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**Chronotope and Polyphony in Contemporary Women's
Literature**

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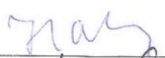
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ABSTRACT

CHRONOTOPE AND POLYPHONY IN (CONTEMPORARY) WOMEN’S LITERATURE

ESER PEHLIVAN

The aim of this dissertation will be to analyze the discourse formations and subversions in the novels **We Have Always Lived in the Castle** by Shirley Jackson, **Cat’s Eye** by Margaret Atwood and **Unless** by Carol Shields. Through a poststructural reading of the uses of two Bakhtinian concepts, namely “chronotope” and “polyphony”, this study will show how each of the novels expose the constructed nature of the gendered subject, and how a variety of voices introduced in these novels challenge the unitary subject formations, and creating a new narrative space for experiences that are not within the norms of culture.

KEYWORDS: Subjectivity, Feminism, Chronotope, Polyphony, Bakhtin

ÖZ

CHRONOTOPE AND POLYPHONY IN (CONTEMPORARY) WOMEN’S LITERATURE

ESER PEHLİVAN

Bu tezin amacı, söylem oluşumlarını ve bunların ters yüz edilişlerini Shirley Jackson’ın **We Have Always Lived in a Castle**, Margaret Atwood’un **Cat’s Eye** ve Carol Shields’in **Unless** romanlarında incelemektir. İki Bakhtin terimi olan zaman-uzam ve çokseslilik kavramlarının postyapısalcı bir okumayla, bu çalışmada kavramların cinsiyet ilişkilerinin edimsel yönlerini nasıl açığa çıkardığını ve romanlarda tanıtılan çok sesliliğin, tek özne oluşumuna karşı nasıl meydan okuduğu gösterilecektir. Bu durumun anlatıda kültürün normları içerisinde yer almayan yeni tecrübe alanları yarattığını gösterecektir.

ANAHTAR KELİMELEER: Öznesellik, Feminizm, Zaman-Uzam, Çokseslilik, Bakhtin

PREFACE

The aim of this study is to analyze the ways Shirley Jackson, Margaret Atwood, and Carol Shields adapts and appropriates the concept of the female subject. I will discuss each novel with regards to their relation to the feminist waves they were written under, and scrutinize how with each novel, the ways and means of constructing a gendered subject alters. To highlight the changes, I will use Mikhail M. Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony and chronotope in dialogue with Julia Kristeva's and Judith Butler's theories regarding the construction of a gendered subject.

I would like to thank certain people who have been pivotal in the course of my writing. Firstly, I would like to thank my thesis advisor Assistant Professor Sinem Yazıcıoğlu, working with her was truly a privilege. Even though the process of writing this study has been, at times, strenuous and anxiety inducing, I always looked forward to our meetings. She always managed to understand my chaotic ramblings, and guided me through countless moments of crisis. I could not have done this without her ceaseless support. I am grateful for everything she taught me over the years I have known her, and I am thankful that she helped me laugh through all of the stressful times that came with the writing process.

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ABBREVIATIONS LIST

Ibid : In the same source

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INTRODUCTION

In 1792, Mary Wollstonecraft wrote the first philosophical feminist treatise **A Vindication of the Rights of Woman**, this seminal book became the backbone of the waves of feminism, especially laying the groundwork for the first-wave feminists. As a socio-political movement, feminism, or feminisms, is a complicated term to define as other movements that are concerned with human rights. Over the years, there have been many branches of feminisms concerning different races, religions, and sexual orientation but for a better understanding, the evolution of feminism can be observed under three waves. The first wave of feminism spans from the late nineteenth century to mid-twentieth century, and even though it is called the first, this movement by no means marks the origin of feminism, but is an outburst of an accumulation of women activists and writers of centuries past. First-wave feminists were concerned with the suffrage movement and an equal recognition with men under the law. This aspect of the movement meant putting an end to the nineteenth century notion called *the cult of domesticity*, which placed women as subordinate and homebound objects of their husbands. This refusal of domestic bounds and objectification became what Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar call “women’s unprecedented invasion of the public sphere” (1988:4), positioning the woman as the other, in search for a subjecthood that does not merely frame her as a lesser version of her male counterpart, which puts the notion of what it means to be a subject at the heart of the feminist movements.

In 1949, at the intersection of the first and the second wave of feminism, Simone de Beauvoir published her key work on feminist philosophy **The Second Sex**, in which she asks her famous philosophical question “What is a woman?” (13), situating womanhood not as a biological but a cultural construct, adding “[...] every female human being is not necessarily a woman” (Ibid.); in other words, having the biological components that scientifically make up the female of the species in themselves are not enough to make one into the culturally inscribed category of women. In an interview, Julia Kristeva states that **The Second Sex** adds to the already existing notions of women’s

bodily autonomy and their right for social, economic, and political equality the idea of “transcendence as freedom” (166). Beauvoir’s views situate her work as the middle ground between the second and first wave of feminism, which exposed the role of women as the inessential object to the essential male subject and brought attention to the necessity for every feminist philosophical or political work to position woman as the subject. As Kristeva argues in the interview mentioned above, in the process of subjectivization, feminist movements fell into the fallacy of assuming a collective identity that negated the I of the woman as an individual but adds this problem is not neglected in Beauvoir’s work, which according to her “hardly eradicates the ‘subject’ or the ‘individual’ within woman” (168). In other words, the value of Beauvoir’s work does not only come from her recognition of woman as a social entity rather than a biological one but also through her acknowledgement of female individuality that has been collectivized with the mythification of their identity through the lens of patriarchal politics that established them as an object. As Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue, “de Beauvoir was [...], the first major contemporary feminist to articulate what now seems to all (except for a conservative minority) to be woman’s basic right to personhood” (1994; 370).

The problem of subjectivity became the main concern for second-wave feminists. Writers such as Adrienne Rich in the United States, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray in France, foregrounded the individual experiences of womanhood rather than collectivized and monological versions that assumed to speak for all women. In the United States, Betty Friedan’s pivotal book **The Feminine Mystique** (1963) marks the transition from the first-wave into the second-wave. In it Friedan asserts, “The feminine mystique has succeeded in burying millions of American women alive” (12), as the fifties was also a time in the United States when the feminist movement had taken a backseat, but still many works of literature and movies, by both men and women reflected the claustrophobic anxiety created around women’s existence within the public sphere. For example, Douglas Sirk’s movie **All that Heaven Allows** (1955), which at the time of its release fell under the category of *women’s picture*, subverts the very image of the fifties’ both at its interior and exterior, as he uses the lighting and colors of the movie to expose the fakeness of the

suburban landscape of his melodrama of a woman pressured to adhere to a certain social role. The anxiety experienced was not just about women's allocation to the domestic sphere but also about their assumed identity as mothers, and that would echo in later works such as Roman Polanski's **Rosemary's Baby** (1967). The confinement into the home, and into the role of motherhood, once again, gave women a collective identity, and consequently negated their individuality. Betty Friedan was de Beauvoir's successor in the United States as Gubar and Gilbert posits, "She plainly expected a reorganization of family structures when and if the New Woman managed to replace the mother-woman and the sextoid" (1994; 370). Like de Beauvoir, Friedan championed for the necessity of women becoming subjects of their own discourses.

The third wave of feminism begins in the mid-nineteens, and was made possible through the accomplishments women achieved through the second wave. In 1992, Rebecca Walker wrote an article named "Becoming the Third Wave," in which she expresses her rage over Anita Hill's¹ case against Clarence Thomas, which she claims showed "the extent of women's credibility and power" (39). In other words, the outcome of the case, the promotion of Thomas and the repudiation of Hill, showed how women's voices were still restricted in the name of men's power. Historically, the rise of the third-wave was inherently Gothic, recalling Freud's concept of the return of the repressed, since at the seventies and eighties it was assumed women achieved the liberation they aimed for, and there was no need for feminism itself anymore. Third-wave feminists proved there was still much to talk about over the repression of women, which did not disappear but transformed within new discourses. Unlike the first wave and the second wave, the third wave of feminism does not have a conclusive agenda other than deconstructing feminist notions prior to its emergence, to the point that even the existence of a third wave is very much debated. Philosopher Judith Butler is the best example to what the so-called third

¹ In 1991 Anita Hill testified before the U.S Congress about the sexual harassment she endured while working with Clarence Thomas, who at the time was George W. Bush's nominee for the Supreme Court. Throughout the hearings she was accused of either lying or being mentally unstable.

wave feminism represent; as the leading figure of queer theory, Butler questioned not only what is a woman but also the very basis of gender and identity construction. In her seminal book, **Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity** (1999), she criticized second wave feminists for their assumption of a collective female identity, as if womanhood is something that fits all sizes and shapes. She describes gender as something shaped heavily through intersecting socio-cultural and political factors, meaning for different races, sexualities, and religions there cannot exist just one way of being a woman, thus repudiating the very idea of the universally female in favor of a polyphonic individual existence.

In **No Man's Land: Letters from the Front** (1994), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar use various versions of the tale "Snow White" they themselves write to highlight both the persistent problematics caused by the notion of a gendered identity, and the feminist camps that have been created around this complex issue. They argue that the socio-cultural changes of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries caused an "intense consciousness of the artifice of gender, [which] impelled many artists to ring what seems to have been every possible change on how the story of the relationship between the sexes can be narrated" (1994; 368). As they list a recurring cast of characters in modernist literature that have been used by women writers to subvert the hierarchies of the patriarchal law, they divide the feminist thinkers of the twentieth century into two categories; "gradualists (who believed in working within established social structures in order to achieve change) and radicals (who wished to obliterate most extant social institutions)" (369). As thinkers like Simone de Beauvoir and Betty Friedan figure into the category of the gradualists, other writers such as Helene Cixous and Adrienne Rich constitute the radicals that wanted the categories of gender completely dismantled. To this binary, Gubar and Gilbert add the mirror and vamp critics; the mirror critics are gradualists and the vamps are radicals, mirror critics; "work with (and usually within) established structures—the institutional structures of the academy along with the intellectual structures signified by such words *as mother, canon, genre, nationality, class, and race*, while the openly ex-centric vamp critic rejects what seems to her the hegemony of such

categories” (1994; 376). They consider critics like Julia Kristeva, Helene Cixous and Luce Irigaray as vamps who “believe that to renovate literary culture is merely to reinstate (albeit in new configurations) the phallogocentric hierarchies that have traditionally subordinated the feminine” (1994; 377). Moreover, “the vamp critics” celebrate the semiotic under the symbolic with its powers to disrupt the patriarchal law.

Behind all three waves of feminism lies the reality of wars that changed the way time and place have been perceived, which led to new understandings regarding what it meant to be a subject in the modern world. Before the beginning of World War I, the art world witnessed the emergence of Cubism with the paintings of Pablo Picasso and Georges Braque, which would also find its echoes in literary forms, especially in poetry, in writers such as Gertrude Stein. Cubism signaled a major shift in the way perspective had been utilized within arts and literature. The movement arguably had its roots in Cezanne’s paintings, who revolutionized the spatial landscape into flattened images foregrounding the subjective perception. Cubism rose as a reactionary form against the use of the single perspective of the Renaissance paintings, which gave them their reality effect. With the start of World War I, Cubism itself transformed into a reality effect, as Martin Jay asserts in **Downcast Eyes**, “When all that the soldier could see was the sky above and the mud below, the traditional reliance on visual evidence for survival could no longer be easily maintained” (188), but whereas from the perspective of the ground it expressed the decomposition of spatial order, from the air it suggested a landscape with unexpected intelligibility, and thus began the collapse of sight as the most important sensory organ. Mikhail M. Bakhtin was writing in a world that was shaken by the trauma of a war that proved perception to be prone to illusion, and was now in the midst of a far more brutal version of it. Beginning with his first publications, he would reclaim perception, or what he calls a person’s *field of vision*, which vitally depends on her singular spatial position as a way to explain the philosophical questions of being and responsibility, and would later transform this surplus of vision into his most known concepts of polyphony, which positions language as a constant dialogue with no fixed points of

meaning, and chronotope, the innate and meaning inducing connection between time and space.

Bakhtin grounds the very distinction between monologic and polyphonic literary works upon the author's field of vision, and the surplus provided by the authorial point of view. As Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson maintain in **Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics**, "monologism achieves unity by incorporating all elements of the work into a single design governed by a single semantic authority" (254). The author of a monological work uses his surplus of vision over her characters to dictate and create a single narrative thread that will come to denote one authoritative meaning. On the other hand, "[t]he polyphonic work has several distinct and irreducible centers" (Ibid.), constantly in dialogue with one another without negation. A polyphonic design can succeed only if characters are imagined as unfinalizable from the outset as on the threshold of essential and "unpredictable change" (Ibid.). This change, or the implication of it, can only take place within a continuous dialogue between alien discourses, between two consciousnesses, sharing the same surroundings but having different fields of vision. Therefore, the self becomes not only a social entity but also a chronotopic one, Bakhtin emphasized that only the I of the subject can be at a certain place, at a certain time and it is this chronotopicity that is inherent to the formation of the subject that gives it a unique existence. This is what Bakhtin means when he writes in "Towards a Philosophy of the Act" that there is no "alibi for being" (12), and calls people "pretenders" (79) who convince themselves that there could be a justification for existence. However as Morson and Emerson point out, Bakhtin does not use the word in its usual meaning but as "someone who tries to live in no particular place at all" (1990; 180), rather than someone who usurps another's place, highlighting once again the importance of placement as the very thing that makes the self unique. Consequently, Bakhtin foregrounds the importance of the spatial order and the surplus vision of the other as the constitutive element of the subject, which situate that self into the time and space it occupies. With this notion, Bakhtin denies both the isolation and fragmentation of the subjective vision and the dogmatism of a singular vision.

