p. 213)

Because Esther "liked to make me feel small, silly and cowardly," Woodward continued to hate her into her adulthood, though she says, "I can hardly remember how she looked, and I don't know where she is" (Woodward, p. 213). Esther had committed the unforgiveable--deliberately taking advantage of a defenseless child's worst fears. She was a true sadist.

So, apparently, was the first grade teacher of Emily Kimbrough. The story about her not only shows the power of an adult over a child, but it also illustrates the gap between adult and child understanding of a situation. Emily's early problems with her teacher seemed to hinge on Emily's superior vocabulary and the pronunciation of certain words. Kept in after school repeatedly, Emily never told her mother the reason for her tardiness in returning from school (at the request of Zoe, her nurse) and was, therefore, repeatedly sent to bed early for getting home late on "battle days" with her teacher (Kimbrough, p. 124).

The unpardonable sin of Emily's teacher, however, was not the hostility with which she customarily treated

Emily. It was a revelation she made to the class about Emily. In the story which Kimbrough tells, there is a poignant mixture of elements: a vindictive, jealous teacher who attributes to Emily a far more sophisticated knowledge of the world than Emily actually possesses; a naive child born to privilege who does not realize she is privileged and who suffers horror because she does not understand how the pieces of a particular puzzle in her life fit together.

Her teacher had told Emily that her grandfather was in the state senate trying to reform state prison laws. Emily had heard members of her family say that her grandfather often went "up to prison"; her grandfather also insisted that she wear clumsy, stiff shoes made by the prisoners. Emily thought that these bits of information meant that her grandfather was a disgraced man, a convict. She thought "senator" was a part of her grandfather's name and had no idea that her grandfather was a distinguished legislator and prison reformer. So anguished was she about this imagined disgrace that she had to work on the problem "privately and secretly" at home. She says, "I would climb into the dirty clothes basket in the closet off the bathroom, which was my praying place, and try to get God to help me out of the . . . secret trouble" (Kimbrough, p. 124).

Kimbrough says, "I thought it could at least be

kept private, but it was my teacher who brought that out in the open too" (Kimbrough, p. 124). Her teacher asked her to name their state senator's name in class one day. Emily didn't know and said so. Her teacher shrieked angrily, "It's your grandfather . . . and you know it. Trying to act stuck-up with me, are you?" (Kimbrough, p. 126).

Emily was convinced that her teacher would not have said her grandfather was a state senator unless being a state senator was terrible "because everything she said about me was always bad. A state senator, therefore, must be something awful to be, like being crazy" (Kimbrough, p. 126). Emily yelled suddenly, "He is not a state senator. He never is!" (Kimbrough, p. 126).

Angrily, her teacher thumped her up and down in her chair and said, "Your grandfather is in the state senate, because he wants to reform the state prison laws, and you know it. Trying to show off. Look at your shoes. They're made by the prisoners" (Kimbrough, p. 127). This was all Emily could bear:

And there it was, my secret trouble yelled right out in the air, before I could stop it, and all over something to do with a state senator. This was what I had prayed about, all those hours, crouched down in the dirty clothes basket, begging God to help me about Grandfather and prison. (Kimbrough, p. 127)

She had carefully concealed what she thought was the truth about her grandfather from the other children,

but "now the teacher was saying it out loud in front of everybody" (Kimbrough, p. 129). Emily could take no more. She headed for the cloakroom, but the teacher stopped her:

Somehow I think I knew that here was my moment. It wouldn't help Grandfather. I would have to tend to that later. But perhaps it would help a great many other things, and make me feel better than I had felt for a long time. My chin was just about on a level with the doorknob. So I stood on tiptoe, opened my mouth, and bit. I don't know how close my teeth came to meeting through her thumb. I tried to bring them together. And I didn't let go for quite a while, in spite of the commotion. (Kimbrough, p. 129)

Her mother came to get her, asking for no explanation and offering no punishment. Emily did not get back to the clothes basket until bedtime. There, she says,

I told God that being at school so much of the day, and being kept in so much of the time besides, didn't give me enough hours to work with Him about keeping Grandfather out of prison. And now it had all come out, because of this school business. And if He would watch over Grandfather harder than ever, then between us surely we could keep him from going to prison again, or from being a state senator. (Kimbrough, p. 13)

This scene would not have happened if Emily had been better informed, though her teacher might have found some other way to make her life miserable. Emily and her best friend, Betty, were freed from the teacher's tyranny (and total misunderstanding of the seven-year-old mind) after they saw and heard the class bully, Ralph, being paddled for drawing a picture of their teacher

and the principal on the blackboard; they were "kissing each other with sparks coming out of their mouths" (Kimbrough, p. 134). The horror was that Ralph was screaming while "staring right at us and not even caring that we saw him like that! . . . And the principal wouldn't stop" (Kimbrough, pp. 135-136). Emily and Betty were aghast. They ran home screaming. Kimbrough says,

I suppose we must have looked like crazy children trying to talk and not being able to get our breath from the running we had done, and trying to tell mother to go and get Ralph until finally she did go to find out for herself what had happened. (Kimbrough, p. 136)

That ended public school for Emily. Implicit in the conclusion of both the Kimbrough stories is the understanding that, like adults, unfairly treated children will rebel against exploitation. The power of love and justice is greater than the tyranny of adults over them. Fortunately, Emily had parents to intervene. Her mother and some other parents were able to get laws passed against corporal punishment in school (Kimbrough, p. 136).

Even caring adults, however, sometimes exploit their power over children in ways that can mark the children indelibly. Statesman and First Lady Eleanor Roosevelt, in This Is My Story, for example, describes her loving mother who read books with her and listened to her recitations. Roosevelt remembers with great pain, however, her mother describing her as "Granny" to visitors, telling them that she was old-fashioned. She was so embarrassed

that she says, "I wanted to sink through the floor in shame" and felt herself alienated from her brothers because her mother selected her for such special ridicule, pain her mother did not seem to be aware of.<sup>7</sup>

The child's powerlessness, therefore, is the result of two forces. Subject to adults, who may be cruel, arbitrary, or simply unperceptive, a child "must spend a good part of his time divorced from real understanding," according to Carole Klein:

And to live without understanding means he must always walk the precipice. He never really knows where the next pitfall is, whether the turn up ahead is dangerous. Because he doesn't know, he must depend on others for guidance. And his inability to make the trip alone deepens his sense of inadequacy.<sup>8</sup>

Born into circumstance over which s/he is powerless, the child operates from a set of perceptions different than those of the adult world. Only with maturation will s/he be able to control those circumstances to some degree and to understand the codes, systems, and rules by which the world operates. It comes as no surprise, therefore, that the safety of home or some part of it is an aspect of childhood repeatedly discussed in autobiographies and that an environment perceived as threatening, rather than safe, evokes memories of almost indescribable horrors.

Though physical characteristics of home may be very important, as in Josephine Johnson's Seven Houses: A



Memoir of Time and Places, the people who provide the safety are more frequently identified as the essence of home. Poet Gwendolyn Brooks, for example, in Report From Part One, identifies home as a "quick-walking, careful, Duty-Loving mother . . . . Home meant my father, with kind eyes, songs, and tense recitations for my brother and myself."<sup>9</sup>

Helen Woodward in Three Flights Up, in fact, suggests that adults grow weary because they do not have the safety of home and never will again. This safety she defines as "the warm, sunny, sheltered feeling they had as children."<sup>10</sup> Woodward finds her own memories of childhood "always sunny," despite the fact that she was a New York-bound child, born into a poverty-stricken family which struggled painfully to survive economically, a family in which pretty objects, toys, and books were almost non-existent. In addition, she was afraid of many things and thought of herself as "homely and ill-tempered" (Woodward, p. 119). She is puzzled why her memories are so positive when the reality was so grim.

Her working out the answer to this puzzle is revealing. People find "the lost sense of safety that they had as children" in devotion to a church called "mother," she says (Woodward, p. 128). In search for this safety, people also support dictators, finding relief from the oppression by telling themselves that harsh discipline

is good for them, as if they were children in need of both guidance and restraint. Woodward decides that thinking of her mother and father as all-powerful gave her a sense of genuine security--and, therefore, she remembers her harsh growing-up days as full of sunshine (Woodward, p. 128). To lack such a power-love center in one's home is to be thrown back on one's own resources, a fearful abandonment.

Parents who say to their children, "If you do that (or don't do that) I will not love you," according to poet and translator Louise Untermeyer in Private Collections, commit "The deadliest sin against childhood . . . ." They withdraw the source from which the child feeds. Like the desperately ill Sally Carrighar in Home to the Wilderness, whose father willed her to live after an appendectomy, Woodward knew, " . . . my earthly father would love me under all circumstances . . . . He would deal justly with me," even if God did not (Woodward, p. 22).

When Sally Carrighar, who became a distinguished nature writer, was beset by a dangerous, mentally sick mother and far from her frequently absent father, she decided to become her own mother, refusing to participate in risky activities, and following a rigid schedule of activities.<sup>12</sup> Such self-parenting sometimes comes about because of other changes, too, such as the onset of adolescence when privacy becomes a paramount need. Sculptor

Malvina Hoffman, in Yesterday Is Tomorrow: A Personal History, describes a substitute home she and her friends built, a "secret house" in the woods. Three years later they had to demolish their cabin, which was on a trolley right-of-way; each one felt a "sense of irrevocable loss," a feeling they could not share with outsiders. She says, "It was as if our land of dreams had been plundered and spirited away. We seemed suddenly and painfully to 'grow up'; uncertainty had entered our lives."<sup>13</sup>

The group did not build another cabin, but Malvina found another place to feel at home: ". . . a distant spot where no one ever seemed to pass . . . For years afterward, I would escape at frequent intervals and spend hours with my ferns and rocks and smoldering forest." There she "would dance to the music of ages past . . . and, oh, it was hard to come home and change back into myself as others knew me!" (Hoffman, p. 45).

Erik Erikson in Childhood and Society says, "The sense of physical and intellectual inadequacy that comes from being so small in a world that looms so large makes a child hostage to a host of fears--that all in some way relate to his overriding worry of becoming separated from the protective clasp of his parents."<sup>14</sup> Erikson explains that the child cannot distinguish fear from anxiety, and, therefore, cannot distinguish real from imagined dangers. While learning to do so s/he needs

stable adults for reassurance. Such guidance helps the child develop judgment and mastery.<sup>15</sup>

Many autobiographies are filled with descriptions of childhood scenes in which anxiety and fear both play roles, such as the deaths of infant brothers and sisters. In her autobiography, Dark Symphony, for example, writer Elizabeth Adams describes the turmoil she lived through when, in only a few months, her infant brother, her Great Grandmother Kellum, and her Grandmother Holden all died. The child Eleanor saw death as a "thief," who had stolen these three, and became terrified: "Perhaps he [Death] was right in my room--ready to grab me and take me away from my mother and father--ready to cut off my head . . . ."16

Though she was allowed to sleep with a light on in her room, she imagined Death following her to school. Finally, to dispel these fears, her Grandfather Holden, a fine playmate, told her he had a pistol with which to shoot death. Her fear was gone until Grandfather Holden, too, died, and she learned, "I knew at last that no one--or any power on earth could ever impede the approach of death . . . ." (Adams, p. 41).

In a Quaker Childhood Helen Flexner describes her reaction when her baby sister died; Helen was six. She was told that her sister was now an angel, a term used often by parents to soften the blow of a sibling's death

to a young child. Only when the undertaker brought in a shiny white box did the reality of her sister's death jolt her. Then, Flexner says,

Horror seized me. And throughout my childhood I continued to shudder before death whenever I saw its trappings--a little white coffin in an undertaker's window, a mound of green grass on a hilltop with a white marble stone at foot and head. To jump over the small heaped-up mound . . . took . . . intolerable courage.<sup>17</sup>

Flexner also describes her fears of the devil, often personified by children because of their religious training at home. One of her earliest memories was of her mother's teaching her to say, "Get thee behind me, Satan! Get thee behind me!" as a way of controlling her temper. Unfortunately, the effect of that repetition was to turn Satan into a real person for her, one who lurked behind her constantly (Flexner, p. 2). During the day Satan lived primarily in a dark closet in the back of the house, past which she raced "to escape a sudden snatching of dark arms" (Flexner, p. 3). At night, though, he filled the entire house with his presence. She says, ". . . when I was forced to go upstairs after dark on some errand I begged my mother to send her voice with me. While the magic refrain, 'I am here! I am here!' sounded in my ears, however faint and distant up the long stairway, I was not afraid" (Flexner, p. 3).

Satan was for Flexner as real and concrete as other people in her physical world. Her mother could not know

the symbolic word, "Satan," represented an actual physical reality for her youngest daughter. Despite the fact that she was terrified of Satan, however, there was some comfort in thinking that Satan "was controlled by my mother and my father" (Flexner, p. 3). God was a far more remote, unknowable presence than Satan.

Kathleen Cannell, a translator, editor, and writer, in Jam Yesterday, describes being terrified of an actual life-sized statue of Mephistopheles "with his neat cloven hooves, and the tiny horns just showing below his plumed cap . . ." which belonged to her father. She remembers that Mephistopheles came from his corner two or three times at night to stand over her, once putting his finger to his lips, warning her to make no sound. She says, "I wouldn't have thought of doing so, even if I could. I was petrified with fear."<sup>18</sup>

Other problems connected with religion are common in these autobiographies. Writer Ruth McKenney in her quasi-autobiographical My Sister Eileen describes the time her father had to call in the minister of the East Cleveland Evangelical Church to talk to Eileen, who had buried a doll on Good Friday, expecting it to be resurrected on Easter Day. This caused quite a scandal in the neighborhood. McKenney surmises that "Inquiring minds ought . . . to operate only in the bosom of the family."<sup>19</sup>

Writer Ruth Suckow, the daughter of a minister,

in her autobiography Some Others and Myself, describes her large paper doll community of both Old and New Testament characters, which attended preaching services in a chapel she had made of wooden blocks. One day, playing at a friend's house, she invented a Mrs. Devil--and was promptly sent home by her friend's grandmother to be punished for heresy.<sup>20</sup>

Helen Woodward describes her childhood fear of robed Catholic priests and nuns in their habits. The people in all the folds looked "larger than life." Only after a friend took her to see a performance of H. M. S. Pinafore in a Catholic church's parish hall did she overcome the fear (Woodward, p. 42).

A variety of other fears and anxieties people these autobiographies. Kathleen Cannell not only imagined the devil coming to stand over her bed, but "During a childhood considerably shadowed by unavowed psychic terrors" she was also plagued by night terrors of the alligators which appeared as soon as her mother put her to bed and left the room (Cannell, p. 55). She says, ". . . blue and green flames crackled over their scales," illuminating the five or six inch long alligators; "then they'd grow gradually to a couple of feet long, sometimes even to six feet, before they would disappear" (Cannell, p. 49). Periodically she would peep out of her bedclothes to see what they were doing, "perhaps just in time to see

one run down the wall behind the bed. Then I would lie immobile, staring, holding my breath, and dripping with perspiration, waiting for it to emerge on the carpet" (Cannell, p. 49). She surmises that some of her nighttime horrors "slithered out of a big fat book we children used to fight over on rainy Saturday afternoons" called Curiosities From Every Clime (Cannell, p. 49).

Ruth McKenney remembers going with her sister Eileen to a film in which train wheels "grew larger and larger," apparently about to run over members of the audience rather than the intended motorcar on the screen. Eileen began screaming, "Let me out, let me out!" as she tried to climb over the legs of others seated in her row. She successfully communicated her fear to the entire audience: "There was a tremendous din, and the scuffle of dozens of frightened children trying to stumble out in the aisles and run for home and mother. At this point the lights went on and the train, wheels and all, disappeared from the screen" (McKenney, p. 6). The audience had been saved from mass hysteria by a projectionist astute enough to turn off the electric power.

Kathleen Cannell describes a different--and intriguing--kind of fear. As a child she was puzzled by the phenomenon of her infant brother's and sister's sleep. She says, "I could never be sure that the two lifelike, quiet dolls were really the obstreporous and nerve-racking



infants who riled me in their open-eyed, open-mouthed moments" (Cannell, p. 33). When their eyelids were shut she could not tell "whether their eyes were still there," so she felt compelled to try to open their eyes by putting her fingers in them, behavior which kept her in constant trouble with her parents (Cannell, p. 34). When the infants awoke she "considered them as 'returners' from some strange realm from which, were they articulate, I would have expected them to bring stories as weird as those of a literary Lazarus"(Cannell, p. 33).

A quack doctor triggered the fear of director-writer May Sarton which she describes in I Knew A Phonenix: Sketches For An Autobiography. He told her she had a very small brain, a statement which became "a walking nightmare" because she transposed "small brain" into "a small, very active spider which was eating me up" in her imagination. It became increasingly difficult for her to concentrate. For a while she thought she was going mad.<sup>21</sup>

Many children evolve compulsive behavior as a way of warding off frightening experiences. Historian Ariel Durant, for example, in A Dual Autobiography, says she would not sleep with her head toward the moon because she was afraid it would make her "loony." She had other compulsive behaviors:

To point at the moon was a sin for which I was supposed to step upon my hand five times. To break wind in the presence of others was a sin for which I was to wash my hands a hundred

times. To tell a lie, to shout, to get angry, to call anyone hard names, were all sins that required specific penalties. 22

Again, the search for safety is key here. Autobiographers repeatedly describe loss of such safety with devastating clarity.

Helen Woodward, for example, a child of poverty, recalls a terrible day when she was ten; she had been sent to borrow a dollar from an aunt. Suddenly she realized she no longer held the dollar: "I dropped dead," she says. So intense was her misery that the details of the exact scene are frozen in her mind. "Desperate and weeping," she retraced her steps--to no avail. She was so in need of comfort that she invented a fantasy man,

. . . a kind man, a story-book man, like in a fairy tale, who would come along and see me crying with my eyes fixed on the ground, and would say, 'What have you lost, my child?' and would give me a dollar. But the time arrived when I got to the door and there was no kind man and no dollar. (Woodward, p. 140)

Among the most powerful manifestations of remembered pain are those connected with the prejudices of other people. The family of Malvina Hoffman, for example, had a chaplain friend, who was a special friend of hers, also. He married--unhappily--then finally eloped with a nurse. He was defrocked and dismissed in disgrace from his job. Hoffman promised her father she would never see the chaplain again. When she accidentally ran into him one day, she told him, painfully, of her

promise to her father. Later the chaplain committed suicide. Malvina became ill with a fever and had a nervous collapse. One day, in working through her grief, she modelled a figure of a woman, "Despair." She felt a sense of relief when she completed the sculpture and later summarized the experience: "This experiment in sculpture was an effort in self-preservation and it worked" (Hoffman, p. 63).

Both Jewish and black female autobiographers have discussed and illustrated the negative influences of racial prejudice on their childhood experience. Jean Untermyer, a Jew, for example, in Private Collections, describes being taunted as "Sheeny" and "Christkiller" when she was a child. Her mother said, "It has always been like this . . . . It is because we are Jews." There were no synagogues in her town, so she visited various churches with her friends. She came to love the words and deeds of Christ as she did those of other moral heroes but felt very confused; surely no Jew could have persecuted such an extraordinary man. The wounds from the early taunting and her confusion about the treatment of Jesus, she says, ". . . had sunk deeply into my psyche, all the more deeply as I covered it and I ceased to speak of it or--even consciously--to think of it" (Untermyer, p. 13).

Helen Woodward, also Jewish, as a child was taught

to dismiss Jew-baiters and Jew-haters as either common or mean and "was surprised when I found that there were outwardly decent people who hated Jews" (Woodward, p. 42). Given the penury in which her own family and most of the Jewish families she knew were forced to live, she would have been amazed to discover, as she says, that "Millions of people hate Jews because they think all Jews are rich" (Woodward, p. 42).

Black autobiographers repeatedly report the overpowering effect of racial prejudice on their childhoods. Probably the best known of these accounts is Maya Angelou's story of her eighth-grade graduation from an all-black school, a much-anticipated celebration, which was ruined when white education officials usurped the ceremony to patronize the graduates and emphasize their lack of opportunities. At least Maya Angelou had company in her misery.<sup>23</sup>

Elizabeth Adams in Dark Symphony had comfort only from her parents when she was not asked to be in the wedding of her favorite teacher, Miss Marlowe. A friend told her she would be asked to be in Miss Marlowe's wedding. She waited endlessly for the invitation, which never came. Finally she found out that the wedding was over--and that her white friends were in the ceremony. Seeking to assuage Eleanor's grief over the slight, her mother explained to her: ". . . many of her [Miss Marlowe's] friends do not like little girls who wear black dresses

. . . . I'm not speaking of dress-goods . . . , but the little black dress known as your body, which covers up your soul, your real-self." People with racial hatred, she said, don't know why they don't "like little colored girls . . . ." (Adams, p. 81).

Her parents bought her some mosquito netting, and for the next couple of weeks--the netting swathing her head like a veil--she played "Miss Marlowe marching to the altar." She was happy despite the slight. The adult Elizabeth Adams asks, "Does a weak bird cease chirping because its frail wings will not lift it beyond a high fence?" (Adams, p. 81).

Early in the book she described the first time she was called "nigger." She was a second-grader. That time her mother had tried to explain why people are different colors by saying, ". . . the stork selected us to blend harmoniously with the bodily color scheme of our respective families" (Adams, p. 28). Her pain was intensified because her parents had forbidden her to fight, so she could not take vengeance when racial slurs were hurled at her. She says, ". . . my hands were tied by the 'invisible cords' of obedience: for my parents having told me that all things done in secret would be witnessed by God, I imagined the Deity peering down at me through the fleecy clouds; and presumed there was some secret method of direct communication between God and my elders so that

He could let them know at once if I disobeyed" (Adams, p. 24).

Author Gwendolyn Brooks interprets the past in the context of adult understanding when she describes her black family's celebration of holidays during her childhood. She details various holidays and then realizes that all the valued traditions had been grafted onto black culture from the white: "All were Europe-rooted or America-rooted. Not one celebration in my black household that I knew featured any black glory or grandeur" (Brooks, p. 44). That fact, by implication, lessened the black child's perception of her own worth.

In even the most seemingly factual autobiographies, which are carefully controlled and revelatory of only limited aspects of an individual's life, such as This Is My Story by Eleanor Roosevelt, there are comments on anxieties and fears like those just discussed. Some anxieties and fears are the result of processes even the most conscientious parent could not change. But many occur because the adults around a child simply do not explain to the child what is going on. In This Is My Story Eleanor Roosevelt describes the garbled notion she had of what was wrong with her alcoholic father when he was removed from his children. Her own experiences with him provided no clues to his problems. She laments, "If people only realized what a war goes on in a child's

mind and heart in a situation of this kind, I think they would try to explain more than they do to children; but nobody told me anything" (Roosevelt, p. 16).

James L. Hymes, Jr. in his Forward to Childhood Revisited says that adults would not neglect to provide such pain-saving information if adults were willing to believe ". . . that the childhood years of life are important to the child--to the human being living them."<sup>24</sup> The autobiographers discussed here do believe this. Otherwise, they would have not given such meticulous attention to countless descriptions of pain, anxieties, fears, and, yes, joy.

In The Uses of Enchantment Bruno Bettelheim comments that "too many parents want their children's minds to function as their own do--as if mature understanding of ourselves and the world, and our own ideas about the meaning of life did not have to develop as slowly as our bodies and minds."<sup>25</sup> Often joy is the result of some kind of breakthrough from the limited understanding of a child to a broader perception of the world and the individual's relationship to it. Jessamyn West describes several of such moments of epiphany she had as a child in Hide and Seek: A Continuing Journey. Many involve moments of heightened awareness when physical objects took on added significance and when her sense of self became brilliantly apparent. One evening, for example,

West was taking a walk and, she says, ". . . what I felt transfigured what I saw. Not the other way around" (West, p. 150). As she looked toward her home from a hilltop, ". . . a feeling burst my body apart, and its fragments become one with yellow violets and Indian paint brushes" (West, p. 150). Her mother

had a round paperweight that she had won as a girl in an elocution contest. It was a heavy glass ball filled with fluted columns of gold and rose, fountains of glass that sprayed stars of blue; and in the center of all this tangle of glory and glassy fireworks was a single little flower, a periwinkle, but white, not blue. I was not this flower, but what I felt was: my feeling made me the world's flowering center. I turned around and around. There was smoke from the home chimney; and in the same way as I was opened to the spring world, the chimney smoke opened the house to me so there was added to the world I could see an invisible world. The walls of the house became transparent: Papa in the kitchen making baking powder biscuits and singing, 'Oh, that will be glory for me.'

What I felt was beyond crying or laughing or rejoicing. It was almost beyond feeling. It was very near to being. After a while whatever it was faded, and I walked, slowly now, on toward home. I have never before spoken to a soul of that hill or of what I felt there. But I will remember it as long as I remember anything. (West, p. 151)

Such moments of illumination when the physical world and the abstract "invisible world" become one are found widely in the autobiographies studied. In this instance West has transformed the paperweight into a symbol--"my feeling made me the world's flowering center"--of the child's own significance in the world. There is an implicit sense of power here. She identified herself with beauty.



The chimney smoke coming from her house also symbolically "opened the house to me so that were added to the world I could see an invisible world." The child now understood something of the multiple levels on which life had been operating all along, though she was previously unaware of them.

Re-creating what it felt like to be a child is no easy task. Problems dealing with the nature of memory, "childhood amnesia," and others have already been discussed. How does a writer of an autobiography shape a work in which the primary goal--or one of them--is the re-creation of what it felt like to be a child? Two autobiographies which do a particularly effective and believable job of conveying such feelings are Josephine W. Johnson's Seven Houses: A Memoir of Time and Places and Emily Kimbrough's So Dear To My Heart, passages from which have been previously cited in this chapter.