Bakhtin saw thinkers advocating for both subjectivism and absolutism as two extremes existing on the same pole. Both sides explain the chaos of existence, which for Bakhtin needed no explanation at all, since he saw chaos as the original state of being. For Bakhtin, it was order that needed justification, especially the kind of order that was being imposed upon what he called an *unfinalizable* world. Bakhtin did not refuse all forms of perceiving the world in unity; his disbelief was towards the systems that structured such an order that created the illusion of any sort of closure and finalizability. He argued that only through the genre of the novel could both the chaos of being and the ensuing chaotic unity could be truly observed and analyzed. Situating the novelistic genre as a “process of becoming” (1981; 7) Bakhtin argued that only the novel could convey what he asserts a “semantic openendedness” (Ibid. 7). What distinguished the novel from its predecessors like the epic was its capability of creating a polyphonic unity of voices, constantly in a dialogue that cannot be exhausted with the passage of time, always retaining its presentness, unlike the totalizing “absolute past” (Ibid. 15) of the epic genre, which kept it far removed from the discursive forces of actual history. Through its temporal orientation towards the presentness of events, the novel transforms the world into a place in which “no first word (no ideal word) and the final word” (Ibid. 30) has been spoken. This temporal inclination gives rise to the polyphonic language of the novel, which signifies a process of constant dialogue between different voices from different times and spaces that both stabilize the content with loose unifications, while also keeping it open to necessary alterations that may be reflected upon it by cultural changes.

Bakhtin’s concept of polyphony also shows his inherent distrust of structures; through it, Bakhtin refuses the concept of language as a stable generator of meaning. In “Discourse in the Novel” Bakhtin regards the “common unitary language [...] as a system of linguistic norms” (1981; 270), which endangers the heteroglot nature of language itself. Bakhtin decentralizes the code and message while emphasizing the meaning generating potential of an ongoing dialogue. As Morson and Emerson underline, “real dialogism will incarnate a world whose unity is essentially one of multiple voices, whose conversation never reach finality [...]. The unity of the world will then appear as it really is:

polyphonic” (1990; 61). In other words, Bakhtin does not use polyphony as a tool for structuring authoritative meanings, but as a means to foreground the open ended process immanent to both culture and the novel, refusing the constraints of both the formalists and structuralists in their search for an aestheticized authoritative word that semantically ties all literature to a neat canon of texts with fixed meanings. In his essay “Epic and Novel,” Bakhtin goes as far to implicate the novel’s incapability to have a fully formed literary canon. Bakhtin views the sub-genres of the novels as memory carrying devices, rather than fixed structures with denotative meanings, and because of the novel’s inherent “spirit of progress and inconclusiveness” (1981; 7). As a result, Bakhtin dismisses the idea of a novel as a strict and canonized genre.

Bakhtin’s view upon the subgenres of the novel functions as his transition into his concept of the chronotope. As Simon Dentith asserts, Bakhtin situates language “as the site or space in which dialogical relationships are realized” (34), therefore grounding language not as a stable semantic structure but a spatial plane where dialogues are in constant progress. The plane of language is not only spatial but also temporal, as every word and shifting meaning reflects its own epoch while also carrying unrealized potential for a future realization of a different meaning. Genres function in a similar manner, having their roots in their constitutive chronotopes. Bakhtin defines “chronotope” in **The Dialogic Imagination**, as the “intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships [...] Time as it were thickens, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible, likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history.” (84). Bakhtin does not only focus on space separately but also integrates it with the temporality it reflects, and adds, “It can even be said that it is precisely the chronotope that defines genre and generic distinctions” (Ibid. 85), as well as situating “the image of man as [...] intrinsically chronotopic” (Ibid.). From these statements, it is clear that chronotopes play a part in structuring the novelistic genre; even though Bakhtin rejects structures as means to singularize the polyphonic unity of the world, he recognizes the need for a some form of unity and common ground for a dialogue to take place.

Subgenres provide the novelistic discourse with the necessary shared *horizon of expectation*, which Hans Robert Jauss uses for showing how the experience and expectations of reading a text changes depending on the readers' cultural and historical context. A reader might easily recognize from the first pages that the book she is reading belongs to which genre. This realization carries with it certain expectations since as Morson and Emerson observe literary genres for Bakhtin signify two vital aspects; first one being its use as "a key organ of memory," and second is its use as "a vehicle of historicity" (1990; 280). In other words, Bakhtin's theory situates the texts' reception to an atemporal space, which shifts in accordance to the reader's place and time of reading. From the outset, genres are steeped into time and space, but the memories they carry into the present by no means act as restrictive regulators. As Morson and Emerson maintain, "The past must contain the potential to shape though not wholly to determine, new visions of the world" (Ibid). Bakhtin sees genres as forms of thinking and seeing, and as conflating discourses of the past with the present, while the author exploits their timeless potential. "In choosing a genre, an author adapts a partially alien vision and imposes on himself a difficult set of constraints" (Ibid. 283). In other words, they carry the residues of alien visions and thoughts, but it is through this intrusive phenomenon that a true subversion can be achieved. The codes and messages of a genre can be transgressed and even be used against itself as a means of a cleansing of the "accumulated centuries of conceptualizations" (Ibid. 285). For Bakhtin, the genre is the novel's pivotal connection to its own history, thus, it becomes the most powerful site to confront the voices of the past, without letting them take over. Even though Bakhtin's writings do not carry a feminist agenda, since he rarely analyzes female writers, or writes about women in general, the way his criticism frees the novel from structuralism's bounds paves a way for confronting prejudices that are internal to any discourse regarding its generalizing tendency of marginalized groups.

Bakhtin's writings parallel the modern idea of the decentralization of language, and therefore the subject. Freud's division of the self into the categories of the conscious and the unconscious destabilized the prior perception of the subject of Enlightenment, as

something whole and as a container of knowledge. As Nick Mansfield writes, “the disjunction between rational and irrational dimensions of subjectivity, between conscious and unconscious, represents the first profound challenge to the idea that the individual makes sense” (20). In other words, Freud’s showing the repressed part of the individual’s psyche created the possibility for a new psychoanalytical discourse in the postwar period regarding the understanding of the self not as a stable subject but as a subject in process or on trial, as Kristeva conceptualizes it. Moreover, beginning with the nineteenth century, the concept of a self with “radical distrust of itself, its fear of isolation, dark desire, hidden madness and easy breakdowns” (Mansfield, 25) became more prevalent, only to take center stage in the second half of the twentieth century. Lacan’s subsequent work regarding the theories of Freud added new means of envisioning the process of gaining subjectivity. If Freud’s theories foregrounded the dialogic aspect of the subject, Lacan’s theories proved the importance of the self’s chronotopic associations. According to Lacan, the infant only recognizes itself as a self in what he calls the mirror stage. Prior to that, the child does not have a conception of itself as an independent being. It is through the mirror-stage that the infant comes to be able to discern things as internal and external, separating itself from its surroundings. It is in the mirror-stage that the notion of subjectivity is acquired. The infant perceives its separation when it recognizes itself in the mirror, therefore it becomes a subject as far as it is able recognize itself in space.

One of the main issues that became foregrounded in the postwar thought regarding the subject was its discursive nature. For this reason Kristeva’s writings regarding the concepts of intertextuality and subjectivity was heavily influenced by Bakhtin’s, as she writes in **Desire in Language**, “Bakhtin was one of the first to replace the static hewing out of texts with a model where literary structure does not simply *exist* but is generated in relation to *another* structure” (64-65). As emphasized in the theories of Bakhtin and Kristeva, the concept of the subject is not fixed but rather is always in a process due to its dialogical nature. Nevertheless, as Catherine Belsey maintains just because the meaning of a word is plural does not mean subjectivity itself is a plural phenomenon, she posits, “A word or a sentence is intelligible only within a specific discourse, and discourse is in

turn constitutive of subjectivity” (45). In other words, meanings are not constructed from a plural subjectivity, but it is the multiplicity of meanings that compose the subject as something that is in constant process, and “[t]o posit the subject as an authority for a single meaning is to ignore the degree to which subjectivity itself is a discursive construct” (Ibid.). In this context, Kristeva’s notion of the subject heavily relies on her conception of the semiotic mimesis that creates the connotative nature of words even if it is conceptualized as always rooted in the symbolic law. Since the subject is molded in language, it is also an inevitably ideological construction, and as Mansfield maintains, the question for Butler, as a critic of Kristeva, becomes “a struggle over whether any identity- or any model of subjectivity, for that matter- can ever make you free” (1999; 78). Moreover, the plurality of meaning does not guarantee or constitute a multiplicity of subjectivity, which is heavily echoed in the problem of the female subject. Ultimately, what language and discourse create is coherence, as Belsey writes, “In [the realist text’s] attempt to create a coherent and internally consistent fictive world the text, in spite of itself, exposes incoherences, omissions, absences and transgressions which in turn reveal the inability of the language of ideology to create coherence” (88). These incoherences and absences result from what Bakhtin terms the heteroglot nature of texts and Kristeva’s semiotic chora which itself is an absent center for the symbolic. Belsey adds that through these inconsistencies realist texts make apparent “the contradictions between the diverse elements drawn from different discourses, the ideological project, and the literary form, [which] creates an absent center of the work” (Ibid.). The absent center that lies at the heart of literary texts mirrors the same absence experienced by Lacan and Kristeva’s split subject. The semiotic drives disrupt the language’s ability to mean, making it polyphonic, never allowing the symbolic law to achieve fixed meanings.

The deconstruction of the subject, which includes the critical reception of Freud and Kristeva’s reception of Bakhtin subsequently pursued further by theorists like Lacan, Kristeva, and more recently by Butler situates the subject as a being that is in constant dialogue with its surroundings, and foregrounding it as a construct of the very language it has been molded in in the first place. As Michael Holquist maintains, “In dialogism, the

very capacity to have consciousness is based on *otherness*. [...] It is the differential relation between a center and all that is not that center” (18) and adds that in Bakhtinian thought, “Being is a simultaneity: it is always a co-being” (25). As Mansfield maintains Lacan’s mirror-stage also frames the subject as, “the discourse of other” (43), and he adds that “the subject does not define itself, instead, it is defined by something other than itself” (Ibid.). In other words, the infant can only get a sense of separation by recognizing its unique position with the help of its reflection, which simultaneously lets her perceive herself as a whole and alienates it since the only way for her to define herself is through an external image. This decentralization of the subject discloses the chronotopic and dialogic nature of subjectivity. Taking her cue from Lacan’s psychoanalytic theories, Kristeva develops Lacan’s theory of the mirror-stage into what she calls the semiotic. However, as Mansfield argues, “the fathers of psychoanalysis are committed to stability, order and a fixed and constant identity. The daughter on the other hand, is able to develop a detailed model that reveals, beneath the father’s ordered world, a host of uncertainties and unresolved images and emotions” (80). In other words, for Kristeva, Lacan’s Imaginary turns into the semiotic order and gives the subject a space, which she calls the semiotic chora, a realm that exists before language and one that subverts the masculine symbolic. Fashioning it in the resemblance of a womb, the semiotic chora remains inherently maternal. Kristeva also locates the word at the beginning of all things, but her concept of the word as originator is not masculine, but an archaic word that is rooted in the maternal, which she terms the *poetic*. Even though the infant’s passage into the symbolic severs her ties with the semiotic chora, the existence of the symbolic word cannot efface it completely, as the drives that originate from the chora constantly interrupt the subject’s existence in the symbolic order as they constitute “waves of attack against stases” (1984; 28).

Poetic language and its revolutionary powers lie at the heart of Kristeva’s works. Kristeva situates poetic language as a tool to subvert the patriarchal power structures as it reconnects the subject to the maternal body. Kristeva defines “the poetic” word as “polyvalent and multi-determined, adheres to a logic exceeding that of codified discourse

and fully comes into being only in the margins of recognized culture” (1980; 55). Even at its minimal unit the poetic word remains with at least a double meaning. What Bakhtin terms as the carnival, Kristeva calls the poetic word. Both terms for both scholars refer to a combination of texts and voices with no fixed point nor meaning. For Kristeva, “in the space of a given text, several utterances, taken from other texts, intersect and neutralize one another” (1980; 36); in other words, the text is the space where language is used in redistribution and the place where other texts permeate. According to Kristeva, the novel comes together in the space where the *alethic* modality of opposition and *deontic* modality of reunion come together, and as a result, “the novel absorbs the duplicity (the dialogism) of the carnivalesque scene while submitting it to the univocity (monologism) of the symbolic disjunction” (1980; 44). The novel belongs to the symbolic order, as language is necessary for intelligibility, but most importantly contains bursts of the poetic word, which adds to its layers of meaning, and multi-faceted utterances that frees its construction from any structuralist approach. According to Kristeva what makes novels and language carnivalesque and polyphonic is the work of semiotic mimesis that bursts through the thetic therefore making language itself connotative rather than denotative, as Kristeva argues, “Poetic mimesis maintains and transgresses thetic unicity by making it undergo a kind of anamnesis” (1984, 60). In other words, the poetic mimesis disrupts the language’s ability to mean or denote in fixed terms by constantly carrying within it traces from its past uses, which recalls Bakhtin’s notions of heteroglossia and polyphony.

Like many French Feminists of her time, Kristeva builds her arguments on Lacan’s psychoanalytic theories, which places the maternal as a lack that must be left behind in order to integrate into culture, and to be civilized, but distinguishes between Lacan’s symbolic order, which represents culture itself, the language that is used, and the legal codes, which provide the basis for the norms of a society by constructing a common intelligibility that produces the subjectivity of the individuals, and the semiotic order. According to Kristeva, the semiotic order is constantly negated by the symbolic, repressed and abjected by it, but is also the very concept that keeps interrupting the symbolic order. semiotics, as a science, is about the study of signs that predates language and psychology,

for Saussure semiotics function between the psychological and linguistic. Within Kristeva's theory, the semiotic order is something far more fundamental than the symbolic, as it constitutes a prior mode of communication of signs and rhythms that predates language. Before the person arrives at the law of the father, and acquires a language of fixed meanings, there exists a plane of multiple meanings and heterogeneity, out of the grasps of the unifying institutions of the symbolic. Situating the semiotic as a break from the totalitarian bounds of the patriarchal laws and language, as a utopic place of complete freedom from the normative rigidity that comes with languages. As Gubar and Gilbert argue, with the semiotic, one of Kristeva's main argument becomes how "the discourse of the mother seems such an impossibility [...] because the symbolic linguistic order is necessarily patriarchal, the maternal can never speak itself except through the mediation of the very phallic structures which must repress it" (1994; 390). In this context, the problem becomes not whether Kristeva is an essentialist but how revolutionary the theory of the semiotic itself can be.

Judith Butler's criticism of Kristeva occurs in regards to Kristeva's heavy use of Freud's and Lacan's psychoanalytic theories, and her construction of the semiotic. For Butler, one of the fallacies of Kristevan theory is that she is too indoctrinated by structuralism, and Lacan's psychoanalytic theory. As she argues, Kristeva does not necessarily deconstruct Lacan's binary assumption of the way that women and men are demarcated as the subject and the lack; however, by using the semiotic, she adds a deeper layer to it and locates the mother at the heart of the individual. Kristeva claims that within her theory, the semiotic and the symbolic are not separate but intertwined and one cannot make sense without the other, as she writes "Because the subject is always *both* semiotic *and* symbolic, no signifying system he produces can be either 'exclusively' semiotic or 'exclusively' symbolic, and is instead necessarily marked by an indebtedness to both" (1984, 24). However, Butler sees the paradox of this claim, as regardless to the way both orders integrate, they are still a part of an exclusionary binary which creates the two genders and then sets them apart. Butler argues, "[Kristeva's] theory appears to depend upon the stability and reproduction of precisely the paternal law that she seeks to displace"

(1999, 102). In other words, since the semiotic by its very existence confirms the hegemony of the symbolic, and its disruptions of it are only tentative and temporary, how can the semiotic order, which needs the symbolic law to exist, act as a possibility for freedom? As Butler observes in Kristeva's theory the idea of a persistent semiotic disruption "cannot be maintained within the terms of culture, that its sustained presence within culture leads to psychosis and the breakdown of cultural life itself" (1999, 102). In this context, like the semiotic chora that both generates and negates the subject, Kristeva's notion of the semiotic itself both "posits and denies the semiotic as an emancipatory ideal" (Ibid.).

For Butler, the central question becomes whether or not the semiotic really is a place of subversion, since it only provides a deeper level to the normative way the subject is produced. The semiotic as a heterogeneous place of multiple meanings can never take center stage in the patriarchal economy, it can only show itself through short bursts, and does not negate the fact that for the subject to be produced, the person still needs to transition into the symbolic. Butler questions the prevalent influence of structuralism within Kristeva's theory, as she analyzes why the foundational theories like the Oedipal complex are still being used as valid. Thus, Butler refutes what Kristeva readily accepts and builds her theory on, namely the symbolic order as the equivalent of culture. Butler asserts that there is no primordial female that is repressed at the basis of culture but rather this very notion of the repressed female creates what is accepted as feminine. It is the very belief into this repression that separates the feminine from the masculine to begin with, through this demarcation the identity of the individual becomes culturally identifiable and thus more controllable. Categorizing people into genders negates individual identities; according to Butler within the feminist politics "the 'unity' of the category of women is neither presupposed nor desired" (1999; 23). Butler sees the problematics of the feminist project to produce female subjects as a means for better political visibility because only after a credible subject is created, true visibility can be achieved.

For one to become a subject in the patriarchal economy, her subjecthood requires stable terms that are intelligible within the norms of culture; thus, the female subject, as the woman or the mother is exclusionary, and for Butler such identity politics themselves are restrictive. As Gilbert and Gubar maintain, “the notion that the symbolic contract inevitably excludes women—a notion grounded in Lacanian as well as Kristevan theory—is problematic” (1994; 390). Since it is through both of the parents, not just the father that a child acquires language, “injunctions against representations of the nature/culture threshold called motherhood are culturally and historically grounded, not psycholinguistically eternal or essential” (Ibid.). Butler distrusts this cultural and historical grounding and questions how and why the notion of an identity has become such an ideal in the first place; according to her “the ‘coherence’ and ‘continuity’ of ‘the person’ are not logical or analytic features of personhood, but, rather, socially instituted and maintained norms of intelligibility” (1999; 23). In other words, Butler echoes Bakhtin’s ideas regarding subjectivism and absolutism being the same, as they both bring about structures that restrict anything and anyone that falls out of the category of intelligibility from the norms of culture. For both Bakhtin and Butler, order is human made, and the notion of an identity or the subject are just human constructs to be better able to label, categorize and rule. Kristeva herself does not necessarily champion the idea of a stable subject, conversely, she asserts that for speech to occur a subject that speaks would be necessary but “this subject, in order to tally with its heterogeneity, must be let us say, a questionable subject-in-process” (1980; 135). In other words, Kristeva’s notion of the subject is also constantly changing and evolving, and what Butler takes issue with is ultimately the fact that no matter the heterogeneity claimed within it, Kristeva still takes the oedipal complex as the foundation that creates the subject and solves the problem of the abandoned and abjected mother through the reintroduction of the semiotic into the symbolic language. Kristeva posits that poetic language “prevents the word from becoming mere sign and the mother from becoming an object” (136). Kristeva defines the semiotic by its very nature as instinctual and maternal, and the reason she sees it as place

to revolt is because it also brings with it a certain fuzziness and multiplicity to the symbolic order of language.

As the concepts of time and space changed, the uses of temporal-spatial configurations also changed. The feminist movement foregrounded the way men and women feel and use time differently; while for men, time is experienced as a straight line due to their position in public life, hence society, women, have been repressed for centuries into domestic duties and thus experience a cyclical time. Such realizations of the personal time, and breakthroughs within the sciences exposed both time and space as not rational givens but as human constructs. Thus, making spatio-temporal theories regarding the person and its surroundings became a necessary tool in the literary criticism. Arguably, women's search for the semiotic chora, leads them to desire another place that is unbounded by the norms of culture, and necessitate a need to create another space of intelligibility for their own experiences. Even though the landscapes changed, and the individual's relationship to time altered, women have to confront with the fact of their abjection from the normative culture. Ultimately, the demarcation of culture and nature split the female subject and situated it both within culture, but also cast out from it.

Within the symbolic law, the only place the female subject occupy is the place of the abject. As Kristeva argues "The abject has only one quality of the object- that of being opposed to I" (1982, 1) the female subject used as the ultimate opposition to create the male subject. In addition, Kristeva's theory of the abject also introduces the subject's vulnerability toward external stimuli. As Mansfield maintains,

No absolute distinction between subject and object results. The subject is merely the hypothetical inside of an imagined container whose walls are permeable. The subject tries to stabilize itself as this inside, yet supposedly, unconscious materials are forever pressing in on it, threatening the consciousness that earlier psychoanalysis has hoped to promote as stable and meaningful. (81)

In this context, the separation that occurs with the mirror stage that creates the notion of an I that is separate from its surroundings, also introduces within the subject the anxiety of transgression, and situates the body as the surface that separates the self from its surroundings. Mansfield adds, “The anxiety grounded in the permeable dividing line between the inside and the outside of the body is replicated endlessly in unease over frontiers and separation in general” (83). In light of this, I will be analyzing three novels written during three separate waves of feminism. In the first chapter, I will analyze Shirley Jackson’s **We Have Always Lived in the Castle** (1962), in regards to the ways it adapts and appropriates the notion of the female subject in the first wave of feminism. First, using Bakhtinian theory, the way Jackson utilizes the genre of Gothic, as a means to appropriate a long canonic tradition that has been seen pivotal to the construction of the female subject, as well as the chronotope of the castle, which is the landmark that the genre is most known for will be analyzed. I will analyze the notion of the inside and outside Jackson creates with the demarcated house the novel’s protagonists live in the light of the domestic/maternal sphere and the public sphere dichotomy, using Kristeva’s theory of the semiotic chora. In addition, with Kristeva’s concept of the abject, I will read the doubling devices used in the novel, especially regarding the two sisters as a criticism of the project of creating a bounded female subject and its fallacies. Lastly, I will analyze Jackson’s appropriation of identity politics in regards to the radical retreat from society that takes place at the end of the novel and will argue that the novel shows the impossibility of the patriarchal fantasy of a stable and impermeable subject.

In the second chapter, I will focus on Margaret Atwood’s **Cat’s Eye** (1988), and Atwood’s politics of the subject parallel to the second wave of feminism. Firstly, I will scrutinize the novelistic genre in regards to the way the novel’s form and narrative structure are used to create the protagonist’s sense of an I/eye. Secondly, I will analyze,

the way the novel appropriates the notion of a unified and coherent female subject in light of the theories of Bakhtin, Kristeva, and Butler. Thirdly, using Bakhtin's concepts of polyphony and chronotope I will explore the protagonist's relation to the city and the ravine and will read the ravine and Elaine's double Cordelia's relation to it through the lens of Kristeva's theory of abjection. Lastly, I will discuss the function of the art show as an alternative version of Elaine's autobiographical narrative.

In the final chapter I will analyze Carol Shields's **Unless** (2002) in relation to the third wave of feminism. Firstly, I will explore the genre conventions of the novel, and the genre of autobiography in regards to female writers, and secondly I will scrutinize the way Shields employs the concepts of the inside and the outside in the light of Bakhtin's chronotope as well as the dialogic nature of the chronotopes used within the novel. Thirdly, I will discuss through the anonymous figure of the burnt woman, who is at the heart of the novel, and in light of Jackson's and Atwood's construction and deconstruction of the female subject, Shields's means of creating a multifaceted subjecthood.

The progression of the three novels of different periods and feminist waves discussed will show the changes regarding the conceptions of a gendered subject, and the problem of subjectivity itself, especially within the feminist discourse. Through the novels, I will analyze the alterations regarding chronotopic and polyphonic structures in relation to the construction of the subject, which will culminate, as Butler writes, in the establishment of a perspective inside of the constructed identities and not from the outside, which is "the construction of an epistemological model that would disavow its own cultural location and, hence, promote itself as a global subject" (1999; 187). All three novels gradually prove the impossibility of a global and authoritative subject that can account for every and any experience. According to Butler, feminism's "critical task is [...] to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity, and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them" (1999; 187). Through the analyzes of **Castle**, **Cat's Eye**, and **Unless**, it

will be argued that the ultimate feminist project regarding the construction of the subject is not to create a coherent and unified gendered subject but to extend the possibilities of representation through the awareness of language's constraints regarding the formation of the subject.

CHAPTER ONE

CHRONOTOPE AND POLYPHONY IN SHIRLEY JACKSON'S **WE HAVE ALWAYS LIVED IN THE CASTLE**

We Have Always Lived in the Castle explores the themes of social stratification and female autonomy within the repressive bounds of an oppressive patriarchal society. By appropriating the traditional landscapes and the narrative voice of the Gothic genre, Jackson challenges the dichotomization of the concepts of inside and outside that have been used to keep women out of the public sphere. At the center of the novel stands Mary Katherine Blackwood and her sister Constance Blackwood, living with their invalid uncle after the murder of their family by poisoning. For six years, after the murders, the remaining Blackwoods lead isolated lives within the fortified Blackwood farm, existing in a suspended continuum of time as they go through their cyclical daily activities. At the Blackwoods' periphery lies the village and its people who did not have good relationships with the now murdered Blackwood family or its surviving members. Since it was Constance who did all the cooking for the household, the suspicion that surrounds her for the arsenic bowl, which poisoned her family, creates a viable reason for the ostracization of the three remaining members. The same negative attention stemming from the trials, which acquits Constance of the crimes, causes her to become agoraphobic and becomes unable to leave the house. Regardless of the tension, the relationship between the Blackwoods and the village people remain at a standstill until the arrival of Cousin Charles. Charles disrupts the order with his intentions to marry Constance and acquire the Blackwood wealth, which commences the progression of the stunted time loop, and pushes the narrative into its climax. The burning of the Blackwood house by Merricat and the stoning by the villagers in the end transforms the old landscape and the house, and through the opening of the fences, turns the Blackwood farm into the center for both the Blackwood sisters and villagers.