Johnson was born in 1910, before the "world of war had . . . reached into every pore and crevice of life" (Johnson, p. 36). Her book is organized in a chronological sequence of chapters which describe each of the places she has lived, except for the first chapter which describes the family home, Oakland, in Kirkwood, Missouri where her mother grew up; as a child Josephine only visited there. The description of her childhood concludes in Chapter 5. Johnson says she thinks of all the homes

she lived in while she was growing up "as shelters on a long slow travelling." These childhood homes "formed and channeled the flow of childhood life inside them (Johnson, p. 33).

Johnson begins Chapter 1, "Oakland," with a New Year's Eve remembrance of the house when ". . . in the darkness . . . I struck a match and lit a candle" (Johnson, p. 7). She imagines people's minds as various kinds of lights, her own a "small wick, burning and burning in a house of bone" (Johnson, p. 8).

This image reminds her that, through a similar darkness in this house, her mother waited to be married. And the mention of her mother opens the chapter backwards to an evocation of the life that went on in this house. Her mother had been parsimonious about describing that life, perhaps because she expected her young hearers to reject the value of that past (Johnson, p. 9). Johnson, however, spends much time describing the furnishings of the house, what the inhabitants wore, and reproducing parts of her Aunt Florence's diary of the year, 1883, when Oakland was built, and diphtheria and other illness stalked both community and family.

Johnson also stops periodically to comment on aspects of her former life on which she has strong opinions--and these most commonly concern the behavior of children. For example, she admits to having "an odd cantankerous

yearning after statues; there were several at Oakland."

For children she says, statues are

. . . something to touch, to rub their fingers between great gritty toes. Climb on the backs of iron dogs with iron curls. Stare up into impassive marble faces that do not suddenly swivel around in rage and ask what you are staring at. Don't poke. Don't point. Hush up. Great marble folds of drapery that never move. Wide laps for sitting. (Johnson, p. 10)

In this passage Johnson begins by generalizing about the worth of sculpture to children; the behavior of statues is predictable though that of adults is not. Then the viewpoint of a child takes over in the shift to you. In "Don't poke. Don't point. Hush up" one hears the negative commands of an adult voice to a child. Then Johnson reverts at the end to simple generalizations about statues which reflect the child's viewpoint: "Great marble folds of drapery that never move. Wide laps for sitting." This is an introduction to the ease with which Johnson moves in and out of the child mind, commenting on the way children are treated, and, then, showing us how children feel as "those elders . . . held us in submission but could not persuade us of their divinity" (Johnson, p. 9).

Johnson uses a similar technique when she describes the way clothes affect "children's minds and hearts . . . . Children should not be forced to wear clothes they hate." Then she begins to remember the horror she felt as a child when she had to wear black tights, which were "Far

from the lovely ballerina tights today" because they bagged and drooped. The description is so precise that one actually shares the misery of the embarrassed child wearing "The perpetually wrinkled stocking" with the "dark shadow of the tight!" showing through. To underscore the misery Johnson adds, "No protection from the rain or cold of nature could compensate for this grim storm inside the stout and discontented child" (Johnson, p. 18).

She puts herself even deeper inside the child's mind when she describes the reaction of children looking at an old family album in which pictures of unfamiliar children appear. "Who are those creepy kids? What are they doing there?" the children wonder. Johnson surmises that children often react this way because they are not the center of attention in these pictures which suggest ". . . a wider life in which one never would have played a part" (Johnson, p. 19).

Johnson's ability to move in and out of the child's mind--commenting on the child point of view, representing that viewpoint, and making the reader feel one with it--requires an alert, responsive reader. In Chapter 2, for example, Johnson describes life at one of the houses. She remembers scratchy dry paint and blistered wood on the porch. She then moves from visual remembrance to memories of climbing on the railings and looking down "on the spirea bushes foaming white below." Next she

moves into the child mind and imagination--"To push someone off the railing was the same as pushing them over Niagara Falls." Immediately she shifts back to her adult perspective--"And after the scratch of paint I think of steps, of steps and stairs" (Johnson, p. 34).

With these words she begins a discussion several paragraphs long about the role of steps in the lives of the children in her family. The discussion moves toward the child perspective and away from it in a slow rhythm, often broken by an unexpected quip or sudden glance into the "years of slow-burning fuses which never quite reached the dynamite" which constitute childhood (Johnson, p. 34).

The discussion of steps ends with a paragraph on the wide variety of uses children find for steps: "You can run sidewise dangerously. You can inflict harm on the one on the step below you if you choose" (Johnson, p. 35). In this paragraph Johnson moves easily from "They" to "You" and then moves closer to first person in "The second row is best to hide one's fat legs and drooping 'tights'" (Johnson, p. 35). The lack of consistency is a clear example of Johnson's demand on the reader: though the book is filled with colorful detail and humor, Johnson wants these to support her central intention--the re-creation of childhood ambience, especially the psychological workings of the characters involved. The character she knows

best is her child-self in this first half of the book.

Johnson tells the reader that she has no intention "of describing the long subterranean world of the child," but she does precisely that:

The child that contemplates the outer world from behind green glass veined in brown (agate eyes, in fact) and then turns inward to its core of murder and grotesque and routine torture from which it emerges fresh and innocent and vulnerable as though the bones of parents, friends, and siblings were no more than seashells in this cave. These caves are known. They are not washed clean by time. They have been explored and overcharted, but they hold some power still and we leave them alone to walk in the no less mysterious outer world where people spoke above our heads of a God above their heads; and trees, sun, mantlepieces, upper bookshelves and lights were all above and out of reach. (Johnson, p. 39-40)

She describes this early part of her life as "the most important time and place of our years. Lifelong burdens assembled and interlocked" (Johnson, p. 47). Books played a key role in those early years, "books whose very covers seemed spongy with the grief inside" (Johnson, p. 5). Sorrow caused by "cruelty and death" as well as those tears "shed for the non-attainment of the unobtainable" filled her reading and imaginative time. She wonders what such a literary diet "did to the generation that wallowed in it . . ." (Johnson, p. 52). Her first teacher, Miss Blanche Byers, however, introduced another kind of book, The Voyage of Ulysees, to her, a story so engrossing that it "levitated" the students "to another plane of life" (Johnson p, 57). By the time

she was ten Josephine had found her vocation, writing.

Her first poem was:

Out of the light  
Comes the conquerors three,  
Liberty, Justice and Humanity.

Yet Johnson describes how hard it was to put flesh on these abstractions in her child life.

She remembers pointedly that she did not worry over the fate of the black laundress, who worked below stairs for them, or that of the black children, who went to separate, run-down schools. She says, "The poor, the widows, the Negroes, the children. Each had a place. And they stayed there" (Johnson, p. 64). When the laundress called on her mother many years later and "made some discerning statements about childhood, " Josephine Johnson was astonished. She says, "I would have thought she scarcely noticed us, having so many problems of her own. It startled me. Humanity in humans always does" (Johnson, p. 62).

Johnson contrasts the times that stimulated her imagination in childhood with those that interest the modern child. Her family inherited a butterfly picture from Oakland. It contained a collection of blue and purple butterflies, emerald beetles, and "a huge owl moth with gold-rimmed eyes on its wings," and a huge tarantula in the middle. This picture contained " . . . all the beauty and terror of the word jungle . . . . We

never tired of looking at it. It was our movies, our television, our terror stories and our visions" (Johnson, p. 65). By contrast, she says no contemporary child would care about such a picture since "In that same-size frame, night after night, any child can see all this in motion--spiders and butterflies and tortoises, horses and monkeys and men dying" (Johnson, p. 65).

The summers spent at Rose Cottage in Columbia, Missouri with her aunts she calls Arcadia and lists a mouth-watering collection of foods eaten there: "The fragrance of strawberries, a soaked piece of biscuit dough," "big squashy delicious biscuits with homemade butter," "angel food cake a foot high" (Johnson, p. 67). Terms like "soaked," "squashy," and "foot high" underscore the child's blissful perception of these Arcadian foods.

The repetitiveness of this marvelous world was its greatest strength. The ways storms developed, the blooming of moonflowers, the smell of grass: these were unchangeable and undeviating. They provided what the present world cannot because "There is no sense now of future, of returning rhythm, as in those days. No sense of both the now and the future now" (Johnson, p. 70). The irony to the adult writer is that in those wonderful days of "sandals, barefoot sandals, lovely shoes," all the child "could think about was the day one could wear high heels and patent-leather pumps" (Johnson, p. 71). In the midst of all the other



change for Johnson, what does not change is "the dew on the grass in the fresh bright morning hours . . . " (Johnson, p. 71).

Later in the book when she is describing her grown-up life, Johnson comments, "Growing up is a terrible time. A person lives with such intensity you wonder there is anything left to go on with when it's over" (Johnson, p. 86). The intensity of experience is what makes it terrible, threatening to consume the child where s/he stands. Johnson increases that sense of intensity in Seven Houses: A Memoir of Time and Places by moving in and out of the child mind so freely that the reader is unable to resist being drawn into it--and back into the "subterranean labrynth" of his own childhood.

The intensity of the experiences described is no less in Emily Kimbrough's How Dear To My Heart, but the way Kimbrough re-creates the feel of the experience is very different from the approach Josephine Johnson takes in her book. Kimbrough re-creates what it felt like to be a child by creating a series of carefully structured vignettes, many of which can be isolated and read as dramatic stories in their own right. These firmly place the child Emily in the upper middle-class family and social context in which she functioned. Each focuses on several central emotions which dominated a particular incident. One does not find in Kimbrough the direct

shifts into and out of the child's mind that are so prevalent in Johnson, but Kimbrough is equally effective at making one feel inside the child's mind because of her meticulous emphasis on narrative chronology and detail.

In two episodes discussed earlier in this chapter--the gift of the doll with its clothes sewn on and Kimbrough's mortification over her grandfather's position--rage and a feeling of helplessness dominated. Confusion was also significant in the second episode. A variety of other powerful emotions is present in the book in addition to the ones just mentioned. The sections in which these are described are so carefully structured that, in retrospect, an emotion and an incident seem inextricably combined.

How does Kimbrough achieve this? A key factor is the preparation she often makes before what seems to be the actual beginning of a story. Sometimes the initial elements in a story take a sudden turn from their seemingly intended direction, but Kimbrough's narrative skill wastes nothing--if a detail is not needed to flesh out the main narrative, it provides vital context for it. Chapter 3 in How Dear To My Heart is one of the best examples of this. It begins with a discussion of her grandfather's love of taking everyone for rides in his automobile, information which, though interesting, seems to be extraneous. Only much later does this piece of information become important.

The reader is then introduced to Zoe, her nurse, of whom Kimbrough says, "Zoe was more my family to me than all the other members identified by family titles. A family was what you belonged to, I understood, and I belonged to Zoe" (Kimbrough, p. 35). Kimbrough makes much of Zoe's beautiful color because it was a significant factor in Zoe's relationship to the family. Emily Kimbrough's mother told her that Zoe "was colored by nature, . . . like leaves--a tawny, gold shade--not so yellow as seed corn on the stalk, nor tan like wheat stacked in the sheaves; not nearly so brown as a pussy-willow bud in the Spring, nor as an oak leaf in the Fall" (Kimbrough, p. 38-39). When Zoe and Emily went for walks they played " . . . match Zoe's color." Emily would pick up acorns, hickory nuts or oak leaves turned brown; "And I would put them eagerly and earnestly against her face or hand when she sat down to rest--matching Zoe's color, and learning how much more beautiful a color becomes through awareness of its delicate variations"(Kimbrough, p. 38).

Kimbrough summarizes the warmth of her feelings for Zoe:

There was never such a lap as hers for climbing into--easy to reach, and with lots of room when you got there. Her strong arms and big gentle hands would make a barricade to hold you in safety. There and the playhouse in the apple tree were the best places in the world to be. (Kimbrough, p. 38)

Zoe was Emily's companion and "solace" everywhere--except

in Grandfather's automobile, which she would not set foot in, though Emily begged her to do so. Emily would not get in it, either, during the time of day when Mr. Hinkley came.

Mr. Hinkley daily brought a freezer full "of rich, yellow vanilla ice cream" into town during the summer to sell by the saucerful to the children of Muncie. No adults were allowed to purchase it. During the mornings all the children did a variety of activities--riding on the back of the vegetable wagon, sucking ice through a wash rag, selling lemonade from a stand, having club meetings--but afternoons were rigidly organized. Zoe dressed Emily after her afternoon nap and brushed her hair; then Emily waited for Mr. Hinkley to arrive.

Kimbrough describes the precise ritual she followed and the sounds and smells of the neighborhood around her while she waited. She sniffed the perfume of her handkerchief, heard insects buzzing and Zoe moving furniture around while listening for the "first far-off sound of a bell tinkling" (Kimbrough, p.45). The adult Kimbrough remembers her wish at the time: "If only he needn't have stopped before he got to me; but there were children all along the way, all of them wanting ice cream and he had ice cream for all of them" (Kimbrough, p. 46).

Emily would walk carefully down the steps so she was exactly at the bottom when he said "Whoa" to the

horse pulling his wagon. His question to her--"What would you like today? We have peach, strawberry, raspberry"--was part of his ritual; he sold only vanilla. With precise detail, Kimbrough re-creates the breathless moments as she waited for him to serve her ice-cream:

He held my saucer and spoon in his left hand, took up the big steaming ladle in his right. Of all the sounds for which I listened on those murmuring hot Indiana afternoons, this was the one that brought the sharpest delight--the sluice of the ladle down into the rich, luscious cream below. Then it was back at the surface again, brimming and spilling over the thick, soft treasure. And now all of it heaped up, was on my saucer, the spoon buried in it. Licking that off was the first pleasure, before the eating began. I pried out the sticky nickel from the palm of my hand, and held it up to him.

'Thank you, Mr. Hinkley,' I said. He would take the ice cream back if you didn't say thank you. (Kimbrough, p. 47)

The precision here is a slow-motion enactment of a ritualistic delight of summer, and the methodical pace of the writing does not change as Kimbrough describes watching Mr. Hinkley drive down the street and turn the corner. Anticipation, again, becomes the dominant emotion:

Every foot back to my top step was undertaken with apprehension. I might slip or tilt the saucer, or stumble, or dislodge the spoon. The passage was fraught with potential mishaps, each of which I had experienced. I reached the step safely, turned around slowly, and sat down. Now was the golden moment. I squashed the spoon down slowly, letting it fill up over the sides, and lifted it to my mouth. (Kimbrough, p. 48)

One day during this ritual, however, the mood of "my moment of pure gold in every Summer day" was abruptly

broken:

A shadow passed across us, the ice cream and me. A hand reached down for the spoon. It was not the kind of hand I had ever seen before; it had wide cracks packed with dirt all over it, sores in big red blotches, and nails torn down below the quick; it was covered with dirt and gave off a loathsome smell. (Kimbrough, p. 49)

Emily stood transfixed by the hand until she was forced to look up into a sore-covered face with red-rimmed eyes, a stiff, mangy beard, and a "slobery" mouth. The owner of these features took her ice cream plate and licked it as the melting ice cream ran down his neck into the dirt, then tried to force her to go with him. Kimbrough aptly describes her terror in short, choppy fragments: "If I could have vomited. If I could have run, or screamed. But I couldn't move, not even my arms" (Kimbrough, p. 48-49).

Suddenly Zoe hurtled from the house, "calling as she came, threatening, her deep voice cracking with the volume and the fury hurled into it." Kimbrough says, "The hand let my arm go, the smell, the filth and the shadow went away from me, the figure lurching, stumbling, running, half-falling and righting itself down the street." The terms, "the hand" and "the figure," suggest the horror which had come over Emily. These do not seem to be attached to a human being (Kimbrough, p. 49).

The description that follows is comparable in power to that of Maya Angelou's description of her benefactor and savior, Mrs. Flowers, in I Know Why The Caged Bird

Sings. For Emily had been struck dumb and frozen with shock. Zoe picked her up and carried Emily to Zoe's own room, calling out instructions all the way. Desperately fighting for breath, Emily found herself lying stiff across Zoe's lap in a rocking chair--and Zoe was singing a strange kind of singing that Emily had never heard before: "more of a talking, in a singsong, now low, now a little higher, and the feel of a drum in it, pounding, pounding. . . . the beat insisting in urgent montony that I listen, and I did" (Kimbrough, p. 49-50).

The adult Kimbrough tries to analyze why Zoe's singing had so powerful an impact on her:

I think I heard that day a chant and a prayer to a source of help far older than my Presbyterian God. I think it was as though Zoe, in her need for someone she loved, groped and fumbled her way back, back through her own people to a litany she had learned years ago by word of mouth, passed down by how many mouths, through how many generations.

On and on, over and over, the words came, my breath came, too, a little deeper a little steadier, and I could hear more clearly. My head turned at last, and I could look up at Zoe. Her eyes were closed. She was straining forward, chanting, chanting. And then I was asleep--my arms and legs soft and curved again into her lap, the sound of her voice and the drum-beat fading out of my ears. They would never fade out of my memory. Though I could not reproduce them, I would hear them always (Kimbrough, p. 50)

The long black heritage, funnelled through Zoe's love, saved the white child. The sounds, Kimbrough says, will never fade from her own memory. This account and numerous others both in How Dear To My Heart and her other books

attest to this; they show an extraordinary sensitivity to the nuances of other cultures and to a rich variety of people.

The sentence structure in this passage reinforces the sense that Zoe was calling on ages-old wisdom; the sentences are long, phrase after phrase separated by commas, as if Kimbrough, by accruing details, will decipher the mystery which even Zoe didn't understand. Kimbrough compels us to feel what it was like to be the child Emily in this situation. "On and on, over and over . . ." intensifies the repetitive quality of the experience, and ". . . my breath came, too, a little deeper, a little steadier, and I could hear more clearly" gives the reader a feel for the step-by-step progress back to normalcy, as does the description of falling asleep.

Emily later woke up to find her family around her and leaped from bed to embrace her mother. At that moment her father came in to say that the culprit had been captured—and suddenly the fear began to return to Emily. But, just then, Zoe shocked the group by asking Grandfather Kimbrough to take her and Emily for a ride in his car. This was the same woman who "had said she would never set her foot in one!" Her mother decided to go, too, and put her hand on Zoe's knee as she said to Emily, "I think I can match Zoe's color today, Emily . . . I'd match it exactly--with pure gold" (Kimbrough, p. 50-51).



Here the chapter ends as it began--with grandfather taking a group for a ride. The Zoe introduced earlier as refusing to get in an automobile had changed her mind; the ride not only immediately diverted Emily from the reoccurrence of her fear but, in a sense, was Zoe's own recognition that she had done an extraordinary deed in pulling Emily out of shock. She, herself, had greater resources than she knew. The conversation in the automobile at the end re-emphasizes the color game, which both Emily and Zoe enjoyed immensely; it made a positive of the color difference and put all of them on equal footing. Kimbrough has systematically taken the reader from a description of Zoe's importance to Emily to the delicious anticipation of the ice cream to the horror of the almost-kidnap to the deeper horror of Emily's shock to Zoe's pulling Emily back from that shock to the positive and humorous "Zoe's first automobile ride" at the end. All these elements fit tightly together. There is no extraneous information.

This chapter is an outstanding example--in a book containing many--of Kimbrough's ability to re-live, with the reader, the emotions of love and safety, anticipation, the temporary but horrifying withdrawal of safety, and then the return to it. It is a sequence--if not an exact situation--with which any reader with a sensitive memory can empathize.

Another kind of situation many readers also identify with in So Dear To My Heart is the pregnancy of Emily's mother and birth of Emily's infant brother. It occupies two chapters of How Dear To My Heart. Emily's mother had told her the coming Christmas would be "different," a term that bothered Emily because, as she says, "I like surprises, but if there was one thing I did not like it was having something to which I was accustomed become different. Above all things, Christmas" (Kimbrough, p. 248). Emily wanted a baby doll with removable clothes, a pram for it, and a bicycle. Emily's mother was sewing in the evenings; because she covered her work when Emily came to say goodnight, Emily was sure her mother was making clothes for the baby doll she had requested. One evening her mother told her,

I musn't be disturbed about things being different. That we musn't hold onto things just because we were used to them.

'Open your casements wide.'

By that she meant, she explained, to pretend to open my window, and look out to see what was all around; to let things from outside come in, and welcome them, no matter how strange they might seem. (Kimbrough, p. 250)

When Emily again questioned her mother about the "different" thing which was to happen, her mother told her that "she and Daddy had decided not to tell me what the different thing was going to be, but let it be a surprise, because they were counting on how much I loved surprises" (Kimbrough, p. 253).

The night before her school's Christmas entertainment she was awakened by footsteps in the hall; the next morning she was told a baby brother had been born. When questioned at school about the unusual event that had happened, however, she excitedly said,

' . . . this morning I ate breakfast all by myself at the table, and'--I paused, because the real denouncement was coming--'I didn't have cream of wheat, I didn't have oatmeal; I had a whole cake of shredded wheat hot, and I crunched it in my hands myself' (Kimbrough, p. 257).

To her that was "The breath-taking event." Kimbrough then describes her delight at the different breakfast:

I loved its being different; I didn't want it to go on the same way day after day, with a dish of cream of wheat or oatmeal set down in front of me, all fixed . . . . Most of all I liked, and would remember always, I knew, the feel of the hot shredded wheat crunching under my hand. (Kimbrough, p. 257)

Her ecstatic revelation, however, did not interest her audience. Miss Richey, her teacher, had to urge her on to talk about the birth of her baby brother. As her teacher and Mr. Ball, the principal, talked, Emily thought about her shredded wheat breakfast; then,

Suddenly what they were saying, and what I had said, did reach down to me. I had a baby brother. That was what was really different. It wasn't the breakfast food. (Kimbrough, p. 258)

Here Kimbrough allows the reader to follow the precise steps in the child's dawning realization.

Fearing that her mother wouldn't be able to come to the Christmas entertainment in which she had a part,

she put her tongue between her teeth to keep from crying. That act reminded her that she had just lost her front tooth; her Uncle Frank had told her if she would keep her tongue away from the space, "a miracle would happen," one that "would stay forever. . . ." Emily suddenly broke into the excited talk about her baby brother going on around her with still another revelation; she said that she would soon have a new surprise---"a front tooth of solid gold" (Kimbrough, p. 259).

After the Christmas program, which her family did not attend, she raced home to tell Mother about the gold tooth, feeling a bit rejected. As she looked at her new brother she compared him to her baby doll, who was better looking than he. Her mother began telling her about the new Christmas plans and then said, "slip your finger down through his fist . . ." (Kimbrough, p. 266).

As Emily took off her mittens and did so, ". . . the baby held it as tight as I could squeeze hickory nuts in my hand to crack. I thought that perhaps, later, when he walked around with me, he would hold my hand like that, and I would say to people, 'This is my baby brother'" (Kimbrough, pp. 266-267).

After leaving her mother, she went to the bathroom closet where she had spent so much time praying for her grandfather when she thought he was a prisoner. She wanted "to tell God and Jesus about the surprise for

Them," her baby brother, but she found herself crying for reasons inexplicable to her, overcome by the effects of sudden change.

Emily went out to her swing, tracked around in the snow, and "thought about how I would show my little brother to people, while he would be holding my finger tight" (Kimbrough, p. 267). She swung for a long time, then let the swing slow down, as she thought about what had happened. Kimbrough concludes, "'Lettin' the old cat die,' we call that kind of swinging in Indiana" (Kimbrough, p. 267).

Emily's inability to see that an imagined gold tooth and a different breakfast were less significant than her infant brother's birth is related in a detailed, lively, systematic way; the story reminds the reader that children often do not make distinctions between minor and major occurrences or between occurrences which concern only themselves and those which have sweeping implications for several people. This difficulty in sorting out priorities is juxtaposed against Emily's slowly dawning understanding that life would be forever changed because of the birth of this brother and that already her relationships with the adults of the family had changed. Her tears attest to the stress of the change she was feeling. (It also makes one question the wisdom of her parents' making the birth of another child a

surprise.)

The swinging at the end is an apt description of the process which both children and adults have to go through in acclimating themselves to change. Letting go of the past and looking forward do not occur without backward swings; the letting the swing go slower by itself suggests the process of reconciliation to such change. The anticipation of Christmas, accompanied by the uncertainties about what change was to take place, evolved, finally, into an anticipation of an uncertain future, of which a baby brother was now a part. The old ways were known, but the future wasn't. Emily needed time to think and swing. Kimbrough provides time for her reader to do so, too, as she richly and meticulously re-creates what it feels like to be a child in How Dear To My Heart.

James L. Hymes, Jr., in his Foreward to Childhood Revisited, says, "We are intellectually aware of childhood but are not yet emotionally involved in it."<sup>26</sup> Autobiographers like Emily Kimbrough and Josephine W. Johnson, because of their skill in re-creating what it feels like to be a child, involve us emotionally in childhood. That affective involvement teaches us at least as much about the human child as investigation of cognitive development, about which we ostensibly know more facts.

## NOTES

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## Chapter 3: Role Models

### In The Childhood Emotional Pattern and Maturity

Leon J. Saul says that children identify with their parents and then transfer these learned patterns of identification to their relationships with adults throughout their lives.<sup>1</sup> Shaped by parents and other close relatives and acquaintances, children are "readily submissive" to those whose love they need and, therefore, choose to model themselves on certain aspects of these individuals.<sup>2</sup> Saul calls this taking of others into one's own personality introjection and concludes that "what persons the child is in close contact with, to imitate, to model itself on and to identify with, are essential factors in the child's emotional environment."<sup>3</sup> This fact helps to explain why many abused children grow up to be abusive parents and why children with a variety of healthy adults on whom to model themselves normally become, in turn, healthy role models for their own children.

Even parents who are healthy role models, however, are sometimes tempted to "exploit a child's need for approval and love in order to shape his behavior," according to Carole Klein in How It Feels To Be A Child.<sup>4</sup> Children evaluate themselves largely according to the way in which the adults on whom they are emotionally dependent evaluate them. "Too often it's the other person's perception that shapes their own--the other person's truth that comes perilously close to being the truth," Klein says.<sup>5</sup>

Some adults never cease feeling a desperate need for approval from others and sacrifice their own autonomy in a never-ending, unsuccessful search to find it.

The female autobiographers studied repeatedly discuss the contributions of positive role models in their lives. These role models fall into three general categories: developers of a sense of vocation; protectors; and teachers of self-confidence and self-respect. There is, of course, substantial overlap among these functions.

Those who help to develop a sense of vocation do so chiefly in two ways: they either directly influence--deliberately or not--a person to go into a given vocation or they encourage the development of skills which later culminates in vocation. The latter is more common.

Two autobiographers describe being profoundly influenced in their vocations by people who had no personal relationship to them at all. Black contralto Marian Anderson, who became world-famous, for example, discovered a great musical vocation and talent even though she originally was able to play only simple tunes on the piano by using a card marked with the notes set directly behind the keys. It had never occurred to her that she might ever be able to play the piano well until, while she was carrying a basket of laundry down the street one day, she heard someone playing the piano beautifully. Peeping in the window of the house from which the sound came, she saw

a black woman seated on the piano bench. Says Anderson, "I realized that if she could, I could." When she herself became a role model for others, she recalled the words of her mother, "Remember, wherever you are and whatever you do, someone always sees you."<sup>6</sup>

An equally powerful story is that told by Agness de Mille, famous dancer-choreographer, of the influence of ballerina Anna Pavlova on her life. Her memory of seeing Pavlova dance at a Saturday matinee is radiant:

Anna Pavlova! My life stops as I write that name. Across the daily preoccupation of lessons, lunch boxes, quarrelings with Margaret flashed this bright, unworldly experience and burned in a single afternoon a path over which I could never retrace my steps.<sup>7</sup>

de Mille felt, "I had come into my birthright. I was fourteen, and I had found my life's work . . . I bent to the discipline" (de Mille, p. 54). de Mille recalls that Pavlova's effect on the women in her audience was hypnotic" because "Barring sport, which offers a minimal emotional outlet, it [dance] is the one physical performance possible to women that does not carry with it either moral responsibility or physical hazard" (de Mille, p. 63).

Role models who encourage the development of skills which later culminate in vocation are more numerous than those who directly inspire vocational choices. Margaret Bourke-White, world-famous news photographer, whose father invented the first Braille printing press, describes her father's interest in "Everything that had to do with

the transmission and control of light." She thinks that her father's constant sharing of this interest with her has had a profound effect on her career as a noted photographer.<sup>8</sup>

Malvina Hoffman, the sculptor, in Yesterday Is Tomorrow: A Personal History, describes the constant practicing of her father, a concert pianist, as a lasting object lesson. She says, "In all that time I never heard Father slur over anything or bang down the piano lid or say, 'That's enough for the day.'" Such discipline also served her well as an artist.<sup>9</sup>

The father of Margaret Sanger, described in her autobiography, taught her to question everything, absolutely essential training for her future career as an often lonely crusader for birth-control. One evening, after prayers, Margaret climbed on her father's chair to kiss him goodnight:

He asked quizzically, 'What was that you were saying about bread?'

'Why, that was in the Lord's Prayer, Give us this day our daily bread.'

'Who were you talking to?'

'To God.'

'Is God a baker?'

I was shocked. Nevertheless, I rallied to the attack and replied as best I could, doubtless influenced by conversations I had heard. 'No, of course not. It means the rain, the sunshine, and all the things to make the wheat, which makes the bread.'

'Well, well,' he replied, 'so that's the idea. Then why don't you say so? Always say what you mean, my daughter; it is much better.'

Thereafter I began to question what I had previously taken for granted and to reason

for myself. It was not pleasant, but father had taught me to think.<sup>10</sup>

This training in thinking for herself was coupled with her father's insistence "that our duty lay not in considering what might happen to us after death, but in doing something here and now to make the lives of other human beings more decent" (Sanger, p. 23). The results of this training in being taught to think clearly and to concern herself with making the lives of those around her better ultimately produced a formidable crusader for the cause of birth control, whose role in the liberation of twentieth century women from unplanned pregnancy is incalculable.

Ruth Suckow, novelist, in Some Others and Myself, also expresses gratitude for the "liberal spirit"<sup>11</sup> of her parson father, seeing in the structure of her household "a sort of school of democracy . . . [which] was far from being a developing ground for any hard-and-fast divisions of humankind . . ." (Suckow, p. 200). She says that, though her father's own convictions were clear to his family, he "did not set up those all too common obstacles which catch and hold back, not allowing a natural individual growth beyond religious childhood" (Suckow, p. 268). The children were most influenced by "the keen atmosphere" of their father's mind rather than by denominational beliefs (Suckow, p. 201). This liberal atmosphere was essential to her development as a writer.

A very different kind of positive influence is described

by Helen Woodward, writer and account executive, whose mother was a narrowly upright woman full of "Thou shalt nots." Woodward says,

Everybody was respectable in the house. You mustn't laugh too loud; you mustn't cry or be lazy; you mustn't sew on Saturday; you mustn't be sassy to your mother; and you mustn't, you mustn't -----12

This situation was tempered, however, by two loves of her father--his love for poker and for horse-racing. She says that she did not realize until she was grown-up "how grateful I should be for these two shameful lapses." She attributes her own later freedom of mind as she went about the task of earning a living to "Papa's betting on the races and the habit of mind it started in me . . ." (Woodward, p. 139).

Even more important than the role model's function as developer of a sense of vocation or of vital thinking, seeing, and reasoning skills that lead to a sense of vocation is the role model's function as protector. Often in these autobiographies a parent with a strong protective role is defined as temperamentally opposed to a parent with a weak or even non-existent role as a protector. Kathleen Cannell's book, Jam Yesterday, illustrates this. With keen insight Cannell describes her negligent father who "didn't care for children" and "thought that babies resembled nothing more than soft-boiled eggs."<sup>13</sup> A lover of gambling, too, "he couldn't bear

anything customary, especially domesticity and puling [sic] infants" (Cannell, p. 15). Cannell sums him up as "brilliant, restless, quick as a flying fish, sharp as a razor, but long-headed too, often scheming behind his direct look of frankness" (Cannell, p. 15). She catches the essence of her father's unfaithfulness to his wife and four children when she says, "Papa had sowed not a single wild oat before his marriage, afterwards he cultivated little else" (Cannell, p. 20).

In a day when divorce was usually unthinkable, Cannell's mother was forced to divorce her husband and raise her children in much reduced straits. She remained "the center and circumference of our [hers and her siblings] infantile world. Papa was scarcely more than a legend" (Cannell, p. 8). Some time after the divorce he lived for a few months in their city, and tried to arrange a meeting with them through their Aunt Helen so he could "play the proud father for a bit" (Cannell, p. 22). Not taken in by his request, Cannell and her brothers and sister

refused with beautiful unanimity. Helen's description of his oddly stricken look when she bore him the word didn't move us; we felt no bitterness toward him; we simply weren't interested. Muds had done everything for us in all circumstances. She was reality. Papa was nothing more than a legend, and a twice-told tale at that. (Cannell, p. 22)

And Muds, the admired, self-sacrificing, protector-mother continued to perform the duties of male and female parent

until they were grown; the father remained a distant shadow. Cannell became a high-fashion editor in Paris who wrote her autobiography in occupied Paris during World War II as an exercise in joyful remembrance and admiration of her extraordinary mother.

Contrary to Estelle Jelinek's contention in the Introduction to Women's Autobiography that "Women are less likely to focus on their mothers than men are" and to "write adoringly" of them,<sup>14</sup> it is mothers or mother substitutes who are most often discussed passionately as protectors in the autobiographies covered in this study. Examples abound. Among these is Mama of Mama's Bank Account, by Kathryn Forbes; the book is a quasi-autobiographical remembrance of a strong, warm, mother (actually Forbes' grandmother) who saved her children from worrying about the precarious state of family finances by inventing a mythical "Bank Account." Says Forbes, "It was a wonderful thing, that Bank Account of Mama's. We were all so proud of it. It gave us such a warm, secure feeling. No one else we knew had money in a big bank downtown."<sup>15</sup> Soon she adds, "Even when the Strike came, Mama would not let us worry unduly. We all worked together so that the momentous trip downtown could be postponed. It was almost like a game." Twenty years later Forbes discovered the truth. She says,

Last year I sold my first story. When the check came I hurried over to Mama's and



put the long green slip of paper in her lap. 'For you,' I said, 'to put in your Bank Account.' Mama looked at me. 'Is no account', she said. 'In all my life, I never been inside a Bank.'

And when I didn't--couldn't--answer, Mama said earnestly: 'Is not Good for little ones to be afraid--to not feel secure.' (Forbes, p. 7)

Marcia Davenport, novelist and music critic, in Too Strong For Fantasy describes her own early years as "in essence the walls of a benign stockade in which I lived wholly concentrated on mother . . ." who "gave herself to me. In the process she gave me everything that has been my measure of aspiration and beauty and character and courage ever since."<sup>16</sup> Davenport remembers that even when her mother, a famous opera singer, was working hardest at her own career aspirations, she ". . . made all my clothes and pasted our handkerchiefs on the looking glass to dry overnight, and counted her sous and centimes anxiously before ordering our food" (Davenport, p. 3).

She explores the roots of the warm circle her mother drew around her at great personal sacrifice. Her memory "is not primarily of myself as a young child, center of my own consciousness; but of my mother, warm, demonstratively loving, delicious to touch, to smell, to look at and above all, to listen to . . ." (Davenport, p. 11).

So secure was Davenport in this circle of protective love that she says she forgave her mother "the seven interminable [school] years" she spent boarding with

an unpleasant family while her mother made concert tours (Davenport, p. 75). Davenport says,

It did not occur to me to wish to be with her when work made that impossible; and it also never occurred to me that my unhappiness for seven years in alien surroundings was one of the prices of her success. Later in her life she said something about this, regretful and conscience-stricken. I said, 'Forget it. It was worth it.' And it was. (Davenport, p. 75)

This willingness to forgive her mother her own seven years of unhappiness in order that her mother might pursue her own career, astounding as it may seem, attests to her attachment to her mother. She would not have been willing to forgive a mother to whom she felt less powerfully bonded. The mother's protectiveness is a strong element of that bonding.

Another autobiographer with similar strong feelings toward her mother, who is also ready to forgive being physically left behind, is historian Ariel Durant, who, in A Dual Biography, describes idolizing her mother who slaved to help support her children by selling newspapers on the street. Durant says,

Love for my mother was my chief solace and support, but she was away half the day and often in the evening. I could seldom fall asleep before her return. She gently reprimanded me for staying awake so late, but I told her, 'Until you come home and I see you are safe and with me I can't close my eyes. I love you so much and worry about you.'<sup>17</sup>

Durant, in fact, describes her mother with a passionate attachment similar to that of Forbes, Davenport, and

Helen Flexner in A Quaker Childhood. Durant calls her mother "my religion; she almost took the place of God in my devotion; she was my creator, my life; she to me, was the light of the world" (Durant, p. 18). The shock to her was enormous, therefore, when her mother left the family for greater personal freedom. Yet, even as a child, Durant "accepted her [mother's] heterodox ideas, and defended them passionately in arguments . . ." (Durant, p. 21). This "special dependence" on her mother accentuated certain characteristics which Durant carefully articulates:

Like her I have a warm, sometimes hot temper, a passionate willfulness, and a tendency to be impatient with people or opinions that go against my grain or judgment. I admire those ideal souls who rise above jealousy and hostility, who open their hearts to all the world; but sometimes such people seem to me characterless, mere putty in the hands of environment and circumstance; and I do not regret having approached with a wilder spirit a reality that didn't deserve a supine acceptance. (Durant, p. 22)

Helen Flexner in her autobiography, A Quaker Childhood, likewise describes feeling passionately attached to her mother, despite the fact that, as the youngest daughter in a family of eight, she often felt she did not receive the attention she needed because her mother spent so much time on religious and civic activities that she had little time left for her children. Yet, in the Preface to her book, Flexner says, "Though my father was vivid to me and important, it was my mother who watched over me day by day and whose love was my refuge."<sup>18</sup> One

of the two themes of the book, she goes on to say, is the fate of her mother; the way she dealt with her mother's death is the pervasive focus at the end of the book.

In fact, Flexner says she sought to keep her mother's protection and approval--children often think of the two as synonymous. She says, ". . . doing what she told me was a joy. If by inadvertance I displeased her, then indeed I was sorry. I could not be happy until I had been forgiven by my mother" (Flexner, p. 12).

When she was told that her parents were planning a trip to Europe to visit the London Yearly Meeting of the Society of Friends--and that the children would be left behind in the care of relatives--Helen ceased to eat or sleep; she says, "Nothing could reconcile me to being separated from my mother" (Flexner, p. 52). Her parents relented and decided to take her and her younger brother, Frank, with them. The adult Flexner judges herself harshly for her own possessive behavior: "This theft of my mother's holiday seems to me by all the odds the worst act of piracy I ever committed. She was to have no other chance of escape from family care" (Flexner, p. 53). However, when, in repeated moral dilemmas on the trip her mother did not act as Helen thought she would, Helen found it difficult to know what would please her mother: "The joy had gone out of being good" (Flexner, p. 76).

For several years after this trip, Helen's mother had little free time to devote to Helen's care. When they did spend time together, Flexner says, ". . . it was like receiving a gift from heaven" (Flexner, p. 107).

When she heard her older brother, John, complaining to her mother about the way he had been raised, her need for her mother's protection was secondary to her felt need to protect her mother from John's attacks: "I felt it was up to me to protect my mother from John and to take his wife and baby off her hands as much as possible" (Flexner, p. 225). She became so solicitous at this that her mother had to discourage her. This shift of roles from protected to protector was cemented when her mother became ill with cancer--and Helen largely took over her care.

In trying to deal with the calamity of her mother's impending death, she saw herself as part of the reason for her mother's illness. Perhaps her mother was ill because she had borne so many children. She felt, "When my mother died I would be utterly alone" (Flexner, p. 333).

After her mother's death she was plagued by nightmares, and all that kept her functioning was her promise to her mother that she would delay going to Bryn Mawr for a year in order to be a companion to her father. Without the protective strength of her mother, Helen became listless, silent, and worst of all, felt "anonymous."

It is on a note of total defeat that the book not so much ends as stops.

Another powerfully protective figure in these autobiographies of women is "Momma" in I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings. Actually Momma was Maya Angelou's grandmother, with whom Maya lived her formative years in Stamps, Arkansas during the 1930's. Momma was a physical and spiritual giant, "taller than any woman in my personal world,"<sup>19</sup> a woman who possessed a singing voice that "would pour over the listeners and throb in the air" (Angelou, p. 38). Proprietor of the Wm. Johnson General Merchandise Store, she worked alongside and cared for her crippled son, known to Maya and her brother Bailey as Uncle Willie.

Momma was fiercely protective on two levels--physical and spiritual. The first was more easily understandable to Maya and stemmed from Momma's intent "to teach Bailey and me to use the paths of life that she and her generation and all the Negroes gone before had found, and found to be safe ones." She believed "that whitefolks could [not] be talked to at all without risking one's life." Angelou says her grandmother thought of herself as a realist in dealing with whites.

Angelou describes the color line in Stamps as "A light shade . . . pulled down between the Black community and all things white . . ." (Angelou, p.40). She says, "People in Stamps used to say that the whites in our

town were so prejudiced that a Negro couldn't buy vanilla ice cream. Except on July Fourth. Other days he had to be satisfied with chocolate" (Angelou, p. 40). In fact, "In Stamps the segregation was so complete that most Black children didn't really, absolutely know what whites looked like" (Angelou, p. 40). To be a realist was to survive. Perhaps the best example of Momma's survival instinct occurred when powhitetrash girls, among them children of sharecroppers on land Momma owned, mocked Momma as they stood in her front yard one day. She quietly hummed hymn tunes as Maya, from the safety of the store,

wanted to throw a handful of black pepper in their faces, to throw lye on them, to scream that they were dirty, scummy peckerwoods, but I knew I was as clearly imprisoned behind the scene as the actors outside were confined to their roles. (Angelou, p. 25)

Suddenly a tall girl did a handstand on the ground, revealing "slick pubic hair [that] made a brown triangle where her legs came together. She hung in the vacuum of that lifeless morning for only a few seconds, then wavered and tumbled" (Angelou, pp. 25-26).

Momma changed to a new hymn as the girls moved out of the yard, saying "'Bye, Annie." Momma responded, "'Bye, Miz Helen, 'bye Miz Ruth, 'bye Miz Eloise" (Angelou, p. 26). Maya was bursting with anger, but suddenly she realized that Momma was happy--that "Whatever the contest had been out front, I knew Momma had won." Momma sang "Glory, glory, hallelujah, when I lay my burden

down" (Angelou, p. 27).

This example is a powerful one; it not only shows Momma performing in a way designed to protect her and her family from recrimination or retaliation by whites, but it also demonstrates the third aspect of role models to be discussed shortly: role models as teachers of self-confidence and self-respect. In the midst of a ludicrous, painful situation Momma kept both her dignity and her self-respect. Both she and the powhitetrash girls knew that as they left the yard. Their disgusting little charade was a test which Momma passed.

Momma knew she had to protect Maya and Bailey from whites because she was keenly aware of the pent-up hostility of whites directed toward black males. And Maya was, too, after Uncle Willie had to spend a whole night hidden at the bottom of a bin of potatoes and onions because "The used-to-be sheriff" had warned Momma: "Annie, tell Willie he better lay low tonight. A crazy nigger messed with a white lady today. Some of the boys'll be coming over here later" (Angelou, p. 14). The boys never came.

One Saturday Bailey was late returning from a movie. He was found by Momma and soundly thrashed. He had stayed to see a film starring Kay Francis, "a white movie star who looks like Mother Dear [Maya's and Bailey's mother]," --and whose film the two were to see over and over. The adult Maya explains Momma's excessive apprehensions



over Bailey's lateness: "The Black woman in the South who raises sons, grandsons and nephews has her heartstrings tied to a hanging noose. Any break from routine . . . [might] herald for them unbearable news" (Angelou, p. 95).

It was "unbearable news" that Bailey came home with one afternoon, having seen a bloated, dead colored man whose body had just been fished out of a pond by white men; they forced Bailey to help carry the body to the jail. Though Momma gave various reasons why she soon thereafter began making plans to take them to their parents in California, Angelou says that she thinks it lay chiefly in this incident and its portents for the future (Angelou, p. 165). The only safe future for Bailey in Stamps lay in a passiveness which would retard all development. Nor were prospects much better for Maya. And so, for the protection of their futures, they went to California.

Momma was equally ferocious in promoting spiritual and social standards for the children. All misbehavior at church, for example, regardless of provocation, was severely punished. When Maya returned from a visit to Mrs. Flowers with a paper sack of cookies for Bailey, her saying "By the way, Bailey . . ." (Angelou, p. 85) brought an unexplained whipping with a switch from Momma. Later,

Momma explained that 'Jesus was the Way, the Truth, and the Light,' and anyone who says 'by the way' is really saying 'by Jesus' or 'by God' and the Lord's name would not be taken

in vain in her house. (Angelou, p. 86)

Bailey tried to intervene by saying, "Whitefolks use 'by the way' to mean while we're on the subject" (Angelou, p. 87). That was no consolation to Mama who reminded them that "'whitefolks' mouths were most in general loose and their words were an abomination before Christ" (Angelou, p. 86).

Maya's real introduction to Mrs. Flowers herself seems to have been the work of Momma. While Maya and Bailey were visiting their mother in St. Louis, Maya was raped by her mother's boyfriend, Mr. Freeman. Maya ceased to speak. Finally she, along with Bailey, was sent back to Stamps where, as Angelou describes it, "For nearly a year, I sopped around the house, the Store, the school and the church, like an old biscuit, dirty and inedible. Then I . . . got to know, the lady who threw me my first life line" [Mrs. Bertha Flowers] (Angelou, p. 77).

Mrs. Flowers is an example of the third kind of role model, the inspirer of self-confidence and self-respect, qualities sadly lacking in the little black girl unwilling to speak. Mrs. Flowers occupies only ten pages in Angelou's book, yet she was second only to Momma in shaping Maya's attitudes. Angelou calls her "the aristocrat of Black Stamps . . ." and gives her an eloquent tribute: "She was one of the few gentle-

women I have ever known, and has remained throughout my life the measure of what a human being can be" (Angelou, p. 78). Much later in her life Maya realized that Momma and Mrs Flowers "were as alike as sisters, separated only by formal education" (Angelou, p. 78). Even from a distance Mrs. Flowers made Maya proud to be Negro, and Angelou is now glad that she never saw Mrs. Flowers

in the company of powhitefolks. For since they tend to think of their whiteness as an evenizer, I'm certain that I would have had to hear her spoken to commonly as Bertha, and my image of her would have been shattered like the unmendable Humpty-Dumpty. (Angelou, p. 79)

In retrospect, Maya realizes that Momma and Mrs. Flowers were in collusion to help her regain her self-respect (and, incidentally, speech), but, at the time, Mrs. Flowers' invitation to have tea at her home had the quality of the miraculous. As they walked toward her home, Mrs. Flowers told Maya, ". . . language is man's way of communication with his fellow man and it is language alone which separates him from the lower animals." Mrs. Flowers stressed: "Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with the shades of deeper meaning" (Angelou, p. 82). Then Mrs. Flowers offered to lend Maya books, which she had to promise to read aloud. After cold lemonade with butter wafers "sufficient for childhood"s lifelong diet" and a "lesson in living," Mrs. Flowers

began reading aloud A Tale of Two Cities and loaned Maya a book of poems from which she was to recite on her next visit (Angelou, p. 83). Jubilant, Maya ran home. "I was liked, and what a difference it made," she remembers. "I was respected not as Mrs. Henderson's grandchild or Bailey's sister but for just being Marguerite Johnson" (Angelou, p. 85). Maya began to emerge from her shell.

Maya's mother is another role model in the book who encouraged self-confidence and self-respect. A competent, independent woman, she seemed to have adequate ways to handle any situation--except for Maya's reaction to the rape. Her position is an unusual one in the book because Maya Angelou says little about issues related to her mother that one would expect her to say much about. Why doesn't Angelou, for example, rail against being sent off to live with her grandmother in Stamps, Arkansas while her mother lead an active, prosperous life in California and St. Louis? The only time Angelou does complain is early in the book, when she describes one "terrible Christmas" on which her parents sent Maya a doll and tea set and other gifts to her idolized brother Bailey. Maya, at least, "had been confident that they [her parents] were both dead . . ." (Angelou, p. 42). The presents caused painful questions:

Why did they send us away? and What did we do so wrong? Why, at three and four, did we have tags put on our arms to be sent by train alone from Long Beach, California, to Stamps,

Arkansas, with only the porter to look after us? (Angelou, p. 43)

They couldn't answer the questions, but they believed the presents were a sign that ". . . any day or night she [their mother] might come riding up" (Angelou, p. 44).

When Maya and Bailey went to Oakland, California later to live with their mother, however, their mother was an admirable bulwark for Maya. During Maya's pursuit of a job as streetcar conductor during World War II, at a time when blacks weren't hired as streetcar conductors, her mother offered streetcar and lunch money and advice to keep her going. After she was hired, her mother gave her money to have her uniform tailored and took her to work or picked her up in the early mornings.

Later when Maya feared she was a lesbian her mother explained the physical process of maturation to her, and when Maya deliberately became pregnant, her mother accepted the fact without fuss and saw that she had proper care. She forced Maya to sleep with her new baby after she discovered Maya was actually afraid of him; waking Maya in the night to show her that she was protecting the baby unconsciously in her sleep, her mother said, "See, you don't have to think about doing the right thing. If you're for the right thing, then you do it without thinking" (Angelou, p. 246).

Vivion Baxter, Maya's mother, encouraged self-confidence and self-respect by supporting her as she

struggled to perform adult tasks. Like the protective mothers of Marcia Davenport and Ariel Durant, she was admired and emulated, even though her strengths had not always been available to Maya. Angelou is explicit in her three later continuations of her autobiography-- Gather Together In My Name, Singin' and Swingin' and Gettin' Merry Like Christmas, and The Heart of a Women-- that she both learned from and adopted many of her mother's character strengths and that, as an adult, she continued to seek advice and strength from her mother.

Non-family members inspire self-confidence and self-respect, as well, in these autobiographies. Shady Hill, the school director-writer May Sarton attended, was run by such a woman, Mrs. Hocking. Sarton describes Mrs. Hocking as "poetry incarnate,"<sup>20</sup> a woman who presided over "a spiritual climate as bracing, as rich and unpredictable as that of New England itself" (Sarton, p. 104). Mrs. Hocking taught poetry all day "by bursting into spontaneous prayer when the spirit moved her, by those sudden noble angers, and more formally, by meeting with each class for a scheduled hour. No doubt there was method, but to us it was a heavenly madness . . . ." Sarton marvels,

Even purely technical matters became magic. Once she turned on me in apparent fury and shouted 'You goose!' and then, before I had time to burst into tears, added in an explanatory tone, . . . a metaphor explodes and simile is pale beside it. (Sarton, pp. 112-113)

The effect on Sarton of Mrs. Hocking in a school which intended "To keep childhood alive to open-mindedness and a love of learning; to provide life with all possible richness and fullness; to secure freedom with self-control . . ." was to balance her own creativity with concern for the welfare of the larger community (Sarton, pp. 105-106).