In the novel, Jackson utilizes narrative techniques from both the female gothic and male gothic traditions. The female gothic tradition as named by Ellen Moers in her influential essay “Female Gothic: The Monster’s Mother,” takes as its base Ann Radcliffe’s **Mysteries of Udolpho** (1794) and Mary Shelley’s **Frankenstein** (1823). Demarcating two forms of the female Gothic, Moers finds within **Udolpho**, the heroine in flight in the process of discovering a dark hidden truth, and within **Frankenstein** the myth of birth, and the anxieties over both the maternal and motherhood. In the male gothic tradition lies the Oedipal myth, the son’s struggle against the authority of the father, which is symbolized through the eternal fight between him and the law his father constitutes. From this point of view, Jackson’s novel follows two orphaned girls- and their invalid uncle- trying to live peacefully in a town that has vilified them because of the past wrongdoings of their family, which mimics the female gothic plot’s basic structure, two young heroines trying to make their way in a world that is both unknown and hostile to them, after being separated from their parents’ supervision. On the other hand, they are orphaned because Merricat poisoned almost everyone in her family, with an implied help from Constance, mirroring the plot of traditional male gothic story, Merricat and Constance usurp both the family house, their wealth, and become the last remaining legitimate heirs to the Blackwood estate. Both the male gothic and female gothic traditions exist under the over-encompassing tradition of Gothic itself. As seen in **Castle**, two clear cut binaries that constitute the Gothic can easily be mixed together to create a journey of an eccentric means to question the way the speaking female subject is constituted. The female subject beginning with Freud has been buried underneath the patriarchal language of psychoanalysis, as the madwoman, with an inherent knowledge of her possibility of burning down the house and escape, but instead of escaping, the Blackwood sisters remain at the site of their own destruction.

The Gothic genre and the literary devices presumed to constitute it, present the critics and readers alike an intricate challenge caused by its constantly altering definitions. The reason for this is the Gothic novel’s inclination to reshape itself to reflect the anxieties of its own time, making it a genre in a process of constant alterations. For Bakhtin this

refusal of closure was the pivotal aspect that set apart the novel from all other closed genres like the tragedy and the epic which had “already completed their life cycles” (Bakhtin: 1981, 3) by the time of the novel’s rise to popularity, the novel’s comparative contemporariness in contrast to these genres made it the only medium that Bakhtin’s concept of heteroglossia can be fully realized. As the genre of novel became the dominant mode of writing, with its inherent polyphony, it did not only create a new mode of discourse specific to itself, but also transformed “the conventional languages of strictly canonical genres” (Ibid, 6). Even though Bakhtin situates the novelistic genre as a revolutionary form of writing, he still maintains its debt and connection to a past tradition that made its production possible. Moreover, novel’s “openendedness” (Ibid, 8) and newness does not point to a rupture within the tradition of writing but only its transformation, which is ultimately what ensures the novel’s multivoicedness, its connection to a history that is older than its own existence. As a novelistic genre, the Gothic situates itself between both the present and an ancient past, and as Jacqueline Howard states, Gothic literature is a medium with a highly developed “propensity for multiple discourse” (16). Caused by the fact of its reliance on narrative indeterminacy and fantastic modes of storytelling, the Gothic novel manages to condense the anxieties rooted in both past and present as it foregrounds the unfinalizability of human consciousness, and the constant ongoing process of subject formation.

As a genre, the Gothic’s commentary upon the present is achieved through confronting past traditions; For Tzvetan Todorov, the term “genre” itself is a term that acts as a tie between a current text and to the tradition inherent to it. The issue of literary tradition was vital to writers such as T.S Eliot who situated it as the most important aspect of literature and believed it was something that cannot be “inherited” (1) but had to be labored over to be achieved. Eliot believed that the most original parts of a text were not the parts that reflected the authors’ individuality, but parts in which “the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously” (Ibid.). In other words, Eliot perceives that talent comes from the assimilation of the literary history- constituted by male ancestors- in the poets’ work, who are also explicitly male. This statement would later

echo in the works of Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault as they deconstruct the notion of the author, and in the concept of the author-function that rose to fill the absence left by the death of the author in literary theory. Bakhtin's notion of the author also parallels the same indifference to the individual voice, since, for him, the most important aspect of the novel is its heteroglot nature, which situates the author as a conduit to reverberate the social languages and utterances that surround her. This issue of who is speaking and its importance would become a critical concern for contemporary feminist critics, since for the women writer or any other writer that belongs to a group who are marginalized, the discrediting of the individual voice as a means to highlight the word and its denotative power creates problems that parallel the concerns regarding the privilege that accompanies the concept of having a voice. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar criticizes Eliot's text as an attempt to construct a literary history that denies the reality of women writers and turn the history of literature into something "in which women play no part" (1989; 154). Which causes the said history to become something women writers are not only denied of having a voice but also a place in the literary tradition, which causes among women writers to feel anxiety towards creation.

Gothic literature provides a fertile ground for dissecting the crossover between Bakhtin's concept of the novelistic discourse and what feminists call feminine language. Diane Price Herndl states that feminine language, being anything other than silence, requires it to be "a usurped language [...] something fundamentally 'other' itself" (10). Similar to the way Bakhtin constructs the novelistic discourse, Herndl asserts, "Feminine language [...] is marked by process and change, by absence and shifting, by multivoicedness" (Ibid.). Moreover, both feminine language, and Bakhtin's heteroglot novel come from a similar fractured discourse, resulting from its constant dialogue with both the past and the present. Bakhtin finds within novelistic genre a tendency for "parodying any canonical genre" (1981, 6) as a means of transforming them into something more open ended, free, and flexible. The novel's tendency to borrow and alter formerly closed-off genres is observed most clearly within Gothic literature as Jacqueline Howard observes "Gothic writers draw on folklore, fairy-tale, myth, legend, superstition,

and the theories of the sublime” (43) to introduce the unnatural and prenatal to their fiction, and this fantastic discourse may operate as a corrective to depictions of “everyday legality” (Ibid.). Especially fairy tale stylization and appropriation among the texts of late twentieth century women writers such as Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood, and Tanith Lee play a crucial role in the project of women writers, to unearth and carve their places within the literary canon. As Marina Warner states “[...] fairy tales give women a place from which to speak” (xxv). First the fairy tales and later the Gothic genre itself was seen as dull texts written for and read by only women, but both modes carry within them a discourse of protest, providing a voice for the silenced experiences of people left at the margins of culture.

Gothic genre’s image as women’s fiction and the lasting effects of the arguments involving whether it is a serious genre in itself reveals the reluctance of the literary theorists to deal with culture’s others’ and their fears. Nevertheless, as Fred Botting asserts; “Gothic narratives never escaped the concerns of their own times, despite the heavy historical trappings.” (2). In other words, Gothic texts does not only highlight the anxieties of a past time, but through those historical evocations, they also unearth the contemporary worries of their own times. The emergences of past events, repressed and traumatic, are always used to enlighten the current social conditions and how those conditions are affected by prejudices that have been internalized all through history. As Allan Lloyd-Smith asserts the Gothic genre also deals with the toxicity carried within past traditions that have survived through the contemporary times; “The Gothic [...] is about the nature of the past, of the repressed and denied, the buried secret that subverts and corrodes the present, whatever the culture does not want to know or admit, will not or dare not tell itself.” (1). In other words, the Gothic functions very much like Freud’s concept of the unconscious, a house like structure with locked and secret rooms, which is haunted by all things abjected and repressed, in a constant process of confrontation. The Gothic past does not only haunt people but also the very landscapes and structures that populate it: Especially in the female gothic tradition, the landscape with its gloomy setting and its ancestral house or castle plays a crucial role in constituting the Gothic atmosphere. The

castle's symbolism regarding the heroine of the Gothic novel is what makes it a vital constitutive element of the genre. Concerning Bakhtin's definition of the literary chronotope as the base distinction for genres, what makes a novel Gothic is itself intrinsically chronotopic. As a result, the discovery of the Gothic castle under the guise of American gothic fiction's isolated house both highlights the Gothic genre's tendency of recalling the past into the present as a disruptive force, and its other vital element, the adaptable Gothic landscape, which is not necessarily about a fixed place but mostly about the way that the space is perceived by the characters.

The symbolism of the ancestral house or the castle, mentioned in the novel's title, which stands at the center of Gothic novels, constitutes a conundrum for the woman writer and the reader. As Claire Kahane asserts, the gothic genre gives the female reader "a vital imaginary space" (340) within the confines of the Gothic castle or house where she can experience "less inhibited pleasures of an earlier, less-gender-constricted childhood" (Ibid.). However, while in that space, there always lies the danger of being seduced by its terror, namely the terror of merging with the mother, and losing the sense of allotment between the self and the other. The response to this possibility shows itself as a necessity and need for an escape or rescue, but within this flight response lies a different danger, "Putting herself outside of [the Gothic castle] the conventional Gothic heroine puts herself outside female desire and aggressivity [...] thus excluding a vital aspect of self, she is left on the margin both of identity and society." (Kahane, 340). The Gothic castles or houses represent spaces of exciting trials constructed by the patriarchal society for the Gothic heroine, which she eventually has to leave behind. By situating female desire spatially into a long-standing ancestral house that represents a rite of passage, the notion of what it means to be a woman becomes diluted, as certain human emotions and leniencies are transformed into spaces to flee. To become socially acceptable, the female subject has to prove that she can leave behind certain traits that are not accepted by the patriarchal culture. In this sense, neither Merricat, nor Constance constitute conventional Gothic heroines, within Merricat's refusal to leave lies a negotiating force to make a home out of what was meant to be only a threshold.

In **Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic**, Ann Williams uses the example of “Bluebeard” to argue that the castle represents not only men’s culture but also their wealth and place in society, which they use to subordinate women. In **Castle**, the Blackwood sisters achieve that power through murder, and this displacement reveals the not so secret, secret cellar of the preserves that has been put together by all the women who have ever lived there. Merricat calls the food preserves “a poem by Blackwood women” (42), which serve as to highlight the semiotic process that lies under the symbolic. When the symbol of the castle is taken to represent the patriarchal family and the Law of the Father, its repressed other buried in the cellar recalls the semiotic chora: The maternal space that the infant is supposed to leave, in order to join the symbolic. Through this departure, the infant becomes the subject, which according to Kristeva is a process that never ends, and it is constantly interrupted by the semiotic tendencies that one can never quite leave behind. In the novel Merricat asserts that their house is held steady against the world by “layers of Blackwood property weighing it” (1), acknowledging from the outset, it is upon the maternal, the feminine that the house of culture depends on to exist, that without its repressed other the castle could not have stood as long as it did.

In combining the aspects of both the male gothic and the female gothic, what Jackson creates is a disharmony of discourses that unsettles the coherence of the female subject even further. In the **Castle**, the female subject is not only in process or on trial but also in hiding. The Blackwood sisters do not confront their immediate past and the traumas caused by their family, nor the impact of the murder on their consciousnesses, they retreat into what can only be called an archaic past, in order to preserve themselves in a similar manner to the food in the cellar. What their retreat unearths is that the aforementioned archaic past of superstitions was never really gone in the first place, especially beliefs that have been imbued with the identity of the female subject. By cutting their ties with culture, meaning the symbolic order, they appropriate the already assumed abjectness of the female subject. They become two watchful eyes that exist at the periphery of the town people’s existence, threatening the borders of the self. The legend spun by the townspeople transforms them into Kristeva’s terrorizing maternal, within those tales they

become omnipresent figures that see everything and prey upon children. Associating them with the witch in the “Hansel and Gretel,” Merricat overhears a woman warning the children saying, “They’d hold you down and make you eat candy full of poison; I heard that dozens of bad little boys have gone too near that house and never been seen again. They catch little boys and they—” (141). They represent to the outside the kind of terror that leaves the faith of little boys ambiguous, the fact that they are never seen again promises a sort of annihilation that threatens their existence while the faith of little girls is clear, which is to be eaten, consumed by the maternal.

Castle’s central paradigm is a regression into the basics of Gothic literature in order to subvert its roots by evoking its original iconic structure, the castle, and women’s relation to it. Originally in the female gothic, the Gothic castle or the house represents the anxieties of womanhood, or as Kehane concludes, the Gothic fear itself which Moers locates at the center of Gothic, stems from a deep rooted anxiety that comes from the “fear of femaleness” (Kehane, 347), which highlights the vitality of Merricat’s assertion that the ruined structure after the fire, though ugly, is their castle in which she and Constance are going to live happily. As Williams maintains, “The Gothic tradition ascribes to itself a “father” who made a world out of words. But this official story [...] manifestly effaces the mother (which should be no more possible in history than in biology), an ironic genealogy for a mode so fascinated with the culturally female.” (11). In this context, through **Castle**, Jackson breaks the conventional narrative thread of Gothic, and deconstructs not only the negative connotations attached to the heroine and her connection to the place of her own lineage, but also alters what the word castle connotes. This time it is Merricat Blackwood who pieces a world out of words, starting a process of spatial transformation for the Gothic genre through poison and fire, the sisters expel patriarchal forces that shape their lives as they create for themselves a safe haven through reclaiming the belly of the beast.

Instead of merging with the Blackwood house, which signifies the Blackwood wealth and their bloodline, sisters create for themselves a consecrated pre-capitalistic

space, which can be interpreted as Merricat's fantasy of living on the moon becoming reality. For Henri Lefebvre such a space is necessary for

Symbolic sexual unions and murders, as places where the principle of fertility (the Mother) may undergo renewal and where fathers, chiefs, kings, priests and sometimes gods may be put to death. Thus space emerges consecrated - yet at the same time protected from the forces of good and evil: it retains the aspect of those forces which facilitates social continuity, but bears no trace of their other, dangerous side. (34)

After the murders and the fire, Blackwood farm becomes what Lefebvre calls a consecrated place, where fertility through the preserves and the garden governs after the murder of the patriarchs of the family. The phallic mother, Lucy Blackwood, is replaced by Constance. Through sisters' ritualistic farewell to Uncle Julian, the concept of fertility is also altered and instead of grieving his death, the girls transform it into a rebirth. Constance plants a "yellow rose bush" (137) and Merricat buries his "initialed gold pencil" (Ibid) by the creek, the phallic symbol of the male author in the family. Thus, by the end, the full regressive circle of creating a pre-capitalistic historical site, is completed, which cleanses the concepts of femininity from the frame the patriarchal society has provided for it causing the sisters to become completely mythologized, as the villagers start to bring them food offerings to appease their literal and metaphorical appetite.

Jackson writes a parodic happy ending that subverts the innate Gothic tendency to punish women who have strayed away from the norms of society, as she appropriates the same tools used to punish them within the Gothic literary tradition. As Gary Saul Morson asserts in **Bakhtin: Essays and Dialogues on His Work**, a genre is not a closed system of connotations but rather a loose frame that regulates a certain flow of conveyed meaning between the writer and the reader, while also being constantly reshaped by the changes in social life, stating that "genre is an organ of memory, but memories as we know, alter over time" (89). In other words, there is a reason certain narrative structures like those of the Gothic are utilized repeatedly, in each telling they change and take on new meanings.

Merricat usurps the Gothic landscape, through murder and deceit in the same manner women writers had to usurp language to have a voice of their own. Merricat assumes the role of the male heir, and alters it in a way that constitutes a matrilineal landscape. When Kristeva's account of the subject formation is taken into consideration, the ending symbolizes a refusal to leave the semiotic, and a refusal to become a subject within the Law of the Father.

When Jackson was writing at the intersection of first and second waves of feminism, especially after World Wars I and II, there were a surge of feminist activists and writers invading the public sphere which caused, as Gilbert and Gubar observes, a battle of the sexes, "[...] both male and female writers increasingly represented women's unprecedented invasion of the public sphere [...] as a battle over a zone that could only be defined as a no man's land" (1989; 4). Women's invasion of the literary and public scene began with the first wave of feminism, which commenced from the writings of Mary Wollstonecraft and were followed by literary women from different eras such as Charlotte Gillman-Perkins, Virginia Woolf, Hilda Doolittle, and Sylvia Plath. First wave feminists demanded political rights and access to higher education that equaled the men's rights and education. As Woolf observes in her seminal book **A Room of One's Own**, (1929) women were "locked out" (24) of the public sphere while being "locked in" (Ibid.) into the private. With the rise of conservative politics in the United States in the fifties, the notion of the domestic sphere became even more confining for women. In this context, the arrival of the second wave of feminism was itself very Gothic in its emergence since it rose out of the notions of repressed womanhood to reclaim not only their present but also the past traditions that have both negatively and positively constituted the current situation of anxiety around the concept of womanhood. Writers like Angela Carter, Margaret Atwood, and Toni Morrison would popularize the rewritings of once matrilineal source texts that have belonged to women but have been adapted to male criterion as a means to efface the female influence over the dominantly male tradition and history. The second wave of feminism meant confronting with the oppressive notions at the site of their very origin.

Jackson wrote **Castle** towards the end of the first wave of feminism and the beginning of the second, at the intersection of a literary world that has become a “disputed domain” (Gilbert and Gubar; 1989 17) that once had stood for a patriarchal passing down. Not just with **Castle**, but with most of her oeuvre Jackson anticipates the second wave feminists’ solution to the women problem, which was to unearth the ruins of the negated and forgotten symbolism of a matriarchal heritage. In the **Castle**, the farm becomes a disputed domain after the murder of the patriarchs, in which the surviving Blackwoods enjoy stunted, yet, peaceful six years with a token male character; their physically and mentally invalid uncle Julian. In contrast to the views of the first wave feminists, the domestic sphere itself does not become an antagonist for the sisters; instead, it offers a refuge, up until the moment of intrusion. It is with Charles’ arrival that the Gothic cycle truly begins. Charles, being a Blackwood, a first degree cousin to Constance, with an uncanny resemblance to their father, not only brings to the surface a recognition of the theme of incest but also, as Merricat perceives, represents, the ghost of the patriarchy coming back to claim what was always theirs. Regardless, from the very beginning Merricat is the only one who sees what makes the Blackwood land so special and protected, which is not necessarily its material existence but the buried things underneath that keeps it tall and steady against the world.

For the second and third wave feminists the notion of womanhood was to be dismantled and deconstructed. Adrienne Rich, a feminist writer during the second and the third waves, wrote in 1972; “Re-vision-the act of looking back, of seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction-is for us more than a chapter in cultural history: it is an act of survival” (18), and the reward for this process of “re-vision” would be the repudiation of the self-destructive tendency of the patriarchal society. **Castle**, anticipates this need; albeit, differently. Jackson’s act of “re-vision” is firstly to recognize the ever-present past, especially, within the Gothic genre. Merricat, unlike the gothic protagonists of Edgar Allan Poe and Henry James, is able to recognize the kind of a story she is in. She is a fictional character in a fictional world of words and her perspective, heavily influenced with fantasy rather than reality, helps her navigate the trappings of the

Gothic novel, and leaves no room for misinterpretation that is mainly caused by the characters' realistic vision, if anything Merricat is haunted by reality itself rather than the fantastical or supernatural. The story regresses back into the archetypal place, where many women of literature, myth, and history have been buried. In doing so, it forces a recognition of the cellar, recalling Madeline's alive burial in Poe's short story "The Fall of the House of Usher" or the faiths of the Sibyl and Antigone, reclaiming the artifice that have guarded the genre of Gothic and thus exposing the center of the narrative web. The overlooked preserves symbolize a matriarchal tradition, rather than the madwoman, in the "liminal zone of the third storey(the attic)" (Gilbert and Gubar; 1989, 67), whose faith is to burn herself to free herself from the confines. Merricat becomes the active agent rather than the sacrifice by placing the remaining possessions of the deceased Blackwoods up in the attic and burning the top floors.

Merricat's general introduction to the Blackwood family is a statement about writing itself especially writing within genre conventions that confine the writer and her characters. Merricat states how the Blackwoods "rarely moved things" (1) as they were not "a family for restlessness and stirring." (Ibid.) and they only "dealt with small surface transient objects, the books and the flowers and the spoons, but underneath [...] had always a solid foundation of stable possessions [...] Blackwoods had always lived in our house, and kept their things in order" (Ibid.). The lack of mobility of the Blackwood family and the objects associated with them suggests the persistence of the Gothic genre which ties the desecration of both the family and the house into a critique and an assault to the confines of the Gothic genre conventions since the whole notion of genre classification depends upon unchanging chronotopes used in the novel's structuring, the concept of genre is something that exists outside the author's intent, carrying its own symbolism to the narrative arc. Within the literary canon, especially for a woman writer in the mid-twentieth century, this meant already built, fully functioning genre codes that constituted the house of literature. The way Merricat introduces the Blackwoods becomes a vital part to understand Jackson's project: The unearthing of the long buried female tradition that has kept the Gothic genre "steady against the world" (1), perhaps with a similar realization

that underneath the anxieties conveyed through Gothic, lies a “forbidden center” (Kahane 336) that symbolizes the existence of a “dead-undead mother” (Ibid.), and instead of shunning, and perceiving it as a prison, Jackson makes a habitat out of it.

If the structure of the house or the castle belongs to culture itself, the rooms within it are reserved for the women that occupy it. In a similar manner to Bluebeard’s murder room, the Blackwood sisters’ drawing room, their mother’s primary room in the house, ensures the ghostly presence of Lucy Blackwood looking down on her daughters as the figure of the phallic mother. Looking at the room from the outside gives the house a “gaunt look” (23), and on the inside, it is filled with mirrors and sparkling glass with their mother’s portrait looking down on them, which remains unscathed even after the fire. However, this time Merricat observes the look on their mother’s face as a gracious one, even amongst the ruins of her room Lucy Blackwood maintains her high position as the phallic mother before the girls close the door on her never to be opened again. From the few narrative pieces Merricat offers, Lucy Blackwood can easily be imagined as the heroine within a female gothic novel. The Rochester house, her girlhood home is her property lost, something she had no right to own until she married John Blackwood and left her maternal space for the Blackwood farm, living in seclusion but safety. It is also quite clear that Lucy had a lot of say in the way the house was run. As Merricat takes refuge in the unused summerhouse after Charles’ arrival, she says one of the reasons it was left to ruins was because Lucy Blackwood refused to go in there “And where [...] mother did not go, no one else went” (95). Lucy Blackwood ultimately achieves a version of the female gothic, which concludes by repudiating the Gothic experience itself, ending “in an idealized nurturing space, the space provided for heroines by patriarchal narrative convention” (Kahane 540), and as a consequence of her victory, instills within her daughters, the main dichotomy and the pressing theme of the novel: The extreme demarcation of the private and the public spheres. In the end, it is her insistence of seclusion that gives the young Merricat nightmares of intrusion from outsiders.

For the sisters, their self-asserted happy ending comes only after they remove themselves from the reaches of day-to-day time. For the townspeople, the sisters become defined by the intersecting space they inhabit, and their ensuing gossip creates a mythification that transforms the sisters into historically atemporal beings. Merricat recalls how they “learned, from listening, that all the strangers could see from outside, when they looked at all, was a great ruined structure overgrown with vines, barely recognizable as a house” (146), and she likens the ruined house to a tomb, in dialogue with a long line of Gothic literary tradition that has at its heart the dead or buried woman “within male power structures which render her ‘ghostly’” (Wallace, 26). For Diane Wallace, the metaphor of burial itself becomes a vital means to analyze the erasure of women out of the public space and into the private. Jackson uses the metaphor of burial not as a means of erasure, but as an atemporal and constant haunting. The Blackwood sisters are not displaced out of history, but are carved into an epic past which is in Bakhtin’s words “locked into itself and walled off from all subsequent times by an impenetrable boundary, isolated” (1981 17).

Once language is understood as dialogic, a boundary phenomenon rather than an internal acquisition, the notion of the private space becomes paradoxical, this oddity is symbolized by the Blackwood farm, a private space existing at the interstice of a stratified society rather than a faraway hill or land, which leaves the house exposed to the possibility of transgression. As Paul de Man maintains, the concept of “heteroglossia postulates distinct and antagonistic class structures as well as the celebratory crossing of social boundaries” (Morson and Emerson; 1989, 108). In other words, through dialogism, one’s own voice is transformed from something interiorized, stemming from the psyche, to something that is external to itself. This understanding repudiates the notion of a closed consciousness; even the concept of private thought becomes problematized. A recurring theme within Jackson’s oeuvre is the inescapability of this kind of an intrusion, which foresees the problematics of the process of subject formation, since both Lacan’s and Kristeva’s theories tie the formation of the subject to language acquisition, subjectivity itself can only mean a discursive formation. Merricat cannot be a subject that is bound

through her gender classification, her assumed subjecthood is constituted out of her family, the townspeople, and the books she reads, and not from a single binary that is constituted out of her biological sex. In the same way, the novel cannot just belong to one tradition, but instead evokes both the male and female versions of the Gothic, as well as myths, legends and fairy tales. Moreover, the more culture insist on fixed meanings, in accordance to the Law of the Father, the more it cannot suppress the disruptions of the semiotic order that creates the polyphony within language.

Judith Butler also recognizes the problematic nature of the dialogue, and the ways the marginalized groups tend to be excluded when in dialogue with others that hold some kind of power over them. In her book **Gender Trouble**, she writes, “The very notion of ‘dialogue’ is culturally specific and historically bound, and while one speaker may feel secure that a conversation is happening, another may be sure it is not” (20). In a similar manner, the conversation Merricat has with a villager named Jim Donell turns into a form of bullying rather than a dialogue. “When Jim Donell thought of something to say he said it as often and in as many ways as possible ... I knew he might go on like this until he was really sure that no one was listening anymore” (14). He is not talking to Merricat, but talking at her. Nonetheless, as exemplified, Merricat in this dialogue is not a participant, but rather the punchline of Jim’s jokes. The possibility of a dialogue is further problematized with the Blackwoods outsiderness to the villagers. For six years, they live without any connection to the outside world, no telephone, nor mail, resulting mostly from the public spectacle that was made out of them because of the murders and the trial. Merricat recalls about the media that camped outside, and how some of them wrote their names on the walls of the house, which is one of the reasons why Constance becomes so anxious to leave the house. Even in the end, as they are trying to escape, Constance’s biggest concern is to be seen by the villagers.