Writer Ruth Suckow learned self-respect and self-confidence from "old ladies of New England type and origin" with their "bright eyes . . . , their decisive and sometimes caustic speech, their intellectual vigor and their goodness."<sup>21</sup> One particular old lady who brightened her life was Mrs. Vogel, "an old woman who liked the things that children liked!" (Suckow, p. 39). She was

A superb fisherman, her tackle was a willow pole, an old string, a bent hairpin, some worms Dicky Wilts had dug. But the fish bit for her, just as the animals ate for her, and the plants grew for her. (Suckow, p. 46)

Though Mrs. Vogel was past seventy when Ruth knew her, she always answered the door "exuding welcome . . . the world of childhood all intact and joyously alive" (Suckow, p. 47). Suckow says that Mrs. Vogel was her lifelong model of a lively, giving, creative spirit.

Elizabeth Adams in Dark Symphony, puzzled about religion and, despite detesting sermons, found a new friend in the pastor of her church, who respected her as an individual. Though her Sunday School teacher told

the pastor that Elizabeth didn't know the commandments and couldn't remember the Bible verse one Sunday morning, he said, "I'm glad to see you, Elizabeth . . . . Lots of little boys and girls can't remember Bible verses, but Jesus loves them just as much as those who can."<sup>21</sup> Utterly delighted by this acceptance from an unexpected source, she pushed forward every subsequent Sunday morning and

clutched skirts and trouser legs trying to shoo grown-ups out of my way until I reached the pastor . . . . Somehow he would catch a glimpse of the child who sought to greet him. 'God bless you.' were his words. That was all I wanted to hear. (Adams, p. 74)

She was soon crushed when she learned that the minister has been fired, according to her father, for not raising enough money.

Two strong sibling relationships are excellent examples of others as inspirers of self-confidence and self-respect. Nikki Giovanni idolized her older sister, Gary, to an extreme degree. On her first day of school Nikki did not want to stay in kindergarten, separated from Gary, a fifth grader, and her own previous carefree life. Gary came to the rescue. The scene as Giovanni remembers it is truly portentous:

In She strode--like Cleopatra on her barge down the Nile, like Nefertiti on her way to sit for the statue, like Harriet Tubman before her train or Mary Bethune with Elenora; my big sister came to handle the situation. You could feel the room respond to her presence. It could have been San Francisco



at the earthquake, Chicago as Mrs. O'Leary walked to her cow, Rome as Nero struck up his fiddle, Harlem when Malcolm mounted the podium; Gary came to handle the situation. . . . 'Kim'--her voice containing all the power of Cicero at the seashore, Elijah at the annual meeting--'Kim, don't cry.' And it was over. Tears falling literally pulled themselves back into my eyes . . . . And I had been chosen to nourish this great woman, to protect her and perhaps, should I prove worthy, guide her.<sup>22</sup>

It is difficult to find a more telling example of the respect of a child for an adored sibling, who commanded her to respect herself, to give up baby ways of solving problems - or trying to - by crying. The kindergartner's image of her fifth grade sister as a "great woman" underscores this.

Maya Angelou felt equally strongly about her brother, Bailey, who was a year older than she. She describes him in I know Why The Caged Bird Sings as "the greatest person in my world. And the fact that he was my brother, my only brother, and I had no sisters to share him with, was such good fortune that it made me want to live a Christian life just to show God that I was grateful" (Angelou, p. 17). She envied him for his good looks and grace, though she had neither and humbly says, "And yet he loved me." When older members of the family complained about her lack of looks in a good-looking family, he took revenge on them by making cutting remarks, at which he excelled (Angelou, p. 17). He amused Maya with outrageous games and pranks, was a secret confederate against the

pains of the outside world, and provided stability in an unsteady world. Angelou sums up Bailey's key role in her life thus:

Of all the needs (there are none imaginary) a lonely child has, the one that must be satisfied, if there is going to be hope and a hope of wholeness, is the unshaking need for an unshakable God. My pretty Black brother was my Kingdom Come. (Angelou, p. 19)

Because of that powerful attachment to Bailey, she endured a hellish time after her rape, refusing to identify the rapist. Bailey told Maya that she had to identify her attacker so the man couldn't hurt another child. Angelou remembers,

When I explained that I couldn't tell him because the man would kill him, Bailey said knowingly, 'He can't kill me. I won't let him.' And of course I believed him. Bailey didn't lie to me. So I told him. (Angelou. p. 69)

Another family replete with role models was that of Margaret Mead, which she describes in Blackberry Winter. Among all the autobiographies surveyed in this study, Blackberry Winter stands out; Mead's family was the most adroit in performing all the functions of role models discussed in this chapter--developers of a sense of vocation, protectors, and teachers of self-confidence and self-respect--as well as many others.

This autobiography attests to the powerful role models her mother, her father, and her grandmother were to Margaret Mead and to the significance of their affirmation on her own developing sense of sex roles, a topic to

be discussed in Chapter 4. From watching her father, an Economics professor, at work Mead learned a vital vocational task--"the concrete sequences of activities necessary to carry out any process and of the men involved---. . . that gave me a sense of how important it was to link together the concrete and the abstract."<sup>23</sup> Mead says that she "respected most of all my father's capacity to listen, his powers of concentration, and the aptness of his criticism (Mead, p. 27).

Mead's mother, highly educated--for her time or ours--"had no real gift for play" (Mead, p. 26) and was good at managing but not performing household tasks (Mead, p. 27). Vehement against the injustices of institutions but personally gentle, she would give money to the AAUW, which she respected for its advocacy of women's and human rights, rather than buy a new rug (Mead, p. 23-24). Extraordinarily generous, "she was [also] absolutely trustworthy." Mead remembers that her mother was criticized (and remembered) in Bucks County for two accomplishments--walking to a sale in Plumsteadville, a round trip of some fifteen miles, and for painting the ceiling of her own kitchen, "two strange and, in local terms, unfeminine activities. It was a kind of criticism she did not mind" (Mead p. 28).

Mead's mother, like her father, had a vital role to play in Mead's vocational sense of self. Her mother

saw every place they lived as a source of "lessons" to be learned, in addition to the regular formal education available. Mead's mother was not particular about the kind of lesson being taught, "provided the person . . . teaching it was highly skilled (Mead, p. 75). Mead has found, in retrospect,

that this way of organizing, teaching and learning around special skills provided me with a model for the way I have organized work, whether it has involved organizing a research team, a staff of assistants, or the available informants in a native village. In every case I try to find out what each person is good at doing and then I fit them together in a group that forms some kind of whole. (Mead, pp. 75-76)

Despite these excellent vocational role models of father and mother, though, Mead says that "the most decisive influence in my life" was her paternal grandmother, who lived with the Mead family until she died in 1927 (Mead, p. 45). Her grandmother never raised her voice or threatened because "she simply commanded respect and obedience by her complete expectation that she would be obeyed" (Mead, p. 46). Mead identifies her grandmother's combination of firmness and love as the source of her own strength of conscience (Mead, p. 56); the content of that conscience came equally ". . . from my mother's concern for other people and the state of the world and from my father's insistence that the only thing worth doing is to add to the store of exactly known facts" (Mead, p. 55).

Mead's grandmother was her only teacher, except for a three year period, until it was time for her to enter high school. Mead's grandmother did not believe in memorizing facts or in repeating drills but taught Mead "to observe flowers and children and baby chicks" and "to enjoy learning" (Mead, p. 48). She was a marvelous storyteller who taught Margaret the joy of doing manual tasks and was interested in all interesting people, regardless of their class or income. Mead's grandmother "always wanted to understand things, and she was willing to listen or read until she did" (Mead, p. 57).

Because her grandmother and parents contributed so greatly to Margaret's self-confidence and self-respect as well as home-based education, when Margaret went to high school she felt "set apart in a way that could not be attributed to any gift I had, but only to my background--to the education given me by my grandmother and to the explicit academic interests of my parents" (Mead, p. 85). This advanced education was the result of the books she read----

ranging from the childrens' books of my grandmother's generation to the most modern plays that my mother sent for to read with a group of friends----and the way all I read was placed in historical perspective, and above all, the continuous running commentary by my family on schools, on education, on the way teachers were treated by the community, and on the relationship between good schools and much needed higher taxes . . . .(Mead, p. 86)

Most of all, her father, her mother, and her grandmother

incorporated her into their lives, and she "was treated as a person, never as a child who could not understand" (Mead, p. 281). Mead says,

My grandmother shared her worries about my parents with me as she combed my hair. My mother took me with her when she did field work among recently arrived immigrants. My father taught me to look him in the eye when I recited a poem to an audience. (Mead, p. 281)

She sums up her experience with the members of her remarkable family simply: "To them I was an individual" (Mead, p. 281).

Adults who believe that children can understand the world around them and respond responsibly and meaningfully, whether in their roles as protectors, as teachers of self-confidence and self-respect, or as developers of a sense of vocation provide positive influences whose effect is long-ranging. Their influence is also great in helping to shape the young girl's sense of her own gender, to be discussed in the next chapter.

## Notes

- 1 Leon J. Saul, The Childhood Emotional Pattern and Maturity (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1979), p. viii.
- 2 Saul, p. 135.
- 3 Saul, p. 136.
- 4 Carole Klein, How It Feels To Be A Child (New York: Harper and Row, 1975), p. 22.
- 5 Klein, p. 14.
- 6 Marian Anderson, My Lord What A Morning (New York: The Viking Press, 1956), p. 10. All further references to this book appear in the text.
- 7 Agnes de Mille, Dance to the Piper (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1952), p. 42. All further references to this book appear in the text.
- 8 Margaret Bourke-White, Portrait of Myself (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1963), p. 20. All further references to this book appear in the text.
- 9 Malvina Hoffman, Yesterday Is Tomorrow: A Personal History (New York: Crown Publishers, Inc., 1965), p. 55.
- 10 Margaret Sanger, Margaret Sanger: An Autobiography (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1938), p. 22. All further references to this book appear in the text.
- 11 Ruth Suckow, Some Others and Myself (New York: Rinehart and Co., Inc., 1932), p. 268. All further references to this book appear in the text.
- 12 Helen Woodward, Three Flights Up (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1935), p. 139. All further references to this book appear in the text.
- 13 Kathleen Cannell, Jam Yesterday (New York: William Morrow and Co., 1945), p. 9. All further references to this book appear in the text.
- 14 Estelle Jelinek, ed., Introduction to Women's Autobiography: Essays in Criticism (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1980), p. 12.
- 15 Kathryn Forbes, Mama's Bank Account (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1943), p. 4. All further references to this book appear in the text.

16 Marcia Davenport, Too Strong For Fantasy (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1967), p. 40. All further references to this book appear in the text.

17 Will and Ariel Durant, A Dual Autobiography (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977), p. 18. All further references to this book appear in the text.

18 Helen Flexner, A Quaker Childhood (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1940), Preface, n.p. All further references to this book appear in the text.

19 Maya Angelou, I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings (New York: Bantam Books, 1971), p. 38. All further references to this book appear in the text.

20 May Sarton, I Knew A Phoenix: Sketches For An Autobiography (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1959), p. 104.

21 Elizabeth Adams, Dark Symphony (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1942), p. 73. All further references to this book appear in the text.

22 Nikki Giovanni, Gemini: An Extended Autobiographical Statement on My First Twenty Five Years of Being a Black Poet (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., Inc., 1971), pp. 19-20.

23 Margaret Mead, Blackberry Winter: My Earlier Years (New York: Pocket Books, 1975), p. 35. All further references to this book appear in the text.



## Chapter 4: The Development of Sex Roles

One of the major differences between autobiographies written by men and those written by women is that the issue of sex roles is rarely discussed in men's autobiographies. In women's autobiographies sex role development is commonly discussed or, at least, mentioned, undoubtedly because men have been the standard against which women have been measured in western culture for many centuries. A female autobiographer generally must account for her not-maleness, her otherness. This concern is not likely to drop out of women's autobiographies soon. Even autobiographers like writer Ruth Suckow in Some Others and Myself, Marya Mannes-playwright, editor, and social commentator-in Out of My Time, and Margaret Mead in Blackberry Winter, who come from families "with none of the stereotypes of sex roles which have so contracted the lives of most men and women, and with none of the hand-me-down limitations forced on children in the name of 'normality,' 'convention,' or even 'love'" must deal with the way in which their own sex role concepts were formed.<sup>1</sup>

In Chapter 6, "Classic Theories of Sex-Role Socialization," in Women and Sex Roles: A Social Psychological Perspective, Jacquelynne Parsons and Julie Croke summarize findings based on massive analyses of scholarly studies which show that, "with the possible exceptions of aggression and spatial skills, . . . there was little, if any, evidence

suggesting biological or inborn personality or response differences between sexes."<sup>2</sup> Thus, ". . . socialization is a major factor in sex-role acquisition."<sup>3</sup> Children, they conclude, can be socialized to think androgynously.

Families like those of Mannes, Suckow, and Mead can be described as androgynous. Mannes says that each of her parents "possessed an almost equal balance of male and female qualities, while retaining, to a high degree, their sexual identities" (Mannes, p. 12). Their union produced Mannes, "a spiritual hermaphrodite" (Mannes, p. 12).

Margaret Mead described the feelings that membership in an androgynous family gave her: "I was always glad that I was a girl. I cannot remember ever wanting to be a boy. . . . I was a wanted child, and when I was born I was the kind of child my parents wanted. This sense of satisfying one's parents probably has a great deal to do with one's capacity to accept oneself . . . ."<sup>4</sup> Late in Blackberry Winter as she is dreaming of the ideal future she would wish for, she imagines a world in which preconceptions about a child would not interfere with a child's flowering: "Perhaps we shall . . . be able to develop a climate of opinion in which a mother waits with suspended imagination for her unknown child, ready to greet a stranger . . . . Children may face gladly the knowledge that they were chosen for what they could

be seen to be . . ." (Mead, p. 305).

When Mead describes herself as being "brought up within my own culture two generations ahead of my time," she is describing a home environment tuned to producing adults, regardless of sex, ready to take responsible roles in the larger world (Mead, p. 2). Mead concludes, "For me, being brought up to become a woman who could live responsibly in the contemporary world and learning to become an anthropologist conscious of the culture in which I lived, were almost the same thing" (Mead, p. 2). A little story she tells about child names illustrates the way in which her family helped the children understand their wholeness as human beings. Her father's pet name for her was "Punk." When her brother was born, she says, "I was called 'the original punk,' and Dick was known as 'the boy-punk,' a reversal of the usual pattern, according to which the girl is only a female version of the true human being, the boy" (Mead, p. 19).

Throughout the early part of Blackberry Winter, Mead attempts to sort out what parts her father, her mother, and her grandmother played in shaping her as a woman, scholar, and imaginative person. Repeatedly she finds difficulty in separating their different contributions. Of her father, for example, she says,

It is hard for me to differentiate what my father contributed to me as a person and what

he contributed to me as a girl learning to know what a woman is and what a man is. He certainly gave me a great deal of affection. He loved to hold my hands and comment on their shape and how they felt, and all my life I have enjoyed using my hands for activity and for communication. He taught me the importance of thinking clearly and of keeping one's premises clear. I learned to value male skills as something he did not have and was somehow diminished for not having. From the beginning I certainly repudiated his fearfulness . . . . (Mead, p.40)

Her mother was more resentful of the condition of woman than her grandmother was, but,

As it was, the two women I knew best were mothers and had professional training. So I had professional training. So I had no reason to doubt that brains were suitable for a woman. And as I had my father's kind of mind--which was also his mother's--I learned that the mind is not sex-typed. (Mead, p. 55)

Though Mead "took pride in being unlike other children and in living in a household that was itself unique," she also sometimes envied children from other kinds of homes: "I wanted to have a locket, like other little girls, and to wear a habit with ribbons and fluffy petticoats instead of the sensible bloomers that very advanced mothers put on their little daughters so they could climb trees" (Mead, p. 18). Mead's bright crusading mother is said to have told her son-in-law, Leo Rosten, "Margaret wanted a little rosebud mother" (Mead, p. 20). With her mother and grandmother as models, however, she never doubted that she would "be both a professional woman and a wife and mother" (Mead, p. 85).

The majority of autobiographers in this study,

however, unlike Mead, as adults must deal with negative forms of sex-role imprinting in childhood. Many must deal with linguistic restrictions they were taught early. Jessamyn West, the novelist, for example, in Hide and Seek: A Continuing Journey, says that in her generation girls were taught "to believe that dirty words were purely a masculine prerogative, a man's 'crest and spurs,' . . . a secondary sexual attribute, on par with big biceps and a hairy chest."<sup>5</sup> A nice girl used euphemistic language, and West details a long list of substitute terms she was trained to use:

We had bottoms, but not butts or asses. We had stomachs, but not bellies. We had bowels, but not guts. We did not piss, we peed, when young. . . . We certainly did not shit. (West, p. 142)

West says she did not know what her parents called sexual intercourse "because we didn't know that such an activity existed. Whatever that word was, I'm sure it wasn't Son's [her brother's]" (West, p. 142). However, the language she was allowed to use was far more liberal than that her mother had been allowed to use as a young girl. Once, her mother

had been sent to her room for not skipping, as she read aloud to her parents, the words 'bucking bronco.' I don't know what Grandpa and Grandma thought a bronco was, but a 'buck' was a male animal; and a male animal meant sex; and a well-brought-up girl found ways of side-stepping words which suggested that unmentionable fact. (West, pp. 141-142)

The euphemistic language required of nice girls

paralleled the ignorance in which they were kept about normal sexual functions. Ruth McKenney in her quasi-autobiographical My Sister Eileen describes her and her sister's hunger for such information in a story about the newspaper serial, "Chickie," which was widely (and "feverishly") read in secret by people in her circle because "Ministers . . . denounced it from the pulpit. Schoolteachers told their pupils it was vulgar and immoral. Mothers tried to prevent their little ones from peeping at the unchaste columns of the Press."6 Even Ruth's and Eileen's "high-toned" Aunt Polly was caught "red-handed, eagerly drinking down the newest installment of 'Chickie'" and bought off her nieces "with new dimes and a promise of two ice-cream cones." McKenney says, "That incident undid all the lessons we had learned at the East Cleveland Evangelical Church and taught us that duplicity exists even among the pure in heart" (McKenney, p. 81).

"Chickie" was quite a revolutionary serial because Chickie "really was seduced," rather than following the usual pattern of escaping her awful fate (McKenney, p. 82). After that "Chickie's life went to hell, fast" (McKenney, p. 84). Her father became sick, her lover deserted her, and Chickie discovered "elementary biology." But not directly. One day, having nursed her father back to recovery for months, Chickie

slipped into a skirt and sweater and took a gander at herself in the mirror. From there on, the installment was breathless. She looked and looked. And then again. A slow flush mounted to her beautiful cheek. Tears came to her eyes. She wiped them off her cheeks to get another look in the mirror. Then she fell on her bed, sobbing. (Continued in tomorrow's Cleveland Press). (McKenney, p. 85)

Eileen and Ruth, totally befuddled about the real nature of Chickie's problem, finally overheard their Aunt Molly telling her husband, "Just imagine, John! Poor Chickie is going to have a baby" (McKenney, p. 85).

The discovery that Chickie was with child (the word pregnant seems to have been language too frank for young women to hear until the sixties) sent horror through Ruth and Eileen. They associated Chickie's vanity (she looked in the mirror) with Chickie's pregnancy, and instantly stopped looking in mirrors, until Ruth "forgot and looked one day, and nothing happened, so we got over our panic. But it certainly put a mark on us" (McKenney, p. 85).

The story of Chickie ended happily. Chickie married her ever-faithful, loving boyfriend, "stopped using lipstick and settled down to be a good wife" (McKenney, p. 85). McKenney describes this whole Chickie episode as having "set back our knowledge of the world by at least four years." Nobody cared to enlighten the female children (McKenney, p. 84).

Though linguistic ignorance and ignorance of even elementary facts of female biology permeate these autobio-

graphies, various other kinds of societal repression and suppression shaped the sex-role development of many of these women. For example, Helen Woodward's family (Three Flights Up), like other immigrant families they knew, tried to adapt themselves, however awkwardly, to societal expectations. Despite the fact that her mother had excellent business sense and talent and her father had none, Woodward says, "it was Papa who was supposed to own a little business, and he simply could not do it. It was Mama who could have done it, and she simply did not have the time."<sup>7</sup> The result was continual, grinding poverty for the entire family.

The adult Helen realizes that she was jealous of her brother Benny, on whom all family hopes were placed, simply because he was a boy, not because he had any special abilities. The other families her family knew placed similar, if equally unrealistic, hopes in their sons to become rich and famous because "The thought that we, like themselves, would go through day-to-day fretting fear about money was unbearable-and therefore inconceivable" (Woodward, p. 173). The only girl in the family expected to plan for her own future was Millie, who was scarred by exzema and, therefore, considered unmarriageable (Woodward, p. 171).

The other girls in the family tried to compensate for their diminished expectations. Dolly became a tomboy,



"as good as a boy in any kind of climbing or running game." Helen competed intellectually and kept doing so:

When I grew up I kept on by competing with men. That is why, when I was in the advertising business, most of my work was advertising to men. And that too is why I am so pleased when anyone says that I have a man's mind and a masculine directness. (Woodward, p. 46)

Looking back, she recognizes that her adult attitudes are based on childhood imprinting; to her the really valuable person is masculine.

Another adult manifestation of this imprinting is that she cannot ask for anything twice. She traces this to her father's attitude--"the first no was final." She says,

I envy women who can plead or who can ask again when something has been refused. I know how to keep on fighting, but I don't know how to keep on asking. The world expects a woman to coax and even to wheedle when she wants anything. I know some women who cannot do so, but they have all suffered from their disability. If a woman asks for a thing only once, the world is apt to think she does not really want it much. (Woodward, pp. 69-70)

Helen Flexner, in her powerful autobiography and tribute to her mother, A Quaker Childhood, is revolted by the fact that her sister Carey and her mother needed to use tactics such as pleading and crying in order to insure that Carey would be allowed to go to college. When all reasoning with her husband failed, her mother and Carey resorted to voluminous streams of tears, which

eventually wore him down. Helen Flexner finds it dreadful that her mother "had been forced to employ a method so alien to her noble courage. . . "8 :

Without suffering that indignity she should have been able to give her talented eldest daughter, on whose career her heart was set, the education she herself had longed for and been denied by her destiny. That my father, loving her as I knew he did, should have forced streams of tears from my mother's eyes was a terrible proof of the power exerted by prejudice on the men of his generation. (Flexner, pp. 88-89)

This pain was made more intense because she knew that even an average son would have been educated as a matter of course (Flexner, p. 86). Carey was far above average, intellectually, but was forced to squeeze four years of education into two, "preparing herself for a career as thoroughly as if she were a man, in spite of the fact that when she returned home she might find no suitable career open to her . . . " (Flexner, p. 78).

Helen was only eleven when Carey and her mother waged their war of tears, but already she "had begun to perceive the possible disadvantage of being born a girl" (Flexner, p. 78). When later she read Elizabeth Barrett Browning's Aurora Leigh she "meditated earnestly on the question it raised concerning the destiny of women" (Flexner, p. 269).

Flexner's mother was prestigious in the Quaker community in which they lived, so the recognition that her mother's position was actually subordinate to her

father's was slow in coming to her. But it arrived as a "passionate interest in righting the wrongs of society to my mother's sex and my own" (Flexner, p. 82), prefiguring her future leadership role in the women's suffrage movement.

Flexner deals methodically with the question, "Why can't women have a sense of humor when redressing wrongs to their sex?" Her thoughtful answer (supported by examples of women who, as children, witnessed the sexual repression of their mothers) addresses not only women's lack of "a sense of humor when redressing wrongs to their sex" but men's lack of humor when redressing wrongs to their mothers and wives. Flexner says, "Indignation for what is felt to be a flagrant injustice to ourselves or to someone we love arouses passionate zeal even in mild-mannered people." Many men are excessively zealous in the cause of women because "When a sense of injustice to one's own self is added to a man's more impersonal motive, the temptation to go to unreasonable extremes becomes greater" (Flexner, p. 82).

These perceptions are as relevant today as they were in 1941, when Flexner published A Quaker Childhood. They are echoed in the life of Isadora Duncan, who, at the age of twelve, read George Eliot's Adam Bede in which a child is born to an unmarried young woman who suffers disgrace because of it. So outraged was Duncan at the injustice to Eliot's young woman that this, along with

the sufferings caused by the divorce of her parents when she was very young, made her resolve

to fight against marriage and for the emancipation of women and for the right for every woman to have a child or children as it pleased her, and to uphold the right and her virtue . . . .<sup>9</sup>

Her anger against the "the slavish condition of women," especially married women, is summarized by her statement: "It seems to me that if the marriage ceremony is needed as a protection to insure the enforced support of children, then you are marrying a man who, you suspect, would under certain conditions, refuse to support his children, and it is a pretty low-down proposition" (Duncan, p. 170). Such revulsion against marriage is not unusual in these autobiographies, though it is seldom long-lived. When, at the age of fourteen, Elizabeth Adams, later the writer of Dark Symphony, was forced to put her father's smoking jacket and slippers beside his chair every night as training to be a "self-sacrificing, patient, tolerant and industrious wife" she rebelled: "Who would want to get married, anyway, I asked myself, if it meant waiting on someone else the rest of one's life!"<sup>10</sup> Isadora Duncan, in fact, sees the dominant note of her own childhood as "the constant spirit of revolt against the narrowness of the society in which we lived . . . ." (Duncan, p. 20). At least she had a mother supportive of her ambitions to be a

great dancer.

Agnes de Mille's family, endowed with far greater resources, was not so supportive at first. Her father "considered dancing at best exhibitionistic acrobatics, and certainly a field that offered neither intellectual nor spiritual challenge."<sup>11</sup> In addition, dancing had long been associated with prostitution. de Mille patiently understands that, behind her father's reservations, "is the pattern of all thoughtful and fastidious men for the past two thousand years," but her greatest insight is that "Men did not want their women dancing publicly; they recognized in the performance an unconscious rivalry" (de Mille, p. 70). Largely because of her mother's support, de Mille became a dancer. Her father had to live with the reality that his daughter's life interests lay outside the home circle.

Ilka Chase, the actress-writer, in Free Admission, however, transformed a repressively close tie to the home circle into a path to graduate school. Having five younger brothers and sisters, she was often stationed in the family library to rock the cradle of one of them while others did kitchen work: ". . . in those long, slow hours I could read, exempt from any charge of idleness which sometimes fell upon those who devoured books during working time."<sup>12</sup> She read all the classics which future college students would be ignorant of because

"their brothers and sisters were never rocked" (Chase, p. 46).

Because sex-division of labor was so common in her childhood, her father played only a tiny part in another significant household task, the nightly putting to bed of the current baby at 6:00 p.m. A procession consisting of her mother bearing the washed and blanket-wrapped baby, followed by various children bearing bottles, medicines, and diapers, would stop briefly at the library so that their father could "look with pride and approbation upon the baby" (Chase, p. 49). Chase remembers that the children

did not think it strange that my father took no part in the evening rite. Early we took it for granted that he, like the other fathers we knew, was supposed to be manually ineffective as far as life indoors was concerned. (Chase, p. 49)

Of the girls, only Ilka was allowed to do tasks outdoors in the stables, her mother "consenting on the ground that I was of less service in the house" (Chase, p. 49).

The push-pull of ambition vs. restrictive traditional sex roles is epitomized by Helen Woodward's description of the personality differences between her mother and father in Three Flights Up. Woodward attributes her own lack of participation in labor and radical activities to the tension between the two because

every time I start to step forth into Papa's world, I am pulled back into Mama's. Papa would say: "Look what's happening in the world.

How terrible that is! How marvelous this is!' While in the face of crime and disaster, Mama would say, 'Shut your eyes. Don't look.' When we were walking along the street and she saw a dead cat in the gutter, she would say 'Don't look.' and shudder away from it. (Woodward, pp. 167-168)

Many of these autobiographers are retrospectively grateful, as Margaret Mead so clearly shows, that they were pushed, because of at least one parent's vision, toward the larger world, rather than held back into the safety of a retreat from it. Sally Carrighar in Home To The Wilderness thinks back to early walks around Cleveland with her father on which they viewed, "best of all, blast furnaces": "Someone once said, 'Your father must have been trying to turn you into a boy. He'd probably wanted his first child to be a son'."13 Carrighar realizes this is possible, but doubts it because her father had grown up in an adventurous household consisting of a mother and four sisters and "thought of women as human beings . . . .," assuming "that they, even one very young, would be interesting to him." From her father Carrighar "did absorb the impression that girls and women reached out for life eagerly and . . . it was natural for them to be interested in absolutely everything" (Carrighar, p. 3). This attitude stood her in good stead in her wilderness experience later in life.

The search for female sex-role models and the constant frustration of that search is nowhere more

powerful or powerfully described than in Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior. Kingston, like Jade Snow Wong in Fifth Chinese Daughter, was born into a Chinese-American culture in which females were valued much less than males. Sara Blackburn in a commentary on The Woman Warrior describes the book as "almost a psychic transcript of every woman I know---class, age, race, or ethnicity be damned. . . Kingston's ambivalent response to growing up in this family and culture evokes the history of women around the world."<sup>14</sup> Thus the book can be seen as a kind of primer on sex-role development across cultures, extreme though it may seem in places.

The book begins with a section called "No-Name Women" about Kingston's aunt in China who became pregnant while her husband was away, was subjected to enormous pressure and harassment (as was her family), and ended up jumping down the well with her newborn infant, victims of a system which would not seek out the child's father for equal treatment. Set against this image of woman is the tale of the woman warrior, the story which gives the book its title and Kingston her aspirations:

When we Chinese girls listened to the adults talk story, we learned that we failed if we grew up to be but wives or slaves. We could be heroines, swordswomen. Even if she had to rage across all China, a swordswoman got even with anybody who hurt her family. Perhaps women were once so dangerous that they had to have their feet bound. It was a woman who invented white crane boxing only two hundred years ago, trained at the Shao-lin



temple, where there lived an order of fighting monks.<sup>15</sup>

Kingston and her autobiographical journey from China to America exists, then, between two poles--the fear of being a wife or slave (virtually synonymous) and the impossible dream of becoming a heroine, a woman warrior. As Colette Dowling in The Cinderella Complex has pointed out, this latter dream is as full of fear as the fear of being a wife.<sup>16</sup> In "The Other: A Study of the Persona In Several Contemporary Women's Autobiographies" Jan Zlotnik Schmidt says, "Each chapter [of The Woman Warrior] merges family history, folk tales and personal history to illuminate how Kingston's cultural inheritance shaped her identity. The memories incrementally build this theme: the woman's position as an 'Other' in Chinese culture."<sup>17</sup> An "other's" identity "depends on how others (particularly men) view her . . ."<sup>18</sup> In her seminal work A Room Of One's Own, for example, Virginia Woolf describes women as ". . . looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size."<sup>19</sup> A looking glass is one-dimensional, despite the appearance that it reflects depth and contour.

The dualism of the tales told by Kingston's mother is striking; though her mother said Maxine would grow up to be a wife and slave, she yet gave Maxine hope by telling her the story of the warrior woman. Maxine's

mother, herself, had worked hard to become a doctor in China, despite the fact that she gave up both career and assertiveness when she came to the United States. Ironically, as Stephanie A. Demetra Kopoulous points out in "The Metaphysics of Matrilinearism in Women's Autobiography . . . ,"

At the same time that she (Kingston's mother) threatens Kingston with this image of the worthless, good-only-for barter woman . . . Brave Orchid demonstrates and teaches her as a ferocious and compelling Amazon archetype . . . . Because it is impossible to perceive the true outlines of the mother's life and character, she becomes a more and more powerful figure in her ambiguity, her ruthless life force, and her almost terrifying energy. 20

Given the choice of accepting a lesser role or fighting for a greater one, Brave Orchid's daughter, Maxine, chooses to fight, producing an extraordinarily vivid account of the price she paid, as a child, to become a warrior.

Part of that price was the constant anxiety that her parents would return with their children to China. Despite the fact that Kingston regularly received straight A's in American schools, "In China there were solutions for what to do with little girls who ate up food [which would otherwise have been available to male children] and threw tantrums. You can't eat straight A's" (Kingston, p. 54). Kingston feared that once back in China her parents would sell their female children or her father "would marry two or three more wives who

would spatter cooking oil on our bare toes and lie that we were crying for naughtiness" (Kingston, p. 116). While the adults pored and "wept over the letters [from China] about the neighbors gone berserk turning Communist" Kingston says she was "secretly glad":

As long as the aunts kept disappearing and the uncles dying after unspeakable tortures, my parents would prolong their Gold Mountain stay. We could start spending our fare money on a car and chairs, a stereo. (Kingston, pp. 221-222)

What Kingston did not know about the new China, though, and which she never learned from her parents was that the status of women in China was improving, an irony not lost on the adult she becomes. But

Nobody wrote to tell us that Mao himself had been matched to an older girl when he was a child and that he was freeing women from prisons, where they had been put for refusing the businessmen their parents had picked as husbands. Nobody told us that the Revolution (the Liberation) was against girl slavery and girl infanticide (a village-wide party if it's a boy). Girls would no longer have to kill themselves rather than get married. May the Communists light up the house on a girl's birthday. (Kingston, p. 222)

Kingston's concept of the Old China remained tied to the one her father described: "Chinese smeared bad daughters-in-law with honey and tied them naked on top of ants' nests. . . . A husband may kill a wife who disobeys him. Confucius said that" (Kingston, 225).

Another part of the price paid to become a warrior was the great pain caused daily by deep prejudice against

female children; what D. H. Lawrence in his poem "Snake" called "the voices of . . . human education" said,<sup>21</sup> "There's no profit in raising girls. Better to raise geese than girls" and "When you raise girls, you're raising children for strangers" (Kingston, p. 54). Her parents were ashamed to take Kingston and her sisters out together because the emigrant villagers would say, "One girl and another girl" (Kingston, p. 55). When she and her sisters ate at the house of their three female cousins their great-grandfather would roar "Maggots! Where are my grandsons? I want grandsons . . . . Look at the maggots chew!" (Kingston, p. 222). When a male was finally born in her family she resented the wild celebrations of her brother's birth. People did not stop saying "All girls," but, as she says,

I learned new grievances. 'Did you roll an egg on my face like that when I was born?' 'Did you have a full-month party for me?' 'Did you turn on all the lights?' 'Did you send my picture to Grandmother?' 'Why not? Because I'm a girl? Is that why not?' (Kingston, p. 55)

The answer was bitter to her and inescapable. When she went to Berkeley in the sixties, the grievances did not stop; at Berkeley she marched against the Vietnam war, but it was only her brother who fought in Vietnam and returned to be welcomed "with chickens and pigs." If she had been able to go to Vietnam her culture would have thought, "I would not come back: females desert

families" (Kingston, p. 56). She felt stymied at every turn of her life.

When she was in high school others said Kingston was making straight A's "for the good of my future husband's family, not my own." Kingston decided to pay yet another part of the price of liberation. Since she never planned to marry, she decided to ". . . show my mother and father and the nosey emigrant villagers that girls have no outward tendency. I stopped getting straight A's" (Kingston, p. 56). Though she denied herself academic excellence for a time, she also refused to perform traditional feminine roles. She would not cook, broke dishes when she washed them, and told others that she wanted to be a lumberjack in Oregon when she grew up. Such bitterness carried over into adulthood. Kingston says,

Even now, unless I'm happy, I burn the food when I cook. I do not feed people. I let the dirty dishes rot. I eat at other peoples' tables but won't invite them to mine, where the dishes are rotting. (Kingston, p. 56)

The power of her negative attitude and words such as not and burn show that Kingston is still paying a heavy price for liberation.

Kingston's description of the obstacles she put in the paths of the young male immigrants, who looked at her and her sisters as potential wives, is powerful. Refusing to be bought (or to have her sisters bought),

she put on an act in a "dried-duck voice" to prove that she was lame, clumsy, stupid, and bad-tempered. She succeeded: "The young men stopped visiting; not one came back" (Kingston, p. 226). She shrieked at her mother,

I can do ghost [non-Chinese] things even better than ghosts can . . . . I am not going to be a slave or a wife . . . . I'm going to get scholarships, and I'm going away. And at college I'll have the people I like for friends. (Kingston, p. 234)

Another part of the price of freedom from the wife/slave mentality was that Kingston and her friends had to invent "an American-feminine speaking personality" because "Normal Chinese women's voices are strong and bossy. We American-Chinese girls had to whisper to make ourselves American-feminine" (Kingston, p. 200).

There are multiple ironies in this statement. Chinese women who thought of themselves primarily as slaves, nevertheless, had strong, bossy voices. Recent Chinese immigrants, particularly, were ". . . shouters, hollering face to face." The language, itself, Kingston says, was ". . . chingchong ugly, to American ears, not beautiful like Japanese sayanora words with the consonants and vowels as regular as Italian" (Kingston, p. 199). The American voices, which would seem to have represented more liberated females, were soft, withdrawn, by contrast. To acquire an American voice required an extraordinary effort to restrain one's cultural impulses.

Maxine chose silence, herself, beginning in kindergarten, because she was intimidated by the difficulties of having to speak English publicly. At Chinese School, which the children attended from 5-7:30 p.m. daily, though, most of the children found loud voices and ram-bunctious behavior accepted.

Kingston and her sister whispered too softly in public school, so they were annually referred to a speech therapist for whom their voices were "unpredictable normal" (Kingston, p. 200). The price she paid for teaching herself this alien speaking personality (when she finally arrived at a middle road between the strong, bossy Chinese and the assumed American whispering) was great. She exemplifies it in her story about her persecution of a quiet Chinese girl who would read aloud in class but would not talk. Kingston says simply that she hated the girl for everything she did and was. One day Kingston found her alone and confronted her:

. . . You're a plant. Do you know that? That's all you are if you don't talk. . . . You think somebody's going to marry you, is that it? . . . . You're so dumb! Why do I waste time on you? . . . . I'm going to do this for your own good . . . . Don't you dare tell anyone I've been bad to you. Talk. Please talk!  
(Kingston, pp. 209-210)

Jan Zlotnik Schmidt interprets this vindictive scene as the result of Kingston's acquiescence to ". . . the behavior ordained by the social code" of the Chinese-

Americans, which meant that she had refused to divulge "any information about her family or personal life."<sup>22</sup> Her rage at this necessity had been repressed until it burst forth in her confrontation with the other girl who most completely lived up to the traditional vow of giving no information to Ghosts--in this case, Americans. Schmidt says that this violent scene "suggests Kingston's need, unrealized at this age, expressed later in her adulthood, to shed the tradition's conception of the behavior deemed proper for a female."<sup>23</sup> Ultimately, to shed such behavior Kingston must "leave home in order to see the world logically, logic the new way of seeing" (Kingston, p. 237).

Kingston is now on her own and a distinguished writer, but the old shibboleths lurk just around the corner. When she goes home to see her family (the visits never last long because they are emotionally unhealthy for her), she says, "I wrap my American successes around me like a private shawl; I am worthy of eating the food" (Kingston, p. 62). But sometimes she feels bitter because:

Nobody supports me at the expense of his own adventure. Then I get bitter: no one supports me; I am not loved enough to be supported. That I am not a burden has to compensate for the sad envy when I look at women loved enough to be supported. Even now China wraps double binds around my feet. (Kingston, p. 62)

Those "double binds" of which Kingston speaks are



precisely those which Jade Snow Wong described in her 1941 autobiography, ones that made her feel "unalterably less significant than the new son in their family."<sup>24</sup> In Wong's book, however, the father played a larger role than the mother, and was more open to new ways than Kingston's father, even if he did put barriers in front of his daughters. In some ways, Wong's father's attitudes toward others were actually in conflict with those toward his own daughters. Wong's father believed that women had the right to work in order to improve their own economic status. Because these women were caught in the double bind of being forced to stay at home, while, at the same time needing extra income, "Mr. Wong took their work to them, installed and maintained their sewing machines, taught them how to sew, and collected the finished overalls"(Wong, p. 5).

This quotation illustrates a striking characteristic of the book: like only a few other autobiographers (Gertrude Stein in The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas, for example) Jade Snow Wong writes of herself in the third person. She explains why she does so:

Although a 'first person singular' book, this story is written in the third person from Chinese habit. The submergence of the individual is literally practiced. In written Chinese, prose or poetry, the word 'I' almost never appears, but is understood. In corresponding with an older person like my father, I would write in words half the size of the regular ideographs, 'small daughter Jade Snow,' when re-

ferring to myself; to one of contemporary age I would put in small characters, 'younger sister'--but never 'I.' Should my father, who owes me no respect, write to me, he would still refer to himself in the third person, 'Father.' Even written in English, an 'I' book by a Chinese would seem outrageously immodest to anyone raised in the spirit of Chinese propriety. (Wong, p.vii)

Wong's explanation here may also again illustrate the double bind. Wanting to break free to new career and life patterns (and succeeding by the end of her book), she, nevertheless, feels constrained by linguistic traditions of long standing. Thirty-five years later, Maxine Hong Kingston felt no such constraints. She is, simply, delighted that she writes so well in an acquired language--better than most native speakers.

Margaret Mead's Blackberry Winter, discussed earlier in this chapter, and Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior may be seen as polar opposites in any discussion of the development of sex roles. Mead is encouraged by family (her sex is irrelevant to them), to become her best--and she does. Kingston is discouraged by family because of her sex from pursuing her dreams--and succeeds in spite of the obstacles, as did her predecessors Jade Snow Wong, Helen Woodward, and many other women.

But both Mead and Kingston are insistent that understanding the functioning, vital adult woman who emerges at the end of each of their books requires understanding the way in which these women's views of themselves as

females developed from infancy onward. Kingston has taken the path of the warrior, though she says frequently that she is a timid one. She became the fantasy possibility always open to Chinese women if they were willing to pay the enormous price exacted of non-conformists. Mead--combining her father's passion for knowledge, her mother's passion for excellence, and her grandmother's confidence that family and profession were not incompatible--set off for New Guinea to begin a career that would revolutionize anthropology. But unlike Margaret Mead, who was accepted as a female expected to achieve from the beginning, many of the women studied were not accepted until they had overcome the enormous cultural obstacles placed in front of them.

Jade Snow Wong's father, finally proud of Wong's accomplishments as a potter, expressed his pride by telling her a story. When he first came to America, a cousin wrote to him, asking him to return to China. He had kept a carbon of his reply to the cousin all these years:

You do not realize the shameful and degraded position into which the Chinese culture has pushed its women. Here in America, the Christian concept allows women their freedom and individuality. I wish my daughters to have this Christian opportunity. I am hoping that some day I may be able to claim that by my stand I have washed away the former disgraces suffered by the women of our family. (Wong, p. 246)

Then Wong's father turned to Jade Snow and paid her the highest compliment possible, "And who would have thought that you, my Fifth Daughter Jade Snow, would prove today that my words of many years ago were words of true prophecy?" (Wong, p. 246)

The testimony of these female autobiographers is that to become full human beings they have to transcend the environments from which they come, to perform herculean tasks of "pulling themselves up by their own bootstraps"-to become women warriors. It is no surprise that the psychic cost is often so high. Even those who come from unusually supportive homes must clash finally with the prejudices of the less-enlightened world. It is not surprising that there are few women warriors. It is amazing that there are so many.

## NOTES

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## Chapter 5: Distance from "Home"

When author Ruth Suckow returned to the church in her hometown where her father had been minister during her childhood years, she thought about the distance between what she once was and what she had become. For her, the visit was a healthy one. She says,

The effect of my return was to lead my feelings outward as much as inward. The visit was more in the nature of a confirmation or affirmation of the validity and value of early memories, than a binding return. According to . . . tradition, I left there ready to go on.<sup>1</sup>

"I left there ready to go on": These words represent the American cultural ideal for childhood--that childhood provides the support structure for a healthy adult life. The mature adult literally "grows out" of childhood, though remaining a product of that early experience.

In The Childhood Emotional Maturity and Dependence Leon J. Saul describes the ingredients which foster proper growth patterns from childhood into adulthood: "to be given proper conditions of warmth, light, nourishment, and protection, and then be allowed to unfold in their own way with only such interference as is really necessary."<sup>2</sup> Children kept in emotional turmoil by a parent tend to replicate childhood patterns in the treatment of their spouses and children. Likewise, adults who refuse to let go of childish responses and take responsibility for their own emotional maturity have not "left there [home] ready to go on."

It, therefore, becomes imperative to understand both the adult writing an autobiography and the child being written about by that autobiographer. Virginia Woolf in "A Sketch of the Past" discusses the reasons that so many autobiographers fail: "They leave out the person to whom things happened. The reason is that it is so difficult to describe any human being. So they say: 'This is what happened'."<sup>3</sup>

The successful autobiographer, Elizabeth Bruss says, is one for whom the writing is a continual process of discovering

something . . . just outside the autobiographer's immediate field of vision, something he can reach only by turning his text back upon itself to examine the vantage point rather than the view. Thus an autobiography typically calls attention to its own devices, to the progress it is making in unfolding its tale, to its successes and even more often its failures to capture and communicate its subject.<sup>4</sup>

If "turning his text back upon itself to examine the vantage point rather than the view" is the task of a successful autobiographer, a major task of anyone writing about autobiography is to give the vantage point substantial attention and to determine the way in which the vantage point shapes the view. The autobiographer is the ostensible authority on everything discussed. The reader, however, may see aspects of the autobiographer revealed which the autobiographer does not appear to be aware of.

Further, the style and tone in which the autobiographer



chooses to write says much about the psychic distance the autobiographer is from that material itself. Sometimes the distance is not as great as the autobiographer might suppose. An examination and comparison of Home to the Wilderness by Sally Carrighar, Facts of Life by Maureen Howard, Looking Back by Joyce Maynard, and The Hearthstone of My Heart by Elizabeth Borton de Treviño reveals major differences in the ways in which the writers, deliberately or not, distance themselves as adults from their formative childhood experiences. Such examination assesses the degree to which these writers left home "ready to go on" (Suckow, p. 188).<sup>5</sup>

In her Foreward to her autobiography Home to the Wilderness, nature writer Sally Carrighar discusses the problems of writing an autobiography, chiefly the notion of an English critic that an autobiographer should be engaged in "withholding nothing."<sup>6</sup> She accepted this as a challenge and "made a start to see how it would go. And since the way forward was descent, it was easier to keep on than turn back" (Carrighar, p. vi). That descent, she says

requires an attempt to reach absolute honesty and that effort itself pushes one's consciousness down to a lower level . . . . it becomes necessary to explore depths that may become uncomfortably obscure--but not too dark to see that a precipice is there, and to realize that one only jumps over it at one's peril. (p. vi)

Having survived the drop over the cliff (" . . . the

terror is here recorded," she says) she can look back on its benefits: "loss of a degree of loneliness, a sense of coming back to a world where other people are now more accessible" (Carrighar, p. viii).

The story of Carrighar's experiences as the child of a terrifying mother might well have been discussed in the second chapter of this study, "Recreating the Feel of Childhood"; it is discussed here because the real story of Home to the Wilderness is the way in which Sally Carrighar, as an adult, worked through the emotional wreckage of childhood to become a successful, productive writer and person. Further, she always discusses those childhood experiences in the context of her adult development, describing in detail in the second part of the book the way she worked through the problems they presented for her.

The first nine chapters in Home in the Wilderness describe Sally Carrighar's pilgrimage toward a more satisfying adulthood, "Home", described in the tenth chapter of the book. The title of the first chapter, "Blast Furnace," is a double entendre, capsulizing the positive relationship she had with her father and the bleak, negative one she had with her mother. Carrighar begins the chapter by describing the Sunday afternoon excursions on which her father regularly took her "to see the industrial marvels of Cleveland, Ohio" when she was four and five (Carrighar,

p. 1). Her favorite trip was to the blast furnaces, where her father, an engineer by trade but a poet in temperament, would explain the processes involved in refining iron ore. The memory of these excursions remained a powerful bond between them during the later years when they could no longer spend time together. The Sunday trips were terminated because her mother wanted "the close tie between her husband and child . . . loosened" (Carrighar, p. 4).

The joy of these trips had always ended at the door of their house because, Carrighar says, her mother "would not let me share with her anything that was in my mind . . . . After I understood that she did not want to listen I would tell my father about my childish adventures but ways were invented to interrupt those conversations, too" (Carrighar, p. 5). Therefore, silence which "lasted forever" came between Sally and her father (Carrighar, p. 6). The silence was broken only at the end of her father's life, as Carrighar tells the reader in the last chapter, shortly before the publication of Carrighar's first book, One Day at Beetle Rock:

he had read the two stories and knew that a book had been sold. Best from my standpoint, he knew me at last as I really was, not as I had been described [by her mother] for most of my life. We had a brief time of understanding and love . . . . (Carrighar, pp. 297-298)

She never mentioned her mother's antagonism toward her to her father.

One of the most powerful parts of Home to the Wilderness

occurs in the first chapter of the book; three brief paragraphs (one a single sentence) describe the physical aversion of Carrighar's mother to touching the little girl, a physical aversion which continued unabated throughout the mother's ninety-plus years, though "eventually we even drew fairly close to each other in letters" (Carrighar, p. 8). Sometimes the child's longing for her mother's touch would overcome her. Carrighar says,

. . . when she was sitting relaxed and looking beautiful sometimes I wished so much to be near her that I would come up to her knee. With a shudder, as if she had been touched by a snake or a lizard, she would start up from her chair, and if in passing along a corridor we happened to brush each other, she would involuntarily shiver. (Carrighar, p. 8)

Although Carrighar's mother sewed well, she would not make her daughter dresses because to do so would have meant touching the child in order to fit them.

Always present here, as throughout the book, is Carrighar's systematic effort to explain why things happened as they did; again and again a poignant incident or series of incidents is juxtaposed against information Carrighar gleaned much later in life that helped her to understand the earlier event. Time and physical distance, the objectivity that intensive psychological counseling brought, and many years as a student of and writer about the natural world have given Carrighar the ability both to describe and analyze, sometimes virtually simultaneously.

Carrighar, even as a child, wondered why her mother hated her so and correctly attributed it to her difficult birth. But she turned her mother's aversion to her inward: "My mother's hatred was such a denial of normal maternal feeling that I thought of it as one would of a congenital deformity in myself" (Carrighar, p. 9).