The Blackwoods do not exist solely within the domestic sphere, but also, at least for six years, they live within a suspended time loop; Uncle Julian’s unending task of writing about the last day of the murder, and Constance with her daily rotating household

duties are just a few examples that occur in the narrative. Merricat's narrative voice is also a vital evidence to this suspension. Even from the first paragraph, as Merricat introduces herself, she does so in a childish glee. Her eccentric view of the world is displayed "I have often thought that with any luck at all I could have been born a werewolf ... but I have had to be content with what I had" (1). With her fantasies of living secluded on the moon, her connection to the garden, her habits of burial, the character of Merricat, recalls an occult creature, both witch-like and vampiric. Her magic spells, her refusal to eat in front of people, and the grounds of the house functioning in a similar manner to the holy ground in Bram Stoker's **Dracula** (1897), offering her safety and power, and when she inevitably leaves them, she feels vulnerable and exposed. She says,

When I went along the path, going easily now because I was home, I knew each step and every turn. Constance could put names to all the growing things, but I was content to know them by their way and place of growing, and their unfailing offers of refuge (19).

When Merricat is in town, she feels like she is in a fortuitous board game in which she has no agency. However, her house, and the garden represent the very space she does not only have agency over but she is in complete control. Constance knows the place through names and Merricat through the placements of things. For Merricat, there is nothing up to chance within the Blackwood farm.

The metaphor of the board game highlights the lack of agency Merricat feels as the road highlights both a chronotopic and dialogical structure in which people of any class can cross paths randomly. "Each player moves according to a throw of the dice" (4) Merricat tells the reader as she explains the village which is "marked into little spaces" (Ibid.) presents dangers like "lose one turn" (Ibid.) or "go back four spaces" (Ibid.). Merricat perceives every event that occurs between the beginning of the game, the library, and the ending, reaching the black rock, as a matter of chance encounters with discourses alien to hers threatening to disrupt her own inner narrative. As she makes her way through

the village, Merricat often escapes into realms of either violent fantasy, or, her house on the moon “I was pretending that I did not speak their language; on the moon we spoke a soft, liquid tongue, and sang in the starlight looking down on the dead dried world” (16). Merricat escaping into her fantasy fairy tale world is a recurrent tendency in the novel, especially when she is faced with the noise of others. In this sense, the village is only a background noise Merricat has to go through twice a week, but she also admits no matter how hard the game becomes with the chance of being humiliated, in the end she always wins by reaching the black rock. Stemming from the fact that, even though, the village stands for the danger of dialogical intrusion, it is also stuck in a progression of cyclical time, it is a village that is “of a piece, a time, and a style” (6), refusing any alterations to its daily order. It is with Charles’ arrival that things began to change, Charles, unlike the people of the village, can actually get into the Blackwood house, and his arrival breaks the non-progressive time of both the village’s and the Blackwood sisters’.

Charles and the Blackwood men symbolize the modern times that erased the concept of lived time through the means of clocks and adverbs. The symbolic order, in which a person enters through language, also constitutes the order of the capitalist time and Bakhtin’s concept of the adventure time of the Greek novels carries similar connotations towards forming characters through the progression of time while negating space and personal experience of time. Thus, dividing the symbolic and the imaginary order into two chronotopic realms of identity formation. Marianne Cave argues that the symbolic realm is the chronotope of “the time with the potential to alter the identity of the characters, to leave a trace on their psychological makeup” (121), summing up the order of the symbolic as the sphere of language and identity, and maintaining the imaginary order as the chronotope of “‘isolation’ or ‘reverie’” (Ibid.). Upon Charles’ arrival, Merricat observes, for the first time, the way “Time was running shorter, tightening around [their] house, crushing me “(84). After six years of suspension, Charles literally and metaphorically starts the clock, the progress of time, felt through Charles fixing their father’s watch, and the newspapers he starts to bring into the house, starts to leave its marks on Constance, as she becomes more and more self-conscious, and Uncle Julian,

whose illness and dementia begin to get worse. As Mieke Bal postulates regularized time, through the means of clocks and calendars, as the constitutive element of our literal day to day life became so innate to our lives that “it is difficult to imagine that there are conflicts built into it” (77). Manmade time that regulates our lives cannot attest for what Bal calls “Monumental time” (Ibid.), which stands for a subjective temporality experienced by the individual, repudiating the charted, historical time as it foregrounds the “thickness of time ” (78). It is no coincidence that one of the most emphasized disruptions that Charles causes when he arrives is to start Merricat’s father’s watch. Charles does not only signify the return of the patriarchal forces, but also the commencement of a capitalist temporality. “I took up the watch and listened to it ticking because Charles had started it; I could not turn it all the way back to where it had formerly been because he had kept it going for two or three days” (86), in this context, time represents the male principle juxtaposed to the timeless preserves of the women.

One of Merricat’s most important rituals for safety is the act of burial, she buries items of symbolic importance as a means of protection around their land. In a similar manner to all Blackwood women, including Constance, burying food down in the cellar. Merricat likens this act to “a poem by Blackwood women” (42). Burial, as a theme in the novel, takes on a positive connotation, rather than being a symbol of oppression, it is the paradoxical point of freedom, for women who have no out of the patriarchal structures. It represents a long line of buried matrilineal tradition, something artful, and timeless. A finalization achieved with something other than death², a monological mythification of the self. After the stoning, and the destruction of the house by the fire, for Constance and Merricat, a new kind of life begins, in which, they become deified, and the ruined house becomes a landmark that reflects the guilt of the villagers, bringing them food as a means

² Bakhtin believes all subjects to be singular beings in an unfinalizable world. Locating the aesthetic impulse for finalization within the impulse of death, while concluding that an only possible finalization can only be made possible externally. For further understanding of Bakhtin’s notion of “unfinalizability” see **Rethinking Bakhtin**, 26-27.

to appease them. What is buried remains so, the cellar and the preserves, even as the villagers are pillaging the house, are not discovered and left unharmed. This reformulation of the metaphor of burial also redefines the underlying anxiety that lies beneath the symbol of burial, transforms the passive female agency into a causative one. The sibling bond at the heart of the novel, and later on, their voluntary entombment evokes an appropriation of the plot line within Sophocles' **Antigone**. As Judith Butler observes in her analysis of the play, the punishment that results from Antigone's defiance of the state, which she commits through a speech act is caused by the inability to make her case outside of language, which represents the people who are in power. Butler writes, "Her words... are chiasmically related to the vernacular of sovereign power, speaking in and against it" (2000; 28). Paradoxically, Antigone both stands up for her beliefs, while betraying her own position through the same speech act, as she appropriates "the voice of the law" (Ibid; 29), in order to act in defiance of it. In **Castle**, Antigone's punishment is transformed into a safe haven through the agency given to the sisters in choosing their own faith. Merricat and Constance choose silence and isolation.

Castle utilizes novel's polyglot nature to expose the centralizing tendencies of language. Stylistically, the employment of a first person point of view of a character who has an eccentric perspective, achieves a *surplus of vision*. Merricat's narrative is constantly accompanied by other shadow narratives, both within and outside her own discourse, which reveal the possibilities of different ways of telling the exact same story. For the townspeople, Blackwoods themselves and the murder are the center of the mystery, while spatially; the town is placed at the center of their narrative and the Blackwood farm at the periphery. For Merricat, the town is just a board game she has to get through before reaching the center, the price, her home. In addition, the thing most mysterious to everyone involved is to her a clear event. Each character is added to the story with their own motives, and because of the first person narration, mostly these motives are left unexplained. like Uncle Julian's desire to write about the day of the murder, or the villagers' desire for the Blackwoods to move away. Only for Charles, there is a clear motive, a desire for wealth. For each of the players a different narrative center

exists, which causes them to have different blind spots as to the story they are in. The villagers' cruelty in the end is not something that just happens, but a violent outburst that has cumulated over time. The ending, their apologetic food offerings, highlights the aggression that comes about is not something that is constant, a habit, but Merricat, as the teller of the story has no means to attest to that shadow narrative of oppression. She cannot act as their witness; she can only be the witness to her own story.

Uncle Julian himself is shown to carry the burden of many other stories that Merricat once again cannot observe. His point of view is different, since his experience of being a Blackwood itself is different. Uncle Julian's shadow narrative is more heard within Merricat's narration than the villagers' are, since his biggest activity for six years is to write about the day of the murders. This need to write about the murders is at best a futile attempt, since his perspective excludes the very person that caused it. Nevertheless, he sees this attempt as his life's work calling it "A most fascinating case, one of the few genuine mysteries of our time. Of my time" (30). The irony is twofold; his attempt is futile because he does not have a clear perspective over the way the murders transpired, and the futility within the notion of being able to write one's life work proves to be the biggest irony. For him, Merricat, the narrator of the actual story, has died at the orphanage where she was placed temporarily during the murder trials. Merricat becomes Uncle Julian's *purloined letter*, without her, his life story cannot ever be written in a way that makes sense. His inability to see Merricat decentralizes his narrative, therefore, explaining why he has not been able to write his book for six years.

The contrast between Merricat and Uncle Julian symbolizes the problem of the women writer. Merricat constantly reminds herself to be nicer to Uncle Julian and keeps out of his way, since he is not a threat similar to the way Charles is. Even though from his point of view, he is the writer, for Merricat he represents the remnants of a past that she has freed the house from through the poison. After his death, for Merricat, Julian is represented by his gold pen, which she throws in to the creek. The phallic symbol of the male writer, who in his lifetime, could not, conceive the story of his life. Julian's blind

belief into Merricat's death is not far off from all the male critics trying to construct a literary history of both literature and criticism based on minimizing the importance of women writers. As Merricat asserts, after his death "Uncle Julian believed [she] was dead, and now he was dead himself; bow your heads to our beloved Merricat [she] thought, or you will be dead" (111). Uncle Julian represents the male writers, whose version is overthrown by the semiotic, which is symbolized by Merricat's act of throwing his pen to the creek "so the creek would always speak his name" (137), and putting his much revered papers down in the cellar with the preserves of the Blackwood women. Through these ritualistic acts, Merricat assimilates Uncle Julian's writings into the poetic side, the sacrifice of the phallic pen ensures that his name will always be echoed through the rhythmic sounds of the creek and his words will live on forever, preserved like the mostly poisonous conserves down at the cellar.

With Merricat out of the picture, Uncle Julian only has the half of the story, which is constituted by Merricat's double Constance. He refuses the obvious answer to the mystery, Constance being to culprit even though all the signs, even for the people who are aware of Merricat's aliveness, points to Constance. The doubling between Constance and Merricat is what absolves both of them from being legally charged, though symbolically Constance's way of living can be read as a self-imprisonment but there are many moments in the story that point to Constance's contentment. Unlike Edgar Allan Poe's use of doubles, Constance and Merricat live in harmony without any need or wish to destroy or even change the other. Writing about doubles in **Negotiating with the Dead**, Margaret Atwood dissects the double nature of the concept of the writer, stating that "I am after all a writer, so it would follow as the day the night that I must have a slippery double- or at best a mildly dysfunctional one- stashed away somewhere" (36). The questions of who is the writing self or whose voice it is, carries the same ambiguity in the **Castle** regarding who has committed the murders. Was it Merricat who performed the action of putting the arsenic in the sugar bowl? Or, alternatively, was it Constance, who watched her family die around her as she patiently waited as she cleaned the sugar bowl which contained the poison?

The motif of the double has been employed within many canonical genres, going as far back as mythological stories, but with female writers, the use of the doubles altered fundamentally. As Atwood maintains, the origins of the double, or the twin started as a bad omen, two selves fighting for dominance. She gives examples from the Scottish culture, which saw twins as bad luck and the concept of “spectral evidence” which was used to condemn women in Salem Witch Trials. The witches who used spectral evidence were believed to be able to “have the ability to send out their ‘specter,’ or incorporeal likeness, to do their dirty work for them” (2002; 41) Similar to the way Jackson uses the doubling between Constance and Merricat, one cannot be condemned for the murders, without the implication of the other as well. As Uncle Julian correctly points out, Constance had many other means to poison the family without ever needing the arsenic. Arsenic part of the plan belongs to Merricat, who was not only too young at the time to be considered a real suspect, but also during that very dinner, she was sent up to her room without supper. Thus, similar to the way a witch might use spectral evidence, the poisonings go down as Merricat is in her room, but without Constance getting rid of the evidence and waiting for the Blackwoods to die before calling the police, Merricat’s plan might not have been realized. As doubles, Merricat and Constance are not in a struggle for dominance, but rather, they strive for harmony. Moreover, without Merricat’s involvement, Constance could not have been condemned the same way without Constance’s protection Merricat would have had to face the consequences of her actions. Similar to Atwood’s example of Alice from Lewis Carroll’s **Alice in Wonderland** (1865), and how instead of destroying her double that is in the mirror she instead merges with “the imagined Alice, the dream Alice, the Alice who exists nowhere” (Atwood: 2002, 56). Merricat’s story ends in a complete merger with her double. Moreover, the mirror between the two Alices is replaced by the ruined Blackwood house, as a place of merger between the doubles.

In the end, **Castle**, as Rich’s notion of “re-vision,” creates a space, situated outside the self-destructive tendency of the patriarchal culture. After the disruption caused by the fire, the sisters find their way back to the semiotic chora. The day after the fire Merricat

says, “I thought that we had somehow not found our way back correctly through the night, that we had somehow lost ourselves and come back through the wrong gap in time, or the wrong door, or the wrong fairy tale.” (114). Merricat’s fear of fire erasing the last six years of their lives proves to be incorrect, but her interpretation of stepping into a metaphorically different spatio-temporality is how they ultimately achieve a pocket world with its own notion of time. In the end Blackwood sisters’ refuge, reveals itself as the distorted version of their house and its surrounding garden. It becomes a liminal zone of existence, a threshold, between the village and the highway, and later on because of the legend that surrounds it, becomes completely separate from the spatio-temporal existence of any passerby. Instead of the denunciation of the domestic sphere, the way first wave feminists tended to, Jackson recognizes within it a potential for creating a new origin story, as she merges the good-mother surrogate, and the feral child, and places them at the center of the Gothic castle which stands for the semiotic chora.