During her birth her mother's coccyx broke and Sally's face was smashed in, a deformity corrected by surgery when she was twelve. Sally also was nerve-damaged at birth. As an adult she searches for the answer to her question, "Does a difficult birth, of even a high-strung and disfigured child, cause a mother to feel revulsion against the child for all of her lifetime?" (Carrighar, pp. 11-12). The answer came from Dr. Susanna Isaacs of London, who told her that her mother was psychotic, "a type of psychosis . . . often no more than a narrow gap in an otherwise perfectly rational mind. It is not inborn. Usually it is the result of some highly traumatic experience" (Carrighar, p. 15). This meant that Sally was always seen as a threat to her mother. "The delusion of being manaced is typical of a paranoid psychosis," Dr. Isaacs told her (Carrighar, p. 15). "You were fortunate that you lived to grow up" (Carrighar, p. 16). Horrible as that truth was, it at least gave an explanation for what, before, was unexplainable. Her mother was among the "repertoire of terrors" she lived with as a small

child, in addition to "the rumbling of horses' hooves on the bridge at my grandfather's mill, the swift flow of the river, the cow in the pasture, the sight of the dark watery depths of a toilet tank." She says,

I can remember a Sunday breakfast when I was small enough to be sitting in a highchair with a hambone teething ring on a string around my neck, and I seemed to sense danger from my mother, who sat on my left, but I was exquisitely happy because this was a morning when my father, on my right, would not be going away and I would be safe all day. Already I had a feeling of something amiss in the emotional atmosphere of our house. (Carrighar, p. 11)

This feeling that she was not safe meant "that anything I might do, believing it harmless, could be considered so wicked that I might have to die for it . . . . I did develop an unchildlike carefulness" (Carrighar, p. 16). As an adult, in order to find a real home, a place of tranquillity and safety, she turns to the least likely place, wilderness, which contains wild animals who seemed to turn to her instinctively as one sympathetic to and understanding of them.

Though the cumulative effect on the reader is horror at the behavior of her mother, Carrighar does not over-write, portray her mother as a monster, or milk the reader for pity. Indeed, the entire book is her attempt "to be straight towards . . . experience, in the hope that honestly seen experience becomes exchangeable" (Carrighar, p. viii). Frequently, Carrighar's attempt to be balanced is buttressed with psychological knowledge or insight she has gained

from sessions with either Dr. Isaacs or Dr. Renz, as if their scientific presences help to shore up her new-found strength and understanding.

Carrighar's vulnerability to her mother was the cause of virtually all the threatening experiences of childhood, offset only by caring from her father, grandparents, and her cousin Donovan. Carrighar describes the key elements of the most terrible experience of her life in one paragraph, a paragraph made doubly terrible by its step-by-step terseness. At the age of six, Sally decided not to have anything more to do with Elizabeth, the distasteful daughter of one of her mother's friends. Her mother was so angered by this that, finding her alone one day, she physically attacked her:

She was striking me on my head, my body, anywhere, and soon, with one arm binding my shoulders, her fingers had tightened upon my throat with a strangling grip. I tried to tear myself loose but fury had given her an iron strength; I tried to cry out but my throat was closed. All I could see, with my head bent back, were two high casement windows, oblongs of light which swiftly darkened until they were black. (They would be a significant memory later.) Yet I was still faintly conscious and struggling when the old lady's cane came tapping up to the open door. As she saw her my mother flung me aside and, passing the elderly relative, she disappeared down the hall. (Carrighar, p. 32)

Carrighar was ill for the entire summer after the episode with a severe tic, unable to begin first grade in the fall because she was too nervous. She recalls, "Waking and sleeping I lived with two nightmares: the

memory of my mother's face as she came into that room, and the pressure of her hand on my neck" (Carrighar, p. 33). Not being able to start school on time was a terrible blow:

Going to school was the objective for which I had fairly pushed myself towards being six--and now I was six and I couldn't go. It seemed my own fault that I could not, because I wasn't brave enough to walk along Euclid Avenue with the other children. It was such a mix-up of fear and disappointment, guilt and self-doubt, that it may be surprising I ever came out of it. (Carrighar, p. 33)

She recovered partially because her friend Jamie, a first grade classmate, walked her to and from school each day. Jamie told her that his father, who worked for a railroad, was going to build a small railroad to connect their two houses with their school. When she excitedly told her mother about these plans her mother exploded at her, "You little fool!" . . . Are you always going to believe what men tell you?" The adult Sally Carrighar realizes, "The remark probably meant that at some time she had mistakenly believed what some man had told her, but it also showed that she didn't understand how much fun it is, at six, to make believe . . ." (Carrighar, p. 34). The six year old Sally, however, had no such understanding. The comment ruined her relationship with the Jamie she now believed to be a liar.

That loss was mitigated, though, by her discovery of music when her parents took her to a concert in the



chapel of Western Reserve University. Stifled by her mother's unwillingness to let her talk freely, she decided that music would be her kind of talk: "I had an almost overwhelming assurance that my doom of silence was simply going to be lifted away," she says (Carrighar, p. 37).

In music lessons and school she found "an escape from personal disaster in impersonal joys and satisfactions" (Carrighar, p. 38). For a long time her goal was to become a professional musician. Chapter One closes with the focus on music.

Chapter Two of Home to the Wilderness, called "Climb a Steep Ladder," describes the family silence from which music was an escape, the birth of a brother, which temporarily diverted her mother's attention from her, a ruptured appendix when she was ten, and an extraordinary friend who died. The ladder image of the chapter's title is an apt one; so great were the emotional and physical burdens Carrighar bore that she wondered whether she would continue to be able to climb to the top of them. She had one startling revelation which gave her valuable, though painful, insight into her mother. Caught in a cyclone on her way to school, Sally sat at school soaking wet, waiting for her mother to come to get her. Finally, she was sent home alone, to a mother angry because Sally was wet (Carrighar, p. 44). Her mother asked nothing about the storm, but on the way back to school several

pieces of an old puzzle fell into place in Carrighar's mind: "my mother wished I was dead." This discovery "let in light." It gave shape to many otherwise unconnected behavior aberrations of her mother and was a kind of freedom: "The important thing now was how to cope with it, how to stay alive" (Carrighar, p. 44). She devised a plan to become her own mother--she stopped doing dangerous things, was more polite and helpful at home, and practiced self-control (Carrighar, p. 45).

Her home environment's rigidity gave her a negative self-image which affected all her relationships; she thought she should not talk to other people because she had a personality repellent to others. At least partially because of her emotional burdens she was a physically sickly child; she had to have an emergency appendectomy and contracted peritonitis, usually fatal in the days before antibiotics. The adult Carrighar attributes her survival to the power of her father's love:

I believe he wished me to live so intently that somehow he made it happen. I knew at the time he was doing it. I knew there was nothing else that could keep me from dying--but I was sure that he would. He gave me my life on that day. His love gave it.

Those who do not have faith in the power of love can say that I'd had a discouraging lack of it and that my father's convincing evidence of his love strengthened my will to live. (Carrighar, pp. 49-50)

Here, as constantly throughout the book, Carrighar pays

homage to those who loved her enough to help to counter-balance her mother's hatred. Another such person described in this chapter was John Craig, a 28 year-old attorney engaged to marry one of Sally's distant relatives. John invited her to become friends with him by telling her, "I hope to find out what goes on in the mind of someone who plays the piano so eloquently." To her this invitation "was a miracle" and Carrighar says, "I turned my face to him as one does to the sun to a warm joining of spirit that was a new experience for one young and lonely, and yet, now, right and natural--even it seemed inevitable (Carrighar, p. 54). One day, for the only time until she was twenty eight, she found herself sobbing out the story of her mother's hatred toward her, symbolized by the attempted murder: "For the first time my emotions and my voice had made a connection, and the loneliness and the fear, the great anxieties of the years were pouring forth in this unfamiliar experience of sharing them (Carrighar, p. 64).

A year after John's marriage her mother, who knew of Sally's friendship with John, brought her a terse message: "I have a letter from Auntie Bess. Your friend John Craig has died. He died last week from pneumonia" (Carrighar, p. 67). There the chapter ends, leaving the reader feeling some of the shock and dismay which Sally must have felt. A key psychological support had

been withdrawn, just as Sally appeared to be emerging from her cocoon of isolation.

Chapter 3, "Legacies From Alice," introduces several additional aspects of conflict and of dawning understanding by Sally, a pattern which repeats itself from beginning to end in Home to the Wilderness. Although such a pattern is common to autobiography, as well as fiction, the savagery of Sally's conflict with her mother and the painfulness of the understanding is not.

Chapter 3 begins calmly, with a discussion of Carrighar's father, a quiet man who brought "sunny amiability" to their home--when he was there (Carrighar, p. 68). The family moved to a flat unexciting Kansas City where her father left them as he travelled widely on business. This was the setting in which "the demons of emotional illness came creeping in closer around us" (Carrighar, p. 68). There is no overt condemnation of her father's leaving the family so isolated and completely on its own, a condemnation which would seem natural since there was evidence that her father was well aware of her mother's animosity toward Sally.

Given the pain of what was soon to follow, Carrighar is tolerant, even tender, toward her mother here. A woman who "needed the balance wheel of a husband's presence," her mother was left to make her own way in a social setting consisting largely of women, in a strange city,

far from longtime friends. Even though "At home she became tense and irritable, . . . the circumstances excuse her" (Carrighar, p. 71).

The short paragraph which follows this statment is a bridge to the menacing situation about to present itself:

At that difficult time her unloved daughter presented her with a crisis. What she had long predicted and dreaded seemed to come true. A five-minute talk might have cleared up the situation but talk was impossible. The lines of communnication between us were almost completely down. (Carrighar, p. 71)

The tone is matter-of-fact.

The crisis came about when pre-teen Sally sought to assuage her loneliness and isolation by befriending a squirrel in the park regularly: "To have found this small friend was a piece of luck too sacred to talk about" (Carrighar, p. 73). Her mother, who called her "little harlot," and her school principal accused her of spending her time with a man. She consoled herself by playing the "Gigue" from Bach's "First Partita," "one of the sunniest melodies ever composed," and imagined herself the twenty-first child of Bach, who fathered twenty children and "still had all this affection left over to send down the centuries to anyone who might need love" (Carrighar, p. 74). Here, again, music provided consolation for her mother's hatred. Since she had so few clues about why she was misunderstood, she was in agony; besides

music, her only other consolation came in the form of a small white dog which followed her home one day and adopted her. Her mother, "showing her terrible face," forced her to abandon the dog (Carrighar, p. 84). Dr. Isaacs later told Sally that she "considered this the saddest episode of my childhood. She said that some children would have killed themselves over it" (Carrighar, p. 85). Carrighar soon gained new insight about why her mother jumped to the conclusion that she had been seeing a man:

my mother believed I had inherited weakness of will from my father's family as well as her own. The culprit on his side was his young sister Alice--not an alcoholic but something that was much worse apparently: she had lived with a man to whom she was not married. (Carrighar, p. 75)

The weakness her mother felt she had inherited from her own side of the family came from Sally's grandfather, a charming alcoholic, with whom Sally spent many happy summer weeks which were, for her, "an emotional oasis." Though her mother often told her tales about her grandfather's drunken bouts when she was a child and showed an "icy contempt" (Carrighar, p. 21) toward her father, "As a child's companion my grandfather was delightful although not always entirely responsible" (Carrighar, p. 20). Her mother "was . . . anxious to impress upon me the shame that can come from 'giving in to a weakness'" (Carrighar p. 21). Her grandfather repaid her mother's

"lack of tolerance" and "frozen scorn" of him by selling everything in the house he and his wife had shared "to its bare boards" before Sally's mother and her sister-in-law could divide the possessions themselves after the death of Sally's grandmother (Carrighar, p. 24).

Carrighar traces her mother's loathing of her father to the unforgiving attitude of the members of her grandfather's family toward him; they felt they had a social "obligation of behavior, an upper-middle-class habit of mind and it was my mother's ." This habit of mind put "loyalty to one's class ideals ahead of loyalty to a member of one's own family" (Carrighar, p. 25). Acknowledging "unconventional offspring" was difficult for such families (Carrighar, p. 26). In Chapter 1 Carrighar concluded her discussion of the family background of the Hardens, her mother's family, by saying that, had they remained in Ireland, they probably would have sent her grandfather, Calvert, off to America, but "I don't know what they would have done with a daughter who seemed unstable from early babyhood. Drowned her perhaps?" (Carrighar, p. 26).

Against this family background, Carrighar, in Chapter 3, "Legacies From Alice," described the love affair of her divorced aunt, Alice, and Jeremy. Forbidden to marry a divorcee by his family, Jeremy took Alice and her two small children to Europe for seven years while he studied

architecture. He died of tuberculosis shortly after they returned to the U.S., and Alice died of it two years later, after which the children were raised by family members. Though Sally's mother censured Jeremy and Alice, she frequently cared--tolerantly--for Alice's son and had many of their possessions in her home. Sally had always pictured Alice and Jeremy as

. . . safe to be with, humane and large-minded in the way of the few sophisticated people that I had met. I had simply shut out my mother's censuring of them. Very startling it was then when my mother accused me of a disgraceful inheritance of Alice's temperament. (Carrighar, p. 78)

When her mother said to her, "You are another Alice and when you grow up you will follow her footsteps and everyone will despise you," Sally vowed, "I said to myself, I never will be an Alice. And I never will risk being trapped in a family again, so I never will marry anybody. Never, Never!" (Carrighar, p. 79).

Surprisingly, the adult Sally has a great deal of understanding of her mother's motivations for condemning her as a harlot when she had only been feeding a squirrel. The age was extraordinarily prudish, and "gossip seized upon any hint of questionable behavior and condemned it ferociously." Especially for her mother "with her hypersensitive scarred emotions, the enormity of the distress is hard to imagine" (Carrighar, p. 79).

Carrighar had a pleasant respite from her mother's



hatred in the form of a three-month stay on a lake in Canada; there she developed a love for wilderness which held feelings of safety lacking in her home atmosphere. When her mother called her "You little ninny" on the way home, Sally finally exploded at her, "A ninny I am not! And I am not an Alice!" (Carrighar, p. 99). Though home life resumed as grim as ever, she had made an emotional Declaration of Independence.

Completely demoralized and ill after she discovered she did not have the talent to become a major concert pianist, Sally had what she calls "a moderate shock" (Carrighar, p. 127) one day when her mother itemized the costs of all her illnesses and said, "If I had an undiagnosed illness and I knew that I was nothing but a burden and an expense, I would kill myself" (Carrighar, p. 126). Sally rejected the suggestion, "But I did realize that my continuing presence at home had to end, and I beat down the fever, almost by will power, and soon got up out of that bed and was well and bending all though and effort towards preparing for college" (Carrighar, p. 127).

During those hours of illness, she thought about the roles her mother, father, and brother played in the family structure. She thought her brother might have suffered from the lack of a resident father almost as much as she had suffered from the hatred of her mother.

She never tried to fit herself into the family at all, thinking of herself as a "non-person," defined largely by what she was not: "Not one who had friends. Not one anybody would miss if she were absent." She says, "I did have sympathy for those who in any way were unfortunate, and it was obvious that I responded with a degree of intelligence to the arts. But responding is not the same thing as initiating. It is a non-person's talent" (Carrighar, p. 132). She wondered, as her train departed Kansas City on her way to college at Wellesley: ". . . would I be able to make or find a home? By the time I did find one, it would be a good thing if I had found also a self to live in it" (Carrighar, p. 132).

The rest of the book chronicles this quest, marked occasionally by her mother's intrusions into her life, which she largely spent working with film and advertising as a writer in Hollywood. Repeated encounters with animals-- a lion, an ocelot, birds, a singing mouse--revealed her extraordinary compatibility with animals, towards which her earlier experiences with the chipmunk and the dog had also pointed. Later, when penniless, starving, and distrustful of everyone, she decided to kill herself by swallowing sleeping pills. Standing at an open window, she had swallowed half of them

when a dog barked. I was startled, for it seemed the bark of the little white dog I had betrayed long ago . . . .

I threw the rest of the pills out into

the rainy dark night . . . . (Carrighar, p. 225).

Fortunately, she contacted Dr. Carl Renz, recommended to her by the Psychology Department of the University of California in Berkeley, but hesitated before going to see him. In a large department store, convinced a visit to him would be fruitless, she decided to kill herself immediately:

Again, fate intervenes. Ahead of me was a little girl, about six years old, with her mother. The child was walking backward as the two went towards the door, and she was smiling up into my face in the most friendly and beautiful way. It was a smile of determined encouragement, and she held her eyes on mine as if waiting for some reassurance. I was impressed, for it seemed an omen, but I still wondered how she had happened to be walking backward, why she had turned around if she had not first seen my distraught face, and how could she have seen it if she had been walking ahead of me in the normal way? (Carrighar, p. 230)

Then Carrighar says,

It has never occurred to me till this moment, as I am writing these words, that the little girl may have been imaginary . . . . Now I believe that the child may have been myself as I was at the age of six, and that the hallucination was a sign from the subconscious monitor urging that one last time I should try to live. (Carrighar, p. 231)

Urged again to keep climbing the steep ladder, as something had urged her to do throughout her life, she kept her appointment with Dr. Renz--and on that hinges Sally Carrighar's successful career as a nature writer, as well as a writer of a remarkable autobiography.

Carrighar documents Dr. Renz's history and her utter

trust in and dependence on him in Chapter 8. Her biggest surprise during psychoanalysis was that, contrary to her own opinion that she "had been very cool, taking care with a calculated patience not to disturb her [mother] . . .," she had "been filled with explosive anger, . . . outraged by all the evidence that I was hated and by the many times I had been falsely accused of weakness, of instability, of deceit" (Carrighar, p. 235). Why had she hidden the anger?

The answer revealed itself in a dream about high casement windows that darkened, the memory she had told John Craig about and then lost. When Dr. Renz asked, "What does that remind you of?" she found herself screaming hysterically:

. . . the windows were those in the upstairs room at the Brownells' house, and the windows went dark because I was being strangled. Again I could feel my mother's hand closing my throat. In the dream it was my life that was losing light. (Carrighar, p. 237)

As she walked up Sutter Street at the close of this analysis session she was free for the first time in her life: "A new world had been born for me and a new life had begun on that day." For the first time in twenty-two years, "faces [were] now friendly, harmless for the first time since I was six." She no longer saw passersby as "potential murderers." Her "panic was gone forever" (Carrighar, p. 238).

Finally able to face the reality that her mother

not only wished her dead but had actually tried to kill her, she continued to wonder why. When Carrighar finally accepted the truth that her mother had paranoia--"that she never had been responsible for her attitude or its expression"--she says, "my mother ceased being an ogre who had presided over my childhood and could be seen as the gracious person that she essentially was" (Carrighar, p. 239). Carrighar hoped, now that she was free of panic, to have a "pleasant relationship" with her mother, but

her dislike of me was as ferocious as ever . . . . Her aversion was almost entirely a physical, neurological thing, which she could not justify psychologically because I was not turning out badly, I had not disgraced the family, her early predictions had not been realized. (Carrighar, p. 243)

Knowing the limitations of Carrighar's emotional recovery, Dr. Renz had told her, "Wherever you are, you may always have to be able to go away" (Carrighar, p. 240). This feeling was a result of knowing, throughout her childhood, "that as soon as possible I must be gone--not just to support myself but to leave, to take myself to some distant place" (Carrighar, p. 244). This feeling of banishment had a very positive side to it, though; it was "escape from a trap." But it also meant that she was never able to achieve Erik Erikson's "basic trust"<sup>7</sup> -- "to want to belong somewhere, to feel secure enough to believe in lasting friends, in oneself, in life's welcome . . . ." (Carrighar, p. 244). Carrighar

no longer fears people, and the terrible pain of the childhood horrors is gone, "but the impulse to leave, even to be the first to leave an evening party, is absolutely compulsive, and I only feel any real confidence in a friendship if I have made it clear that I will not put any weight on it." Because "There is too unavoidable a sense that I must go through life always saying goodbye," Carrighar says, "I cannot feel warmth of life for my mother's memory" (Carrighar, p. 245).

Analysis provided Carrighar her first major adult freedom; her second came when she discovered her life vocation, nature writing. She describes her discovery-- "I was born for this"-- as "a switch into sanity" (Carrighar, p. 277). Her description of systematically planning her writing career and the publication of her first book, One Day at Beetle Rock, supports this. One day in her cabin she was surrounded by birds and animals seeking refuge from a goshawk. They were at ease. She suddenly realized,

This is the home I have come to. I know now what home means to most people, not only walls but a shelter--touch for the heart and mind. Here I have found it, home at last--and with all these delightful children. (Carrighar, p. 330)

Finally she has what her childhood denied her--a place of refuge to which she brings a childlike enthusiasm in an observant, balanced mind.

The book deserves several re-readings; only then

is the reader completely aware of how carefully Carrighar picks and chooses images, juxtaposing the description of childhood incidents against her mature understanding of the significance of those incidents. This allows the reader to weigh Carrighar's judgment and to test that judgment repeatedly. She idealizes neither her suffering childhood self nor the animals in nature where she ultimately finds solace and creativity. She openly tells the reader that she could not leave home psychologically until she received psychological help in healing the wounds of her childhood. Further, scar tissue from those wounds would always cause problems when she developed close relationships. Her autobiography is an exercise in balance, though unbalance would seem to be a more likely result of her experience as a child. Ultimately, she, like any autobiographer, tells us far more about the internal person she is at the moment of writing about her past life than about the actual facts of her life.

The autobiography of novelist Maureen Howard, Facts of Life, however, is far from the studied balance of Home to the Wilderness. Divided into three sections--"Culture," "Money," and "Sex,"--Facts of Life might better have been called The Pervasive Childhood From Which There Is No Escape. The reader is left feeling that either Howard does not want to or cannot free herself from her childhood. Saul Maloff in a Commonweal review describes

Howard's purpose as follows: "to get the facts of her life into something like steady focus and plot the route, across dangerous terrain from there to here, showing us where the scars are and how they were come by."<sup>8</sup>

Filled with tongue-in-cheek sarcasm, self-deprecation, rhetorical posturing, shifts from past to present tense to re-create the "feel" of the past, and extrapolations from single incidents to cover whole life patterns, Howard's autobiography has a polemic quality which both exhausts and titillates the reader; the method of presentation, Howard's subject matter, and Howard's distance as an adult from childhood are virtually inseparable. Alfred Kazin's emphasis on Howard's "stirring hatred of pretense and false gentility" points to what is the central metaphor of the book--play acting.<sup>9</sup> This concern with play acting takes many forms, but all members of Howard's family, as well as other characters, are examined either as people who were play actors or as people who avoided becoming play actors--or tried to. The former group is, by far, the larger.

Maureen Howard describes her father more strongly and consistently as a play actor than anyone else in the book. She is also more ambivalent about her feelings for him than about anyone else. "My father was a terrible man," she says:

I know I'll spend too much time in taking that statement back. My efforts will make Bill



Kearns out to be a good fellow who easily drove his daughter to distraction and at times to flashes of anger that came close, very close to hatred. If he hadn't been my father I would have loved the spectacle he created--one performance following quickly upon another--like a versatile old vaudevillian with his audience (wife and children) in the palm of his hand. But I am his daughter and it's no mystery that he is the model for the charming, self-dramatizing men I'm drawn to.<sup>10</sup>

Not only did she have to suffer the roles he tried out on his family; she is still condemned to keep replicating him in her love relationships. This vice into which she seems locked for life finds her railing against him more vehemently than against anyone else--and at the same time understanding him. It also makes her highly vulnerable to him; she says " . . . even when I was a grown woman, he would leave me on the edge of hysteria in all our arguments: though I married and lived as far as I could spiritually from Bridgeport, he reduced me in a matter of hours to a wriggling child, pleading to go free." Cynically, she calls this relationship "an exciting game for both of us . . . " (Howard. p. 59).

One night her father would take "delight in his own rhetoric" (Howard, p. 25), playing his role as "perverse and crude, a man who must have his own way" (Howard, p. 24). Another night he'd strike quite another pose. Fully clothed,

indeed, sporting a well-tailored suit from Fenn-Feldstein in New Haven--we'd all be taken through some intricate legal proposition that had come up at lunch in the Stratfield Hotel,

or, the Latin and Greek roots of our common English words would be expounded and he would have a 'sliver, darling--ah, that's not a sliver now' of our dessert. Charming and urbane, he was the most interesting father in the world and we were his radiant family. (Howard, p. 25)

Some nights the mood at the dinner table was tense between Howard's parents; "And the other nights--the alternate mood of our family meals was as sparkling as a good scene out of a Depression comedy" (Howard, p. 26).

Howard's father, in fact, needed "one domestic scene and all his fancies had to be enacted in our first little house." She describes various other roles he played on that little stage of their house--roles "worthy of blind Lear" or "O'Neill's disenchanted boys gone gray and balding. He was Mr. Micawber at the kitchen table, the Duke of Bilgewater as we drove out to Fairfield Beach" (Howard, p. 64).

Howard particularly resents the "last great role" of her father's life, which extended for ten years (Howard, p. 59). He made a "monstrous show" (Howard, p. 60) out of his illness, "indulging himself in butter and salt, thick steaks marbled with fat . . ." (Howard, p. 61) during "his staged demise" (Howard, p. 62).

Howard's father greatly admired Senator Joseph McCarthy, a fact that Howard still has difficulty dealing with. Unforgivingly, she says, "I have refused to understand my father's admiration for that twirp who manipulated

two Presidents." She summarizes:

Rhetoric was all. He worshipped every word that came from Senator Everett Dirksen's mouth, fruity vowels and ripe pauses, down-home wisdom. Monsignor Fulton Sheen, on the other hand, was a fake. He 'fancied' himself, dressed in full clerical robes for a television audience, fingering a cross: the whole show was too haughty and aristocratic. (Howard, p. 69)

Her father went day by day to his job as a detective at the courthouse and was outraged at his children who "would never find a place out there in the world. In my dancing and acting, in my brother's translations, he could only see children who would never give up our play, for all his envy I believe his fear for us was genuine" (Howard, p. 69). Howard finds it hard to understand why "My father--that impossible clown, inflated impresario, barker, snake charmer, P. T. Barnum of our respectable shingle cottage on North Avenue" wished that she and her brother would live a comfortable suburban life, willing "to settle for one act" (Howard, p. 70).

When she told her own daughter about her grandfather the girl said, "It sounds as though you hated him." Howard tried to defend herself against this charge by citing examples--"feeble proof of my love." She wanted to balance her "emotional ledger," but she had to struggle to do so (Howard, p. 63). She can only conclude, ". . . I loved him, . . . coarse and unlettered as he pretended to be . . ." (Howard, p. 70).

Maureen Howard, herself, took on many of these dramatic

qualities of her father, melding them with the cultural pretensions of her mother. Her dance class with Miss Weinstein was, Howard, says, "the beginning of my long career as an escape artist" (Howard, p. 15). Sometimes when the mothers had left, Miss Weinstein "would fling off her kimono and reveal herself to us, free and naked under her Grecian dress, leaping, swaying around the shop for her small audience" (Howard, p. 14).

Howard learned elocution so well from another paid tutor, Mrs. Holton, that "Today I can't read a poem out loud that my family doesn't ridicule me" (Howard, p. 19). She recited reams of sentimental verses on ceremonial holiday occasions. These learned histrionic attitudes carried over into her adult life; uneasy once when her former husband picked up their daughter for the weekend, she found herself falling naturally into a dramatic way of dealing with the situation:

I stood above them on the landing, posturing, hand to heart. 'Chin up. That's Mummy's darling.' I laughed and struck the Attitude of Bravery. 'It's going to be such fun. We must never say goodbye.' (Howard, p. 33)

Even her own religious experiences were fake, "genuine only as dramatic exercises," she says (Howard, p. 35). This generalization comes after she discusses the debacle of her First Communion. She describes finding a whole glass of orange juice in the kitchen the morning she was to have her First Communion. Because orange juice

was a rarity in her household, she says, "forgetting my spiritual obligation, I drank it down . . . ," thereby breaking the fast before she took First Communion. "I broke my fast, but I didn't have the guts to go through with the ceremony. I could not take the body and blood of Christ into my mouth now fouled by orange juice" (Howard, p. 34). She then tried to commit suicide and "Sawed at my wrists until they looked as though I had been clawed by a mean tabby cat, then plunged the harmless curved blade at my breast" (Howard, p. 34-35). "I was not good: that idea was set in my mind," she says, and was thereafter highly conscious of her own moral hypocrisy when doing good deeds--she could not and cannot forgive herself the dramatic satisfaction she feels when performing them (Howard, p. 35).

To the reader of Howard, the most theatrical of all her gestures may be her tendency to draw out of even a tiny incident a sweeping generalization on the course of her entire life. Many of these sweeping generalizations seem to be an attempt to deal with many questions left unanswered for her. A key one is why her mother forced culture--"those ineffable finer things"-- on her children in such large doses (Howard, p. 7). A misfit in their blue-collar neighborhood, her mother played the role of lady, "dressed in a linen hat and pearls," walking Maureen around the block (Howard, p. 4). Her mother

was a never-ending source of "scraps of poems, stories, jingles that she pronounced throughout the day" (Howard, p. 3). She, alone, took the children to the Klein Memorial Hall to hear Helen Traubel, the Budapest Quartet, and the Connecticut Symphony, poor as it was. After the children left home, however, Howard's mother reverted to watching Lawrence Welk, "Double Jeopardy," and Dean Martin.

Maureen and her brother, George, were hooked on culture by her mother, but the adult Maureen says she finds herself "split, split right down the middle" (Howard, p. 8). She is

all sensibility one day, raging at the vulgarities that are packaged as art, the self-promotion everywhere, the inflated reputations . . . . Then, again, everything is acceptable to me. In an orgy I view the slickest movie or love story on TV, suck in the transistor music and thrill to the glossy photographs of sumptuous salads and stews, the magnificent bedrooms and marble baths in House and Garden. Our great living junk art. (Howard, pp. 8-9)

She often finds herself "sick of art," though she knows, "It would never have occurred to my mother that the finer things might be complicated for us, less than sheer delight" (Howard, p. 9). The question "What did it mean to her?" remains unanswered for Howard (Howard, p. 7).

Though Howard, herself, does not specifically make the connection to her mother when she describes her own gourmet cooking orgies, she echoes her earlier comments about her mother in them: "In a sense I have dined out

in my own house, hoping to enter a world I can't belong to and that I now hold in contempt" (Howard, p. 72). Howard sees herself as an adult who is an "Impersonation of wife and mother. I have begun to wonder what I am like in real life" (Howard, p. 86).

Maureen and her brother George, as adults, were united in anger one night, three years after their father's death, at a time when "my mother's hold on the facts was daily more fragile." They sat down to discuss the play-acting of their parents' lives, especially their parents' enchantment with "their supposed poverty" (Howard, p. 109). Their grandfather Burns' diamond ring, appraised at six thousand dollars, "clunked around the bottom of a cracked sugar bowl in our pantry for years while my brother worked his ass off in a bursar's job at Yale and I went to Smith with humiliating clothes stitched up on my mother's sewing machine . . ." (Howard, pp. 108-109). Their mother had repeatedly said that "we were like that penniless family in George S. Kaufman's You Can't Take It With You, fancy-free bohemians . . ." (Howard, p. 109). Howard says that the bitterness she and her brother felt during their discussion that night "was thoroughly satisfying" (Howard, p. 109). Now, however, Howard sees that what she and her brother considered their "family's wayward attitude toward money . . ." was her mother's way of being free from her own family: "She

was not beholden to her father. For twenty years the salary check from the state of Connecticut came each month as a ticket of independence and, we must believe, set no limit on domestic bliss" (Howard, pp. 109-110). The enchantment with poverty was really an enchantment with independence.

Howard reflects, also, on what she calls the "farce" of her parents' religion, though: "My parents were good Catholics and never meant us to find our religion a farce. It was as perfect to them as any knee-bobbing, bead-telling spinster" (Howard, p. 12). One time the family had a rosary together, a fiasco which left them all knowing they would never repeat "that charade" (Howard, p. 13).

The adult Howard finds her parents' posturing symbolized by the way they hung their underwear in the bathhouse when they visited Fairfield Beach. She asks, "If the few times a year that my mother put on a bathing suit, she tucked her stockings and girdle far out of sight, then why did my father choose to display his jockstrap sprung with the shape of his balls on the most prominent peg? The answer to that one can interest only me and will interest me forever" (Howard, pp. 37-38).

At Fairfield Beach Maureen's family met Clare and Leslie Fine, a couple toward whom Maureen still feels enormous ambivalence, but "Within a week our family was swept into the make-believe of their lives" (Howard,



p. 36). Clare was a rich Hollywood writer, and her husband was a less successful minor public relations executive. They needed a playmate for their niece, soon to visit them from New York, and Howard qualified. She says, "I pulled my goodness, my splendid little-girl audition (I'd been in training for years) and got the role" (Howard, p. 40). She went to their estate at Westport often to play with their niece Phyllis, "their only heir, a common child from Queens who could not be made fashionable (good for her!)." Maureen, as a child, however, was not so charitable: ". . . I more than sympathized with their pain: Phyllis was not possible and I was. They were amazed at my manners, at my interest in all things theatrical, and delighted by my literary wares (a title here, a line there) . . ." (Howard, p. 41).

Maureen once thought that the constant bickering of the Fines was "light and easy to take," but "Now I know that it was rotten: their laughs were the chill gagging of Strindberg. This flamboyant successful woman needed her little man and she needed to destroy him. The bickering was Leslie's way of further demeaning himself" (Howard, p. 42).

Maureen learned one very important lesson from Clare Fine, though; Clare became Maureen's "role model, the woman writer," who excluded people from her presence in order to work. Howard says that she, herself, "wrote

two novels in the corner of a bedroom before I realized that my prejudice against writers' dramatizing themselves and the tools of their trade went back to my status of outcast" while Clare Fine produced "those slick psychological stories of the forties written to become scripts for the female stars of that era, dramas that always simplified a neurosis . . . "(Howard, p. 44).

Maureen was irritated "In a million ways" by the Fines, but she continued to play her role--"quiet and good, smart, polite, everything they wanted" (Howard, p. 46). Rewarded with yearly Christmas gifts, she received a sentimental novel from them her sophomore year in college. Having spent a semester gorging herself on the metaphysical poets and the New Critics, she was too disdainful of this trifle of a book even to acknowledge receiving it, though she read it. When they asked, she said she had not received it, and the Fines replaced it with a copy of Willa Cather's On Writing. Howard says, "I mocked this too . . . "(Howard, p. 49).

Long after Clare Fine died Howard came to a new understanding of this woman, who "Like a true professional, . . . had gone from task to task for forty years" (Howard, p. 50). She admits, "I was a young prude to reject her (the self-serving confession I so mistrust) . . ." (Howard, p. 51). Further, Howard has "read, reread and taught Willa Cather . . .," (Howard, p. 51) whose criticism

is "lucid, plain talk in which art is art, commerce is commerce, life is hard" (Howard, p. 52). Howard ends her discussion of the Fines with a fantasy:

In the darkened theater of my make-believe it is only a matter of time before the houselights go up. Then I will sit at my leather-topped desk, ring for the houseboy and my husband to be witnesses as I sign myself away for the fashionable pastiche: I'll wait for something like absolution and all the time repeat the words of my mentor, Miss Cather--'The courage to go on without compromise does not come to a writer all at once--nor, for that matter, does the ability'--like an enigmatic prayer (Howard, pp. 53-54).

Howard does not leave the reader on a negative note, however. She acknowledges that her parents' marriage was a love match. Shortly before the end of the book she reproduces a letter written by her father to her mother ("that ill-matched pair") during the summer of 1943 when her mother took the children to a resort near Holyoke, Massachusetts (Howard, p. 180). It is a gentle, everyday letter describing a train trip home, expressing concern for the children, and great tenderness for his wife. It is signed with many X's and the words, "Lovingly Bill." Howard's placement of this sentimental letter just before the book's final paragraph reinforces the reader's perception that these parents remain dominant in Howard's consciousness and that her love for them was and is much stronger than she will let herself admit. After reading Howard's autobiography, one doubts that she will ever grow "beyond" her parents either to the

painfully earned equilibrium of Sally Carrighar or to the warm joyous acceptance of Elizabeth Borton de Treviño, who will be discussed later. It may be necessary for her art that she not do so; it may also be necessary for her sense of self to define herself, partially, by her rage against the bogus, even if that rage seems excessive.

Walter Clemons in "Up From Bridgeport" called Facts of Life an "unsettling combination of elegance and earthiness,"<sup>11</sup> an accurate description of a book in which the elegance of a self description like "My arms and legs but above all my womanly appurtenances, mons veneris, the very curve and tilt of my womb existed for a higher purpose" is instantly juxtaposed against the blatancy of "big ass--caesarean scar, broad hands good for scooping potatoes out of the dirt of Killarney . the mockery, will I ever leave off" (Howard, p. 172).

Alfred Kazin says, "Since it is easier to write a book than to liberate oneself from all pain, sin and error, it doesn't surprise me--though Maureen Howard's bitterness sometimes does jar me--that she communicates her stirring hatred of pretense and false gentility better than she does any great personal liberation."<sup>12</sup> Maureen Howard might reply to this by saying that the liberation from her family comes in telling the story so violently. Howard, the skilled novelist, remains her parents' child, seemingly condemned to shout the story over and over

without much hope of respite.

Joyce Maynard shares Howard's "hatred of pretense and false gentility," but her book, Looking Back, written when she was a nineteen year-old Yale student, has a radically different focus from that of other autobiographies in this study. Maynard uses her life story not primarily as a vehicle for self-understanding or self-exploration, but as both an illustration of and a contrast to the value structure of the 1960's and early 1970's.

Maynard is of special interest here because she has neither the authority nor the perspective of age, not having reached what Esther Salaman calls a "stable position" in her own life, yet she makes generalizations about her own experience--and that of her generation--with what sounds like authority.<sup>13</sup> She catalogs and identifies the minutiae vigorously. There are few vignettes, often the essential content of autobiographies. Maynard gives the impression of being an astute observer who is, as yet, unable to take the emotional risks sustained contemplation would bring. She is too close to childhood herself to evaluate its long-term effects on her personal self.

The reader of Looking Back meets Joyce Maynard as one meets any precocious, verbal child or young adult: warily. Since Maynard is both highly self-aware and overtly conscious of her audience, she gives the impression that she knows how the reader is responding to her.

While one side of her strives, almost desperately at times, to show how different her generation is from other generations, the other side recognizes great commonalities in the childhood experiences of all Americans. Generalizations encompassing the reader begin early in the book:

We all have something of the observer in us, the detached outsider, the self-conscious partygoer who's capable of worrying, deep in a back-seat embrace, whether his/her breath smells of pizza, something of the grandstand football fan who's never quite sure, when the cheerleaders demand 'Give us a B---' whether to give them one or not (looking around to see what the other kids--who may be looking at him--are doing). We are none of us quite as carefree as we look.<sup>14</sup>

Maynard encourages the reader to accept her--in a thousand generalizations--as a spokesman for her generation, even as she describes the dangers of generalizing. On one page she exclaims, "Mine is the generation of unfulfilled expectations" and "My generation is special because of what we missed rather than what we got, because in a certain sense we are the first and the last" (Maynard, p. 6). But quickly Maynard warns, "Generalizing is dangerous . . . (Maynard, p. 7). "But memory--shared or unique--is, I think, a clue to why we are where we are now" (Maynard, p. 8).

After reading Looking Back the reader is exhausted, grateful that the book is only 160 pages long, because the book seems to be spat at the reader. It does not capture the past (or comment on it, as Mary McCarthy painstakingly does); it vomits the past out. Ostensibly,

the book is ordered chronologically. After the first chapter, Maynard focuses on the period from 1962, when she was nine, until ten years later at the time of writing when she is nineteen. In the first chapter, however, she gives the reader a series of descriptions of the 60's child: "We were sensible, realistic, literal-minded, unromantic, socially conscious and politically minded, whether we read the papers (whether we could even read, in fact) or not" (Maynard, p. 5). She arrives at this description by comparing herself to her friend, Hanna, age five, for whom she serves as "child protector" (Maynard, p. 1). It hardly seems believable to Maynard, who remembers "never bothering to count the stops or peer through all those shopping bags and knees to read the signs because she [her mother] would know when to get off [the bus], she'd take my hand . . .," that she is now in the mother's role herself. Maynard describes herself as "old before my time" (Maynard, p. 1).

Maynard focuses on one day when Hanna and she escorted each other to the circus; though they bought Cracker Jacks and Jujubes, a flashlight and "a celluloid doll whose arm already hung loose," (Maynard, p. 2) they seemed out of place:

the admission fee hadn't really bought us into youngness again, even the little kids, because most of them had barely had it to begin with. We grew up old, Hanna even more than I. Ware cynics who see the trap door in the magic show, the pillow stuffing in Salvation Army Santa

Clauses, the camera tricks in T. V. commercials  
. . . . (Maynard, p. 3)

Why, she asks, is this so? She surmises, "Perhaps it was that we had too much to look at and so weren't awed by any one thing. But even more, it was that we had seen greater spectacles, unmoved, that our whole world was a visual glut, a ten-ring circus even Ringling Brothers couldn't compete with" (Maynard, p. 3). Maynard also realizes that she may be reading too much into Hanna's behavior: "She throws her head back (a shampoo ad) and smiles a toothpaste commercial smile so that baby teeth show--sex appeal?--and says, for my benefit, 'This is lots of fun, isn't it?' the way people who aren't enjoying themselves much, but feel they should be, try to convince themselves they are." Maynard says the sixties have touched both of them--"I've grown up old, and I mention Hanna because she seems to have been born that way, almost, as if each generation tarnishes the innocence of the next . . . . I feel the circle--childhood and senility--closing in" (Maynard, p. 4).

She closes the first chapter with a discussion of why she wrote this autobiography. Self-aware and self-conscious as she is, "It must seem, to people who don't know me and even more, perhaps, to the ones who do, as if I'm a cold-blooded traitor, informing on a world that trusted me enough to let me in." She denies this, saying that "the person I'm informing on most of all is myself"



(Maynard, p. 10). She also denies writing either nostalgically or angrily. Maynard, like so many others, says she writes "because there's no understanding where we are now without a glance, at least, to where we have been" (Maynard, p. 11).

This ten year period she shoots at the reader rapid-fire--the tumultuous, fermenting 60's and early 70's--was characterized by lapel buttons with "This country's going to pot" on them; the publication of Ehrlich's Population Bomb which caused her to notice pregnant women: "there seemed so many of them. I was indignant--they were using up the quota, filling spaces that should have been left for the children of my friends and me" (Maynard, p. 122); Earth Day; the "God is dead" slogan and the Jesus movement; slang terms like "far out" and "rapping"; Pete Seeger; Woodstock; a dateless prom for which she helped build a silver castle; fifth graders obsessed with sex" (Maynard, p. 28). Looking Back is a cultural history of the sixties and early seventies replete with such artifacts and with generalizations about those artifacts. Maynard sees even herself as a cultural artifact, an interesting, if curious, position for an autobiographer.

Even when Maynard is discussing intimate details about herself she seems to be, with the reader, on the outside looking in. She says, "In truth, what I have always been is an outsider" and then describes clear-headed

New Year's Eves she spent discussing the pass-fail system with some young scholars or cleaning up the vomit of a ninth grader who gulped scotch as if it were Kool-Aid (Maynard, p. 9). Seeing herself as "the third person, a character in a book, an actor in a movie," she feels herself more interested in writing about life than living it (Maynard, p. 10). The result of talking about herself as if she were on the outside looking in at herself is that self-deprecation becomes the modus operandi; because she is part of the generation she is so thoroughly dissecting, however, her own motivations are always suspect.

But, having established herself as an outsider, she can go one step forward and tell her readers that she, as an individual, differs from the collective pack. She never used drugs, for example, and deeply resented the stereotypes that anyone who smokes dope is "liberated and hip and creative-thinking," and anyone who doesn't "is, if not crew-cut and Republican, old-fashioned, certainly, and cowardly, probably a tight-lipped church-goer . . . " (Maynard, p. 134). Her audience consciousness is particularly apparent at the end of her discussion on drugs:

One other thing. Almost surely this will sound stiff and righteous, and once again I feel defensiveness approaching . . . . But, all that said, I don't believe in unearned gifts . . . . It's unacceptable to me that mental and spiritual 'enlightenment' may be bought for the price of an ounce of marijuana, and that a simple physical act like lighting up a joint and inhaling (no skill required) should equip one to listen to the Ninth Symphony with

a richness and amplitude that Beethoven himself never enjoyed. (Maynard, p. 136)

Here she breaks, as she does increasingly in the latter part of the book, from the omnipresent we. The collective consciousness of the generalizations is gone and, though she feels a bit defensive, lest she be misunderstood, she states her moral position. She also makes clear the disparities between moral positions once held and those currently held. Once, she says, she had visions of herself doing good works in exotic places--"feeding the hungry and healing the sick with an obsessive selflessness." Now, she says, "my goal is simpler. I want to be happy. And I want comfort-nice clothes, a nice house, good music and good food, and the feeling that I'm doing some little thing that matters" (Maynard, pp. 156-157). She is well aware of the world-weary tone.

The end of the book, like that of Howard's Facts of Life, trails off into indecisiveness. She sits before a fire on a winter morning, re-reading her manuscript, trying to tie up the book "in some fine and final-sounding paragraph" (Maynard, p. 160). She searches for a final conclusive statement about the sixties but finally concludes that she can't conclude: "Ten years can't be summed up; a generation can't be generalized about" (Maynard, p. 160).

What she has omitted in the book are "the dog and the red-breasted nuthatch and the chickadees and even the grosbeaks, also the home-grown summer squash and

peas I'm about to thaw from the freezer for dinner, and the fields where, last August, I picked them . . . . It's suppertime" (Maynard, p. 160). She has pursued too much triviality, she feels, and not enough of what has lasting value. She has supplied details about her generation, but she has not drawn herself distinctly. She is looking forward now because "I feel everything will work-out just like on T.V." (Maynard, p. 157).

The sarcasm in the hope is characteristic of the book. But so are scenes and comments permeating the book which seem timeless. For the reader, there are numerous personal shocks of recognition, which have little to do with specifics of the 60's and early 70's. Many aspects of childhood seem relatively unchanging: ". . . with very few exceptions, what they did to (not for) us in elementary school was not unlike what I would sometimes do for my cats: dress them up in doll clothes because they looked cute that way" (Maynard, p. 18). The perils of entering puberty were different for boys and girls, as they still are: "The boys were almost encouraged to be goofy and playful, happy-go-lucky, while we got left with being Women, suddenly matronly, with images of cramps and making excuses not to swim--all that ahead of us, our sexuality something to be concealed, while boys could flaunt theirs on their chests and chins" (Maynard, p. 28). The awful Kotex films "about the Trials of Being

a Woman" (Maynard, p. 25) have apparently remained standard fare for generations. And competition has not changed: "The line between winners and losers cut though all phases of school life almost from kindergarten on, and to cross it was as hard as kicking the ball past the goal posts" (Maynard, pp. 44-45).

Maynard is not as brittle as she sometimes appears to be. For example, she describes her teenage adoration for the perfection of Jackie Kennedy. Later, after Mrs. Kennedy married Aristotle Onassis, Maynard read an expose about her; she says, "I felt almost sick . . . . I wasn't interested in the fragments, only in the fact that the glass had broken . . ." (Maynard, p. 33). The brittle precocity of the book is broken occasionally by such observations, the pain not so much felt as told.

Despite Maynard's rejoinder that, having finished the book, she still has no idea "what all the pieces . . . add up to," the reader does: it is one bright young woman's attempt to see pattern during a decade of enormous political, social, and personal change (Maynard, p. 160). Maynard focuses on we statements, on generalizations about cultural patterns (and her differences with these), and is sparse with personal details. That she refrains from sweeping generalizations at the end may indicate that she has come to distrust her earlier methodology.

Her methodology might be called "validation by detail."

The organizational structure sometimes includes her specific personal experiences placed in the context of national life, 1962-1973. But just as frequently she generalizes about her contemporaries. Maynard remains for the reader more an unusually perceptive member of her generation than an individual the reader has come to know, though the reader admires her accrual of details and sometimes agrees with the extrapolations made from them or identifies with many of the situations and attitudes which Maynard describes. The reader cannot know how successful she has been in leaving home because she really hasn't left yet; she still, figuratively and literally, comes to the safety of home for vacations.

After the assaults of Facts of Life and Looking Back, different though the books are in focus, the reader turns to the Hearthstone of My Heart by Elizabeth Borton de Treviño with a sense of relief. The book has some of the balanced tone of Home To The Wilderness but a radically different subject matter. de Treviño tells the story of her childhood and young professional life as a newspaper writer in The Hearthstone of My Heart, published in 1977. The title comes from a line in a poem by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow. de Treviño says at the beginning that her purpose is "to preserve for some of us what we loved, at least in memory . . . ." She wants to explain what it was like to grow up at the

"beginning of this century, tell about those times . . . , for almost nothing of them remains in our present-day culture."<sup>15</sup> She remembers these times "with longing, for they offered happiness without introspection and doubt; joy without fear of the future; contentment without cynicism" (de Treviño, p. 4).

Margaret Cousins in the Introduction points out that during these years

the whole population [of the U.S.] was helpless before the scourge of disease, unable to ameliorate the extremes of the land and climate, limited in communications, slow and ponderous in methods of transportation, largely deprived of the advantages of higher education, and the majority tied to some variety of hard, drudging work.<sup>16</sup>

de Treviño neither denies nor avoids these facts, but her primary concern here is to emphasize that "Across my life many wonderful people made their way, many dear and good people have guided and helped me, many--far more than I deserve--have loved me" (de Treviño, p. 4). Unlike Sally Carrighar's adult interpretations of childhood horrors, Maureen Howard's impassioned denunciations of false values, or Joyce Maynard's cynical cultural generalizations, Elizabeth Borton de Treviño's evocations of family and friends have a warm, objective quality to them; de Treviño tells story after story about the characters without much need to intrude upon the narrative. Occasionally she does stop to comment on the material, often simply to make clear the relationship between what once was

and what now is, and sometimes a strongly felt opinion comes through. Acceptance of what was, with love, is key to her.

In the Epilogue to the book she says,

Certainly my own life has been lucky and fortunate beyond expression. And there is a Chinese saying worth pondering here: 'One must be happy to be lucky.'

I have been happy. I am grateful for the life I have lived. I wish happiness, like a smile, were something I could bestow. (de Treviño, pp. 223-224)

This book is essentially about those who make their own happiness, people of character. Margaret Cousins says, "Profoundly individual, they exhibit basic integrity, a respect for discipline, willingness to accept responsibility--even to welcome it--to cherish expectations and believe they can accomplish them."17 Cousins sees these qualities as still relevant to today's culture: "These tools are still available, so the opportunity exists for anyone willing to use them." 18

The Hearthstone of My Heart is divided almost equally in half. The first section, entitled "Hearthstone of My Heart," describes de Treviño's childhood years, at the end of which, as she admits, she "had, almost literally, to be ejected from the nest (de Treviño, p. 118). Part II, "Memories of an Enchanted Youth," describes her remarkable career as a newspaper reporter on the Boston Herald and her marriage to the Mexican gentleman with whom she went to live in Mexico a thousand miles from home in



Bakersfield, California. She and her mother wrote each other daily and talked frequently by phone thereafter. During this second section she describes her decision to write four books in the Pollyanna series. These take her back in time to her own childhood, when she had been "as highly moral and bigoted as my sophisticated friends deprecated" (de Treviño, p. 194).

de Treviño goes on to discuss the limitations of much current writing for children about "real world" subjects: ". . . some of the special gifts of childhood must somehow be preserved, and chief among those is the vaulting imagination, and the child's capacity for love and empathy," she says (de Treviño, p. 195). These were the gifts of her own childhood that Hearthstone of My Heart discusses.