As the title of the novel suggests, what Jackson unearths, is not a new revelation. The castle, and its variations, connoting the domestic sphere as a deadly maternal space, or in Kristevan terms; the semiotic chora, have always haunted the psyches of women. In the novel, while there is the recognition of its inescapability, there is also a protest. The regressive nature of the narrative, favoring the orality of narration over the written form; fairy tale like vision over, an objective and historical account, as Uncle Julian’s papers remain down in the cellar, never to be found, read, or completed, it is Merricat’s voice that reverberates. This conclusion situates Merricat as the one who is in charge of her own story, as however she perceives of it. Merricat as the only narrator becomes a vitally strategic choice, within a narrative that is so layered with gossip, and the perspective of others. There are enough clues within the story that shows how any other perspective would render Merricat’s version unrecognizable. Thus, ultimately, what remains from the Blackwood sisters, is the one thing that truly matters, a voice that encompasses all the noise that surround the sisters.

The now ruined structure that is left after the ruined house becomes covered by vines, which becomes the sisters' safe haven can be read as the place that Butler and Kristeva meet. What Kristeva calls the poetic revolution for women, by appropriating Lacan's concept of the imaginary and symbolic order, only acknowledges the presence of the female other but does not necessarily carries it out to equal footing. Ultimately, what Merricat and Constance achieve in their newly found solitude within abjection is a passive defeat, in Kristeva's concept of the semiotic, women can only interrupt the prose that represents culture with their poetry, but can never take the center stage. Jackson writing a decade earlier than Kristeva foresees the impossibility of an equal merging of the semiotic and the symbolic, as she employs the oppressed female that haunts the male conscious with her capacity of burning the house down. As long as, the female voice continues to speak from the margins, as the manifestation of the semiotic function, the female subject more than the male subject will never achieve any progress but rather will always be stuck in a process of becoming without any hope of being. Haunted by an unconscious that presumes the primacy of the father, which leaves very little room for daughters and mothers to be seen as subjects. As Williams argues "Any girl in a patriarchal culture is, in any case, always already castrated in effect, since for her the development of consciousness involves the recognition that she is 'cut off' from many sources of gratification; status, power, and even to a degree language, especially writing" (59). In the end, the Blackwood sisters accept this state, outside the house- away from the maternal chora- they will not be recognized as subjects. In the patriarchal economy of either being or non-being, girls choose to exist within the semiotic realm, cut off from the language and chronology of the symbolic, which in itself does not constitute any particular revolution but rather a way out of the structure that is called the subject in the first place.

CHAPTER TWO

CHRONOTOPE AND POLYPHONY IN MARGARET ATWOOD'S CAT'S EYE

Published in 1988, Margaret Atwood's novel **Cat's Eye** deals with the issues of the female artist and the experience of being a woman in a conservative post-war society. The novel explores the layers of trauma inflicted through both the Second World War and urbanization, and their effects on the way one perceives the self and the other. Through a coming-of-age story, Atwood explores the themes of the oppressive social structures that create the illusion of a self that can be or already is unified by treating it not as a complex structure of unique and multiple traits but as an empty shell to be filled with socially ascribed denotative linguistic sets of rules. For this, this chapter will address first the genre of the novel with regards to its form and narration and then will discuss the problems of creating a bounded self and being a unified subject within a feminist context in connection to the Bakhtin's notion of polyphony and chronotope while analyzing the social structures that are inherent in space, time, and language. Lastly, this chapter will address the notion of the abject within the chronotope of the ravine and how the retrospective art show functions as the same story, albeit, in a different language.

The novel begins with the novel's protagonist Elaine Risley's coming back to Toronto for her retrospective art show. As she walks down the familiar, yet also hauntingly different city of her childhood, Elaine's repressed childhood memories begin to resurface. As the now gentrified city echoes the traumatic events of her past, Elaine finds herself within a labyrinthine Gothic journey towards a mystery center of fragmented memories. Her past memories slip into the present, creating a tumultuous sense of time and space. For the first eight years of her life, Elaine's experience of life is a nomadic open road journey with her family. During the last years of war, the Risleys travel along the empty roads as they collect bug and insect samples for the work of the biologist father. When the war ends, the Risleys buy their first house and finally settle. For Elaine, this means having

to join society and leave her isolated bubble. There are three distinct periods that follow, her school years where she meets her schoolmates Carol, Grace, and most importantly the absent and haunting figure of the novel, Cordelia. Elaine's friendship with the three girls correlate to a violent initiation into what it means to be a girl in a conservative society, as all three girls unknowingly carry their own domestic traumas into the way they treat and try to mold Elaine into what they believe a proper girl should be. Out of all three, Cordelia leaves the biggest mark as the two connects on a level that haunts Elaine even in her adult years. The second period comes after a traumatic bridge incident caused by Cordelia, which almost kills Elaine. After this, Elaine goes through a change she cannot account for as she represses the memory of the time she almost died. This voluntary amnesia causes her to fight back against the bullying of her friends, shifting the power balance between her and Cordelia. The third and final period begins when she goes to an art school, when her ties with Cordelia loosens even more and ends with Cordelia's hospitalization in a mental health facility and with Elaine's own suicide attempt. The way Elaine narrates her past causes a slippage, which forces her to relive and reexamine her unresolved issues as if they are occurring concurrently, resulting in a multi layered self-portrait she names **Cat's Eye**.

Even though genre conventions help categorize texts into certain expectations, they only establish a fluid arrangement rather than something fixed. On the surface level, Atwood's **Cat's Eye** presents itself as a postmodern coming-of-age story (Bildungsroman). As is the case with most of Atwood's stories, **Cat's Eye** also contains within itself, its own doublings as a means to convey the autobiographical journey of Elaine's "I." In order to tell Elaine's life story, Atwood borrows and alters the conventions of Gothic narratives but also the stories of time-travel. It can be argued that a woman's story of a quest to acquire a self mirrors Gothic narration; this same journey of supposed hindsight also symbolizes a metaphoric time-travel, as the subject travels back to pivotal moments of her life in order to tell her life-story. However, Atwood locates the notion of looking back not as a linear and chronological act of regression, but as an act of unearthing. As Elaine states at the beginning of the novel she thinks of time "as having a

shape, something you could see, like a series of liquid transparencies, one laid on top of another” (3). In order to be told, Elaine’s life-story does not require a linear journey; her quest requires her to dive down and descend and bring to the surface her lost time, which is inevitably tied to the stories of others. Atwood transforms the notion of time travel into something that is not only temporal but also equally spatial, as the novel’s protagonist first has to go back to the place where her life-story took place, and re-construct it by deconstructing the past.

Painting, more than words transform time into space, creating the possibility of ultimate time travel. The art gallery in which Elaine’s retrospective art show takes place echoes and almost parodies the pages of the text itself as it highlights the text’s arbitrary nature as blank walls where events can be arranged, by whomever, in whichever order they choose. In this case, even though it is Elaine’s paintings up on the walls, she is nothing more than a guest in the art show: as she walks around to see “What is here and what is not” (476) she observes how in the show directors’ ordering of the paintings, “Chronology won out after all” (Ibid.); the chronological progression of the paintings, therefore, becomes her way of presenting Elaine’s story. The novel’s chapter titles as well highlight this implied discrepancy. Some chapters are named after some of Elaine’s paintings like “Cat’s Eye,” “Half a Face,” “Falling Woman,” “One Wing,” “Picoseconds,” and “Unified Field Theory,” while others are named after certain symbols that come up during Elaine’s narration but are never drawn. The name of the first chapter “Iron Lungs,” gets its name from two separate moments in Elaine’s life. One of them is accounted within the chapter, as Elaine imagines Cordelia put in an iron lung and Elaine says, “[Cordelia] is fully conscious, but unable to move or speak. I come into the room, moving, speaking. Our eyes meet” (9), which establishes their connection as doubles long before Cordelia is properly introduced to the narrative, and functions as an indication of inertia that both girls experience throughout their lives, and breaking the chronological logic of the art show. In a similar manner, Elaine talks about her painting **Half a Face** not in the chapter titled “Half a Face,” but in the chapter called “Leprosy,” which follows the former title, first

introducing the conditions that results in the painting, which situates her paintings as shadow like after images that the traumatic events of her life cast upon her.

In **Cat's Eye**, both the Bildungsroman and the Gothic genres are infused together to create the effect of a past time reproduced in the present tense, creating the effect of a continuous presentness, which disrupts the perceived linearity of time. According to Bakhtin, the Gothic represents the ultimate past but the Bildungsroman thematizes a person's "process of becoming" (1987: 21); which locates the genre mostly in the present, it chronicles the emergence of a character as the notion of time becomes infused with the image of the developing subject, and situates it as a historical being. Elaine's story reflects the same process of becoming, albeit in reverse. She deconstructs her idea of a self by reclaiming the fragmentation of her life that comes up on the surface upon her return to Toronto, and thus locates her journey of becoming at what she herself calls the "middle" (13) of her life, and it is a journey that simultaneously goes backwards and forwards. This notion of confronting the present with the re-emergence of the past that constituted it recalls the Gothic genre's mode of storytelling. As Allan Lloyd-Smith maintains, "The message of Gothic [...] is that it isn't so much a matter of whether you can repeat the past as whether the past will repeat itself on you." (1). In other words, the Gothic experience itself instills the character with historical time; the past is not something a character simply relives from a safe distance, but it is instead inscribed within her, a continuous threat, which situates itself as eternally present. Moreover, the two seemingly different genres infuse organically in the novel, as the past becomes independent from the linguistic logic of the past tense, instead reinstates a disordering ruled by memory and emotional significance that both reflects and undermines language.

Unlike **Castle**, which is told in the past tense, **Cat's Eye** refuses to give boundaries to Elaine's self by rejecting to distance her memories into the traditional notion of a past; moreover, it highlights their prominence as events still in progress rather than things that are concluded. Atwood's uses of present tense in her other fictional autobiographies also either foreground the entrapments of vision strictly rooted in the present, or the means to

avoid confronting past memories. As David Ward writes, in Atwood's novel **Life Before Man** the use of the present tense signifies the "ramifying limitations of immediate perception" (160), however, in **Surfacing** it foregrounds the narrator's "fear of the past" (125). In **Cat's Eye**, all of the events unfold as if they are being perceived at the moment of the story's telling, Elaine cannot avoid her past since it is intrinsically infused with everything she is. Through this consistent use of the present tense, Atwood underlines the difficulty of creating a bounded subject. Once again, Atwood uses the motif of going back home to highlight the vulnerability of the notion of self. As Ward interprets, the home motif Atwood uses previously in **Surfacing** creates the image of home as the place of some archaic and incomprehensible language and also adds that the notion of returning there deconstructs "the acquired meaning which protects and enables the social self" (97). In other words, for Atwood's characters, telling one's own story and journeying back home, inevitably comes to mean a disillusionment regarding their notion of a self within culture. Moreover, what **Castle** only implies, with an exaggeratedly mythic construction of an inside and outside that both traps and protects, becomes the focus of **Cat's Eye**, the fact of there being no internal nor external positions regarding the subject, due to its polyphonic nature.

The process of Elaine's deconstruction inherently recalls Bakhtin's notion of the polyphonic self, and the creativity that is immanent to it. For Bakhtin, the notion of creativity itself is dependent upon the unfinalizable nature of human existence. Creativity cannot be found within the laws of a monological discourse, or the conception of a self that is closed and bounded, language is only creative if it is polyphonic, spoken by subjects always in process in an open ended discourse that cannot be concluded. As Morson and Emerson state, Bakhtin's vision of the creative self, which is echoed in Kristeva's work as well, is a "'polyphonic unity' of heterogeneous chronotopes" (1990: 49). In other words, the self for Bakhtin and the subject for Kristeva is always in dialogue with other voices, and it is constituted by the spatio-temporal relations it forms with its surroundings. From a Bakhtinian and Kristevian perspective, the Subject or the Self cannot be seen as a shape with external and internal boundaries but as a liminal being that is in a constant

process of negotiating its fluid boundaries. For Bakhtin, culture itself is not a space with an inherent inside and outside, in his own words “The realms of culture has no internal territory. It is entirely distributed along the boundaries, boundaries pass everywhere, through its every aspect” (Morson and Emerson, 1990: 23).³ There is no place in culture, which a speaker can occupy externally, meaning that when a person speaks, she can only do so from her position at a fluid boundary. As Morson and Emerson write, for Bakhtin dialogism at its true form will reveal “a world whose unity is essentially one of multiple voices, whose conversation never reach finality and cannot be transcribed in monologic form. The unity of the world will then appear as it really is: polyphonic” (1990: 61). In other words, Bakhtin’s notion of unity translates into the self Elaine creates for herself through deconstructing the discourses that surround her, and the polyphonic self that is symbolized in her paintings aptly named **Cat’s Eye** and **Unified Field Theory**, which will be analyzed further later on in the chapter. This effect of polyphony is not only achieved with the use of the present tense but also the autobiographical “I” that cannot be fleshed out without the other selves Elaine touches or is touched by all throughout her life.