The first chapter of the book, after she briefly describes her purpose for writing it and sketches her parents' background and marriage, evokes small town Bakersfield, California--a "quiet and semi-rural life [which] came to an end with the advent of the automobile" (de Treviño, p. 10). Thereafter, chapters describe her family's red Maxwell automobile, her neighborhood, hot summers, entertainment, pets, three extraordinary black women, illnesses, trips to Grandma's house in Monterrey, and music lessons. Chapters 11 and 12, appropriately set at the center of the book, discuss, in order, her father,

then her mother. Chapter 13 discusses family legends, especially de Treviño's Uncle Ed, and Chapter 14 concludes the first half of the book by focusing on Grandmother Borton.

de Treviño's parents were her most important influences. She says,

. . . my own life, rooted in theirs [her parents], has been unique for the reason that my parents were happy and united, and felt able to cope with any trouble that might descend upon them. I therefore never felt rebellious, never wanted to 'find myself,' and had to be literally pushed out of the nest and made to use my wings. In all my life, there were never any two people to whom I would rather turn with trust for guidance. (de Treviño, p. 57)

Each of de Treviño's parents receives a full chapter of description, and together they permeate the book positively. Though her attachments to them remained very strong throughout their lives, as the last half of The Hearthstone of My Heart indicates, de Treviño lived a full, rich professional life 5000 miles away from them before she moved to Mexico. She is able to apply many of the lessons she learned from them with none of the psychic torture of Carrighar, the sarcasm of Howard, or the cynicism of Maynard. Of the four writers discussed in this chapter, she most nearly left home "ready to go on," as Ruth Suckow was quoted as saying at the beginning of this chapter.

Well aware of the cynicism which permeates modern life, de Treviño stops several times to explain that

her comments on her parents are based not only on her own perceptions but were corroborated by others. For example, she begins Chapter 11, which focuses on her father, an attorney, by saying,

I am aware that my love for my father may blind me to the fact that a record of his life may not be as entrancing to readers as it has been to me. In partial apology, I offer this quotation from a column by Jim Day which was published in the Bakersfield California in 1939, many years before my father's death. (de Treviño, p. 56)

Mr. Day described her father as one who "learned of the sordid nature of many men, . . . without having become cynical; . . . because he is at the top of his profession without arrogance or foolish pride . . . (de Treviño, p. 57). In short, Mr. Barton fit Francis Bacon's description of "a full man . . ." (de Treviño, p. 56). This concern that she not be seen as over-writing is characteristic of de Treviño throughout her autobiography: "I remember those early years on our block with a great feeling of peace and security, and yet I must not give the impression that our town was a specially virtuous one," she says (de Treviño, p. 15).

This deliberate care to avoid both the actuality and the appearance of over-writing, as well as an overt awareness of the differences that space and time have brought about in the world, gives a broad appeal to her autobiography. As soon as she asks indulgence for any idealizing she may do, she asks the reader to listen

to what she has to say, anyway, because "this time produced men like my father, who was unique in a way many young people, it seems to me, are trying to imitate." She admits that in a world characterized by maladjustment, "It may seem hard to believe, . . . but my father was a perfectly happy man" (de Treviño, p. 17). Her focus on her father helps to pinpoint the character of the society which shaped her own childhood. Even in her father's age, of course, there were people who were failures, "Only in those years, part of the natural courage of men and women consisted in keeping their mouths shut." She comments on this approach to life: "It worked very well. The literature of the breast-beater had not come into flower" (de Treviño, p. 17).

She is positive about "Women's Lib," which she describes herself as watching "with awe and admiration" (de Treviño, p. 106). She refers frequently to the difference in the treatment of women over fifty years ago and now: ". . . while women and girls canned and peeled and sterilized jars, the boys played poker in the cool cellar, with bottle tops for chips" (de Treviño, p. 19). However, liberation is not unique to the contemporary age. She describes her Grandma Borton, for example, as one of "the women I have known who had the courage and the wit and ability to liberate themselves, and did." She was "a free soul if ever there was one" (de Treviño, p. 106).

de Treviño comments on other aspects of society as well. In Chapter 4 of the first part of the book, she describes Bakersfield as "remarkably cosmopolitan," with many Italian, Jewish, Chinese, and black inhabitants (de Treviño, p. 13). There were also several black citizens who "passed" for white and "were taken into the white community with no questions asked . . . ." de Treviño says she is grateful that contemporary blacks are now proud to be themselves, people "of admirable pride," with no desire or need to be other than what they are (de Treviño, p. 14). She remembers three black women who worked for her family at various times--Mammy C., Vee, and Lula--as proud, loyal people of principle. Lula (and her grandmother) taught Elizabeth "what it means to be a lady." de Treviño does not scorn the "rigid code of what was fitting for the daughters of a lawyer," which Lula taught her, though she admits, "I suppose Lula was a snob, in a way" (de Treviño, p. 31).

The aspect of de Treviño which appeals most to widely varied readers is this tolerance of others, including her readers, that she seems to have inherited and absorbed from her parents and others. She does not blame others for what she is; she celebrates their being a part of her life. She respects quiet dignity--in her maternal grandmother who taught her to do work well and in her father, who once courteously told a group which had asked

him about organizing a Bakersfield chapter of the Ku Klux Klan that he thought they "would have to go unmasked" if they formed a local chapter because "I don't think you could possibly get up any sort of group if you went around done up in sheets." He knew that the Klan would do anything except expose itself publicly (de Treviño, p. 73).

She also admires staunchness, represented by her mother. de Treviño remembers a conversation between her parents which occurred when she was about nine. Her father was discussing an impending family financial disaster if a man who owed money to him could not pay promptly; her mother responded, "The children are not going to starve, not while I know how to cook beans." de Treviño remembers:

I have never forgotten my first feelings of icy terror, of change and of the unknown, which assailed me when Papa spoke of the awful something called bankruptcy. And I remember the wave of certainty and safety that washed over me at Mama's valiant words. I crept back up to bed and slept soundly, and I don't think I have ever recalled the incident to anyone until this moment. (de Treviño, p. 79)

de Treviño's careful explanation of terms unfamiliar to the reader, attention to discussing all sides of a story, and frankness further enhance the reader's image of her as a tolerant individual who is what she says she is.

Of the four autobiographers discussed in this chapter,

Elizabeth Borton de Treviño deals least dramatically with her own growth from childhood to adulthood, perhaps because she was given the ingredients needed to foster growth early--"warmth, light, nourishment, and protection and then . . . allowed to unfold . . . with only such interference as is [was] absolutely necessary."<sup>19</sup> These ingredients were denied Sally Carrighar and hardly appreciated (or, at least, sarcastically deprecated) by Maureen Howard. Joyce Maynard barely gets around to describing her own nurturing (a shortcoming she admits, since she seems to value her parents) in her intense need to characterize an age and way of thinking , despite the fact that she dissects the years of her childhood systematically.

The four autobiographers discussed vary widely in the distance they put between themselves and "home." Having lived through hell as a child, Sally Carrighar retraces that journey, systematically providing painfully gained adult insights into motivations and situations. Balance is all. Maureen Howard rails with considerable force across time against the play-acting so characteristic of her family, in which she and her brother find themselves still caught. She grudgingly admits to understanding her parents' motivations better than she did as a child, but she does not forgive them their or her own deficiencies easily. Joyce Maynard makes the social, political, and economic canvas of the 60's and early 70's the backdrop

against which her own brief life is described. The personality of Maynard is less clear at the end than the character of her age, if we can trust her generalizations, but Maynard has the ability to stir communal memories of puberty, school traumas, and shared pain. Elizabeth Borton de Treviño remembers those who have had a positive effect on her own life by carefully describing the texture of a time and place with sensitivity, humor, and love, though she does not idealize that past. Lack of idealization of the past, in fact, is characteristic of the majority of writers in this study.

In Chapter 2 of this study, "Re-creating the 'Feel' of Childhood," the painstaking attempt of autobiographers to re-create the emotional state of childhood--helplessness and lack of understanding of adult motivation and systems--was discussed. This chapter, "Leaving Home," puts the materials of Chapter 2 into a larger context, the framework within which the feelings of that childhood are now being analyzed by adult autobiographers. That framework is the end product of attitudes shaped by the role models of Chapter 3 and the sense of self as female discussed in Chapter 4. As Wayne Booth, prize-winning literary critic best known for The Rhetoric of Fiction says, ". . . although the author can to some extent choose his disguises, he can never choose to disappear."<sup>20</sup> Nor can the autobiographer conceal the degree to which s/he has been able to build



a successful adult life on the base of childhood experiences. The student of childhood reading autobiographies must do analyses of each source in order to fit the remembered elements of the childhood experience into a meaningful context. "How far has this writer come from home?" remains the key question to ask. Earnest Schactel in "On Memory and Childhood Amnesia" was quoted in the first chapter of this study as saying that the "discrepancy between experience and word is a productive force in man as long as he knows and remains aware of it, as long as he knows and feels his experience was in some way more than and different from what his concepts and words articulate . . . ." The four writers discussed in Chapter 5 of this study have in common this recognition of the tension between the actuality of their lives and their inability to express this actuality in words. One might argue that the vehemence of writers such as Maureen Howard and Joyce Maynard is a concomitant of their inability to reconcile the distance between actuality and art.

The calm reasoned tone of Sally Carrighar, of course, is a deliberate choice by her to illustrate the balance which has finally evolved out of the chaos of her childhood. The happy reflective tone of Elizabeth Borton de Treviño underscores the harmony between her life and her recollection of it. Yet, even de Treviño provides a series of statements in which she admits that memory may play tricks on a

writer and that she is aware of temptations to idealize the past, a congenital hazard for the autobiographer.

## NOTES

1 Ruth Suckow, Some Others and Myself (New York: Rinehart and Co., Inc. 1952), p. 188. All further references to this book appear in the text.

2 Leon J. Saul, The Childhood Emotional Pattern and Maturity (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Co., 1979), p. 17.

3 Virginia Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past," in Eight Modern Essayists, ed. William Smart (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1980), p. 70.

4 Elizabeth Bruss, Autobiographical Acts: The Changing Situation of a Literary Genre (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1976), p. 164.

5 Home here refers to the shape or structure of an individual's childhood experience, as well as to key adult figures in childhood. Though a specific location may figure prominently in some of these autobiographies, the term home is used primarily to indicate a child's psychological ties.

6 Sally Carrighar, Home to the Wilderness: A Personal Journey (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1973), p. vi. All further references to this book appear in the text.

7 Erik Erikson, Childhood and Society (New York: W.W. Norton and Co., Inc. 1963), p. 247.

8 Saul Maloff, "Maureen Howard's Facts of Life: The Family Romance," Commonweal, 8 Dec. 1978, p. 789.

9 Alfred Kazin, "Books Considered," The New Republic, 9 Sept., 1978, p. 37.

10 Maureen Howard, Facts of Life (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1978), p. 54. All further references to this book appear in the text.

11 Walter Clemons, "Up From Bridgeport," Newsweek, 25 Sept. 1978, p. 101.

12 Kazin, p. 37.

13 Esther Salaman, A Collection of Moments: A Study of Involuntary Memories (London: Longman, 1970), p. 63.

14 Joyce Maynard, Looking Back (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc. 1973), pp. 39-40. All further

references to this book appear in the text.

15 Elizabeth Borton de Treviño, The Hearthstone of My Heart (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1977), pp. 3-4. All further references to this book appear in the text.

16 Margaret Cousins, Introduction to The Hearthstone of My Heart (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday and Co., Inc., 1977), p. 4.

17 Cousins, p. viii.

18 Cousins, p. viii.

19 Saul, p. 17.

20 Wayne C. Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1967), p. 20.

## Chapter 6: Conclusion

Albert E. Stone in Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts discusses the irrefutable fact that". . . the self . . . has no recoverable existence apart from language."<sup>1</sup> Stone says that autobiographies more than merely "return to the characterizing themes and metaphors announced earlier." Most of them "at the close. . . open outward into the ongoing life of the autobiographer. . . ."2

Because they open backward into the past and forward into the future, they give both the individual autobiographer and the reader of autobiography a sense of order and completion not readily found elsewhere in today's world. Stone says, "One of the cultural functions of autobiography continues to be to demonstrate viable ways of reasserting personal identity in the face of social chaos and spiritual meaninglessness."<sup>3</sup>

Though autobiography seems to serve this and other cultural functions, it has limitations as a source of information about the nature of childhood. Some of these have been alluded to earlier in this study. Perhaps the most important is that few autobiographies worth reading are designed as case studies on the nature of childhood. They are, first and last, works of literature which include only what the writer chooses to include, shaped in ways she chooses to meet whatever ends she has in mind, and incorporating the kinds of metaphors most characteristic of the individual's unique perception

of herself and the world around her.

Though people--even from diverse cultures--have more human likenesses than differences, no two individuals replicate each other's worlds. Individual efforts to turn the stuff of these individual worlds into autobiography require enormous selectivity. No matter how true to the original experience the writer thinks she is, the very acts of selection, ordering, shaping, and concluding turn that material into a literary construct, a kind of "fiction."

A reader of autobiography must be able to believe that this "fiction" is more fact than fabrication, even if the writer's particular approach to or bias toward that material is readily apparent. In her essay, "The New Biography," Virginia Woolf describes the dilemma:

. . . if we think of truth as something of granite-like solidity and of personality as something of rainbow-like intangibility and reflect that the aim of biography is to weld these two into one seamless whole, we shall admit that the problem is a stiff one and that we need not wonder if biographies have for the most part failed to solve it.<sup>5</sup>

Further, we tend to think "that the life which is increasingly real to us is the fictitious life; it dwells in the personality rather than in the act. Each of us is more Hamlet, Prince of Denmark, than he is John Smith of the Corn Exchange."<sup>6</sup> Both the truth-personality problem and the belief that reality is internal, as well as the vicissitudes of memory, must be acknowledged by the reader

of autobiography.

The basic assumption of students of childhood as it is revealed in autobiographies, then, is this: Identification and analysis of what autobiographers specify as having shaped themselves, as well as investigation into the factors that shape a particular view of self, provide data from which to draw inferences and generalizations about the experience of childhood, if the data is scrutinized with an awareness of its limitations. In addition to asking, "What are the limitations of studying autobiography as a source of information about the nature of childhood?" one must ask, "What are the inferences and generalizations to be drawn from this study of childhood in the autobiographies of women?" and "What questions should future studies of childhood based on autobiographical sources ask about the nature of childhood?" Answers to these questions will be discussed briefly as they specifically apply to Chapters 2-5 of this study.

In Chapter 2 of this study, "Re-creating the 'Feel' of Childhood," autobiographers illuminate the central problem of childhood: the child, who has least power to bring about change in her environment, is the individual who least understands that environment. She, therefore, builds a rich fantasy life as a way of escaping from that confusing environment, but succeeds only in

bringing down the punishment of that larger world on her head.

The adult who seeks to re-live her own childhood feelings must crawl progressively backward through her own life experiences, shedding as many preconceptions about the nature of childhood along the way as possible. Peter Abbs in Autobiography In Education says, "Autobiography is the search backwards into time to discover the evolution of the true self."<sup>7</sup> There is widespread yearning among these autobiographers to replace temporarily the larger shoes with smaller ones because the life story seems inadequate unless founded in what feels like an accurate perception of that child self. Autobiographers such as Maureen Howard in Facts of Life seem psychologically compelled to seek the truths to be found in childhood, almost as if their adult peace of mind depended on it. They feel that surely there is some pattern, rooted in the psychological responses of and to childhood, which will clarify the adult perspective on self. Their autobiographies become a search for the pattern which begins in a catalog of remembered or half-remembered responses to the world around them.

Though adults, too, rebel when they feel locked into a structure over which they have little control, they usually try various methods to gain control. Josephine Johnson's passionate coveting of her teacher's



bell as a power symbol and Emily Kimbrough's hatred of the doll her grandmother had given her on which the clothes were permanently sewn are only two of innumerable examples showing the locked-in, pent-up feelings of powerlessness, which are so much a daily part of children's experience.

The host of fears and anxieties about phenomena adults take for granted also intensify the emotional pitch of childhood. The assumption of Emily Kimbrough's vituperative teacher that Emily knew more about her grandfather's position as a state senator than she would admit to is one of many examples in these autobiographies which illustrates the way in which adults draw completely wrong generalizations about the minds of children, thereby increasing stress on them.

Frequent attempts by these autobiographers to define the essence of "home" point to their often-expressed need to identify and explore the emotional climate in which they grew up. So important is coming to grips with this emotional climate that in some very important ways it often provides the context for entire autobiographies, as Chapter 5 of this study indicates. Descriptions of epiphanies abound in which the adult remembers when her child-self broke through to some new insight about the world.

Some autobiographers, such as Josephine Johnson in Seven Houses: A Memoir of Time and Places, use

different levels of language in the same paragraph to attempt to move in and out of the child mind. Others, such as Emily Kimbrough in How Dear To My Heart, attempt to re-create that child's mind by supplying a detailed series of vignettes to show the chronological and emotional development of the child. Though these works are literary constructs, they are filled with details suggesting their authenticity as records of what it feels like to be a child.

Possibilities for future study of this area are numerous. The questions "What is home?" and "Where is home?" shout from the pages of these autobiographies. A discussion of the concept of home in these autobiographies, alone, would require serious study of the elements that affect and alter stability. Another fruitful investigation might focus on the influence of religious phenomena and religious teaching on a child, since religious imagery and fears permeate the autobiographies. The study of the way death influences a child, as seen in these sources, offers another area for investigation, as does the effect of racial or social prejudice on a child. Like the analyses of Josephine W. Johnson's Seven Houses: A Memoir of Time and Places and Emily Kimbrough's So Dear To My Heart, analyses of the systematic techniques autobiographers use to re-create their childhood feelings unite the intellectual awareness of the child's feelings with an emotional

awareness of them.

Chapter 3 of this study, "Role Models," focuses on functions characterizing adults who are role models for children: developers of a sense of vocation, protectors, and teachers of self-confidence and self-respect. For many autobiographers the perspective of distance finds the beginnings of significant life patterns in seemingly isolated encounters with persons admired, whom they finally seek to emulate in one or many ways.

Role models who help to develop a sense of vocation may directly influence a choice--intentionally or not--or they may simply encourage the development of skills and habits which serve the individual well in later life. Fathers seem especially numerous in the latter category. Perhaps the most striking example was the father of Margaret Sanger who forced her to examine critically the words of the Lord's Prayer, which she had previously recited mechanically without thinking. Her father's insistence that the highest calling on earth was helping others, coupled with the critical thinking skills he taught, provided important tools for the woman who became a birth control crusader.

Role models who served as protectors in these autobiographies are most often women, and they are sometimes described as possessing characteristics opposite to those of the fathers. Though Helen Flexner, Ariel Durant,

Marcia Davenport, and Maya Angelou do not ignore the shortcomings of their mothers, they find great compensating virtues in them. Maya Angelou's grandmother is one of the most powerful female protectors described. She upheld high physical, social, and moral standards and wisely found a supportive friend for Maya after she was raped at the age of eight.

This friend, Mrs. Flowers, was a role model who taught self-confidence and self-respect, as did Nikki Giovanni's older sister Gary. A story from Nikki Giovanni's Gemini . . . well illustrates the way Gary taught these qualities. Nikki, crying bitterly during her first hour of kindergarten, was accosted by her fifth grade sister, Gary, whom she idolized and thought of as grown-up. Giovanni remembers that when Gary told her not to cry, "Tears falling literally pulled themselves back into my eyes. . . ." (p. 19).

Margaret Mead's family was unique in combining all the roles previously mentioned. Her mother, her father, and her paternal grandmother were vocational models, protectors, and teachers of self-respect. They treated her as an individual capable of any task she undertook. People like Momma and Mrs. Flowers in I Know Why The Caged Bird Sings, Nikki Giovanni's sister, Gary, in Gemini . . ., and the parents and paternal grandmother of Margaret Mead in Blackberry Winter are so indelibly

stamped on Angelou, Giovanni, and Mead that it is impossible to know the autobiographers without also knowing these important others. Significant analysis might be done, breaking down characteristics of life-changing role models into their component parts. Further, educators might study ways to motivate students to learn or to improve their belief in their own capacities by finding ways to incorporate role-modelling techniques into the curriculum.

Oddly enough, many of these role models, especially mothers, committed egregious wrongs in rearing their offspring that would have seemed to alienate the children; yet, many of these autobiographers seem more closely drawn than ever to these mothers because of these faults. Why is this true? What characteristics of the role model most strongly bond the young to him/her? Further study of these questions might involve detailed evaluation of key passages in these autobiographies, since passages describing such bonding are among the most powerful in the books studied.

Chapter 4 discussed this bonding, which is often a key factor in shaping the young girl's sense of her own sex, an issue which virtually every female autobiographer discusses. Only a few, such as Mead, Mannes, and Suckow were socialized to think androgynously. Whatever the form the socialization to sex roles took, it

was a powerful factor in the girl's development. Descriptions of inadequate sexual information, euphemisms, the dearth of career and economic expectations for females, and cultural mores that consider women to be second-rate human beings are far more common, however, than are descriptions of women raised to be fully rounded human beings. The roots of the poor self image many modern women struggle with are described vividly in these autobiographies. They are epitomized by the horror Helen Flexner felt when her talented, admired mother and her brilliant sister, Carey, had to resort to tears in order to persuade Flexner's father to allow Carey to attend college.

Maxine Hong Kingston's The Woman Warrior and Jade Snow Wong's Fifth Chinese Daughter, both studies of Chinese-American women who struggled against tremendous odds to educate themselves and become productive human beings, might seem aberrations, since they so clearly describe the customs of the Chinese culture in which women were both covertly and overtly discouraged from seeking individual identities. Yet, the mythic framework of Kingston's book--embodied in the tension between the image of the woman warrior and the image of the slave-wife--and the domestic claustrophobia so central to Wong's book delineate the boundaries of experience with which other American women must live, also. These two books

underscore the fact that cultural restraints on women are deeply rooted in cultural mores, for which no contemporary rational cultural justification can be found at the time an autobiography was written.

More study of the way in which societies socialize females--using autobiographies as texts--would be very helpful, as well as fuller study of the historical sources of such socialization. Much more study of the factors which retard healthy sex role formation is needed, also, in addition to study of the psychological consequences of negative sex roles and ways to combat these.

Chapter 5 discusses the psychological distance from "home" four specific autobiographers--Sally Carrighar, Maureen Howard, Joyce Maynard, and Elizabeth Borton de Treviño--have come. This is a crucial chapter because it deals with the essential nature of autobiography: an individual's life story is always filtered through a set of values extant at the time the autobiography is written. Further, the relation of the adult autobiographer to his/her individual concept of "home" is the single most important yardstick by which to judge the objectivity and authenticity of the autobiographer. Carrighar calmly details a terrifying childhood, over which she had gained control through extensive psychological counselling and a satisfying career as a nature writer. Howard shoots brilliant images at the reader

of family play-acting and her own unresolved conflicts with her mother and father; Joyce Maynard fancies herself the cultural spokesperson for the generation of the 60's; bearing a tough-spoken facade she inundates the reader in cultural generalizations while revealing little about her own family life. Elizabeth Borton de Treviño evokes a rich cultural heritage, now gone, which focused on the strengths of individuals. A reader cannot divorce the writer's attitude from the historical past discussed and shaped by the writer. The two are inextricable.

Autobiographies are studies not only of the specific childhood milieu being discussed but of the life continuum itself. Since the conscious or unconscious coloring of childhood experience is often cited as a drawback to the study of autobiographical sources, much more attention must be given to ways to detect such coloration, ways to measure its effect on the account of childhood, and ways to sort out universally applicable insights from the merely idiosyncratic.

In Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts, Albert E. Stone discusses Phyllis Greenacres' belief that "one of the social functions of the creative individual is precisely to explore the frontiers of personal identity."<sup>9</sup> A culture obsessed, as ours is, with personal identity and its antecedents, is ripe for the study of "artistic careers" because "only young children, philosophers,



artists, . . . concern themselves constantly with questions of their own identities."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Stone concludes, ". . . artists who recall and philosophize about themselves as young children would seem particularly sensitive seismographs registering important and prophetic personality patterns within a culture."<sup>11</sup>

In Autobiography in Education Peter Abbs argues a complementary position: "It is in individual experience --and only there--that I and the many interacting worlds . . . come together in an intricate, creative, and largely unconscious manifold."<sup>12</sup> To Abbs and Stone, autobiographers are seen as cultural seismographs registering widely held patterns; they are valid responders precisely because only in the individual is cultural influence truly assimilated. This study of childhood through the autobiographies of twentieth century American women fully supports that position.

## Notes

1 Albert E. Stone, Autobiographical Occasions and Original Acts (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pa. Press, 1982), p. 317.

2 Stone, p. 312.

3 Stone, p. 323.

4 Virginia Woolf, "The New Biography," in Collected Essays, Vol. IV (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1967), p. 229.

5 Woolf, p. 234.

6 Peter Abbs, Autobiography In Education (London: Heinemann Educational Books, 1974), p. 7.

7 See Chapter 1, Note 2.

8 Stone, p. 94.

9 Stone, p. 144.

10 Stone, p. 95.

11 Abbs, p. 4.

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