Like **Castle**, **Cat’s Eye** is told in the form of the first person narration; this narrative element foregrounds the need to situate the female subject as the speaking subject. Ann Williams writes that “Gothic narratives usually purport to be autobiographies, a discourse of the self, composed to preserve and authenticate the authority of the speaking subject” (67). As she argues, most narrative techniques within Gothic conventions on the micro level show an anxiety over language and its connection to meaning, and on the macro level anxiety and suspicion towards the symbolic order itself. Gothic mode achieves this confusion and distrust of meaning by constantly highlighting different systems within the accepted and normalized ones. In **Castle**, this is achieved through the contrasting perspectives of Merricat, Uncle Julian, and townspeople in the construction of the narrative. For Julian the climax is the poisonings and murder

³ Translation of Morson and Emerson from the original Russian.

while Merricat focuses on Charles' arrival and the disruption that follows after, and in the end through the lens of the townspeople, the tragedy of the girls is transformed into a myth. On the other hand, in **Cat's Eye**, this effect is achieved through the juxtaposition of the writer Elaine to the painter Elaine, as her paintings reveal more about their subjects than the written word does, or even can. The anxiety over meanings as exemplified by Elaine's friend Cordelia and her brother Stephen takes center stage. In comparison to Merricat, who lives a reclusive life and has very little doubt concerning her perception and her words, Elaine constitutes a double-voiced subject of speech. Unlike Merricat, Elaine cannot and does not escape from the surrounding society and all the different discourses it introduces into her life. However, ultimately Elaine herself exposes the deficiency of her own perception and language as the paintings she creates speak of unconscious things that she was not able to interpret until a later age. As Fiona Tolan writes in "**Cat's Eye: Articulating the Body**" Elaine's narrative constitutes both a construction and deconstruction of herself as a subject since the self is "haunted by the impossibility of completing and containing" (195) itself. In other words, from a Bakhtinian perspective she becomes a liminal heroine that exists on the boundaries of culture, neither inside nor outside. The deconstructive process constructs the polyphonic reality of what society sees as the individual.

The beginning of Elaine's life story parallels the necessary departure from what Kristeva calls the semiotic, as she and her family transition from living reclusively in the woods to a house in Toronto. This parting symbolizes the same process an infant goes through when she acquires language, and becomes a subject within the patriarchal economy. Elaine asserts she was genuinely happy until she and her family moved to Toronto, which situates the city itself as her brutal introduction to culture. It also does not help that once they move, the house is not ready and it is mostly muddy and empty. Upon their arrival, Elaine feels "trapped" (36) she says "I want to be back [...] on the road, in my old rootless life of impertinence and safety" (Ibid.); like the infant torn from the safety of the semiotic chora, Elaine is introduced to patriarchal rules. Living in a house for the first time also means for Elaine to have a room of her own, which at first she finds exciting

as it provides her with an empty space to arrange all on her own. However, juxtaposed to the house itself, and the societal structures at large, a room arranged all by herself does not provide the same safety of the woods or offer her any guidance as she tries to make her way within the patriarchal economy. Elaine's getting her own room, and her initial excitement and later indifference to it establishes the novel's connection to the first wave of feminism. The concept of the room itself recalls Virginia Woolf's **A Room of One's Own**, in which she declares for a woman to write and create, the ultimate necessity is a door and a lock. For a time when women lacked a private space of their own, regardless of Woolf's comments about a personal room being vital Atwood acknowledges the ultimate shortcomings of that very notion, its monological isolation. Especially in the late twenties where women have been once again put in the domestic sphere, thus, the first wave feminism's agenda of an isolated space proves itself insufficient as long as the norms of the surrounding society are still functioning to immobilize women within the public sphere.

The locus of **Cat's Eye** is the gentrified cityscape, which acts as the malevolent labyrinth of a Gothic narrative. The novel carries the hidden labyrinths and corridors of the Gothic castle, out on to the streets of Toronto and its ravines. In the same manner of a Gothic heroine, Elaine feels both lost and terrorized by the city she grew up in, stating that for her Toronto represents both "misery and enchantment" (14), and adding that whenever she dreams of it, she is always lost. The city disorients Elaine as her past starts to resurface within her present. She states how she is in the middle of her life, which would normally mean for her to be a "person of substance" (13), but the city makes her feel like she is "shedding matter" (Ibid.), almost as if she is being emptied out of her lived time as it scatters around the landscape while merging with it, and causing her to descend, as she is "dragged downwards, into the layers of this place as into liquefied mud" (Ibid.), time and space thus merge, as Elaine also sees time as "liquid transparencies" (3), recalling Bakhtin's notion of the chronotope, time taking shape through its reflection upon the spatial plane. It is Elaine's memories that shape her perception of the city, thus, the malevolence reflected back to her is simply her own individual traumas and the collective

traumas that is transforming its façade, while also carrying into the present its own past in a symbolic language.

What makes a text Gothic is not always necessarily the eerie landscapes and ghosts that the genre became best known for but rather an internal feeling of terror and the feeling of being lost within an existence that constantly eludes meaning. As Ann Williams asserts, “Not every castle is Gothic, and not every Gothic has a castle” (15), in other words, the motif of the castle or the haunted house are constructions to create a certain sense of feeling, and also are structures used to highlight the characters’ perspectives and places within the given society. As American Gothic Literature shows, this feeling can be evoked through other structures that give both the reader and the character a dizziness of perception and loss of meanings. These alterations of settings, especially beginning with the nineteenth century established three separate sub-genres of Gothic, which are the Urban Gothic, the Suburban Gothic, and the Southern Gothic. In *Cat’s Eye*, Atwood utilizes the motifs of the Urban Gothic, which subverts the traditional Gothic’s notion of the protagonist journeying from the safe and populated city into a remote rural location. For Elaine, safety and peace are represented by the seven years she spends in isolated rural locations with her family. This notion situates the city of Toronto as a vast and terrorizing industrial space that negates nature in the name of culture. Moreover, as a chronotope Toronto functions differently than the ancestral Gothic castle, on one hand, the Gothic castle is both remote from culture, with the implication of there being an escape from it, and it is also fixed both in its ancestral history and place, on the other hand, the city represents liminality, consisting mostly of shifting borders that invites transgression. In this sense, the liminality of the modern industrial city reflects the liminal subjectivity of the novel’s protagonist, who changes incessantly with each threshold event she goes through. For this reason, the Urban Gothic adds to the Gothic genre the chronotope of the threshold, both as a place and a character.

Elaine's construction and deconstruction of a self is reflected upon her perception of her childhood years in the suburb, and her reflection of the city, with the ominous ravine that cuts through them both. Her double Cordelia, more appropriately her other with the burned face, is intrinsically connected with the chronotope of the ravine as they both represent the abjected elements that create and threaten the boundaries of the self. The symbol of the burned face comes from the comic book that Cordelia and Elaine read in their teenage years, in which Elaine becomes bothered by the idea of looking in the mirror and actually finding someone else living inside of her with a burned face. The same motif is repeated in Elaine's only painting of Cordelia, which she aptly names **Half a Face**. Elaine finds her own title of the drawing unusual as she describes the painting she states; "an odd title, because Cordelia's entire face is visible. However, behind her, hanging on the wall, like emblems in the Renaissance, or those heads of animals, moose or bear, you used to find in northern bars, is another face, covered with a white cloth. The effect is of a theatrical mask. Perhaps" (267). Elaine's painting reveals to the reader the unconscious connection between the two girls, **Half a Face** is not an odd title as it highlights Elaine's own face as the missing half. Additionally Elaine observes that in the painting Cordelia's eyes look out in fear, which Elaine interprets as Cordelia being scared of her as well as Elaine being scared of Cordelia "I'm not afraid of seeing Cordelia. I'm afraid of being Cordelia. Because in some way we changed places, and I've forgotten when" (Ibid.). Recalling the comic book story Cordelia reads to Elaine that terrorizes her, which is about two sisters one "pretty" (249), other with a burned half of a face. The pretty one finds a boyfriend and the abject sister gets jealous and commits suicide in front of the mirror, which causes her soul to be stuck in the mirror "and the next time the pretty one is brushing her hair in front of that mirror, she looks up and there's the burned one looking back at her" (Ibid.). The Other sister possesses the pretty one's body until the boyfriend realizes the situation and breaks the mirror. As Nicole de Jong surmises, "Cordelia represents the burned sister that has escaped and 'has succeeded in forming Elaine's identity to the extent that Elaine has become Cordelia'" (100). In other words, for the adult Elaine like the

semiotic chora that both creates and negates, Cordelia represents an absence that constantly threatens the boundaries Elaine has created around her image of a self.

Elaine is first introduced to the social rules through school and the three girlfriends she makes there. Her experience with having friends introduces Elaine for the first time to the concept of a gendered identity, which is also supported by the fact that while entering the school there are two doors for each gender, as well as specific rules, like girls not being allowed to wear pants. A gendered identity becomes the first concept Elaine fails to adopt, which constitutes the first trauma that disillusiones Elaine regarding a stable subject formation. First comes Carol, who treats Elaine as if she is some kind of an exotic animal as she explains things “name them, display them” (60), in treating Elaine like an object, Carol commences the process of objectification that Elaine will face for the rest of her life. With the addition of Cordelia and Grace, a process of trying to subordinate Elaine begins, as her every move is observed and criticized Elaine internalizes her otherness, and how that means she must change every part of herself that does not fit into the gendered identity of being a girl. Elaine spends most of her formidable years as a rearrangeable object for her friends and later on her boyfriends. Elaine becomes the victim of social discourses that have been internalized by the people around her, which highlights the perils of the polyphonic female subject, since language itself obeys the laws of the patriarchal order. Thus, Elaine perceives her first step to reclaiming her own subjectivity as becoming an all seeing eye, in order to reconstitute her own feeling of I-ness.

The problem of sight and its power of objectification is the focal point in both **Castle** and **Cat's Eye**. It is vision that lies at the heart of the oedipal complex, as the male child sees an absence that makes him aware of the existence of another, splitting the I of the child from the mother, which situates the mother as the not-I. In his psychoanalytic theory, Lacan also emphasized the way the gaze gives the perceiver power to transform any subject into an object of her gaze, which acts as a sign of her own identity. Lacan's conception of the mirror stage conceives a subject that objectifies itself through its own gaze, which situates what can be called a self as something that is already divided and

alienated. In the novel, this division is highlighted with the doubling of Elaine and Cordelia, and for most of their friendship it is Cordelia with the power of the gaze, constantly watching and assessing, and no matter how much Elaine tries to push Cordelia away, even in her absent state Cordelia remains at Elaine's periphery. Elaine also has to establish her own sense of self against a societal gaze that constantly finds her lacking in some way or another. However, Elaine's quest is also traditional, which is the basic narrative quest of the Female Gothic, as Ann Williams writes;

Learning to read (or rather, not to misread) appearances, is one of [The Female Gothic Heroine's] most important lessons. She can be happy only when she realizes that she did not see this ambiguous, paradoxical figure accurately at first. In her eyes, [the male Gothic hero] is eventually *transformed*, his true nature 'realized' (144).

In other words, the gothic heroine does not only have to confront with the patriarchal language with constantly shifting meanings, but also the way her own senses might deceive her. For Elaine, there is no mysterious male, she possesses deeper and more wounding relations than that, and the most important of them all are her relationships with Cordelia and Mrs. Smeath, her school friend Grace's mother.

Unlike Cordelia, who figures into Elaine's life-story as the abjected other, Mrs. Smeath signifies the semiotic chora, which all that is abject. Mrs. Smeath looms large against Elaine's mother who is mostly described by her daughter in terms of wise and trickster animals. Unlike Elaine, her mother does not concern herself with other people's views, and Elaine tells the reader how her mother "never says, *What will people think?* the way other mothers do, or are supposed to. She says she doesn't give a hoot." (253) and adds, "I think this is irresponsible of her. At the same time, the word *hoot* pleases me. It

makes my mother into a non-mother, a sort of mutant owl” (Ibid.). Additionally, Elaine observes her mother’s indifference towards both fashion and furniture, which to the young Elaine represents the ultimate masks of femininity, she says, “It’s as if, like a cat, she cannot see things unless they are moving” (Ibid.). Her mother juxtaposed to Mrs. Smeath embodies a connection to nature, and a rhythmic archaic language that is shared with it, in Kristeva’s terms, Mrs. Smeath and Elaine’s mother exemplify the split maternal body, with the female subject’s body, scientific and theological discourse create “a thoroughfare, a threshold where ‘nature’ confronts ‘culture’” (Kristeva:1969, 238). According to Kristeva this liminal positioning creates the need for the phallic mother “Because if, on the contrary, there were no one on this threshold, if the mother were not, that is, if she were not phallic, then every speaker would be led to conceive of its Being in relation to some void” (Ibid.), which in the novel becomes what Elaine has to confront after her incident at the ravine.

From the outset Elaine perceives her friend’s mother as a grotesque figure, she describes Mrs. Smeath as someone who “has big bones, square teeth with little gaps between them so that you can see each tooth distinctly, skin that looks rubbed raw as if scrubbed with a potato brush.” (67). Elaine describes Mrs. Smeath in a way that makes her sound like an inhuman figure. Elaine also observes;

Over the dresses she wears bibbed aprons that sag at the bosom and make it look as if she doesn’t have two breasts but only one, a single breast that goes all the way across her front and continues down until it joins her waist. She wears lisle stockings with seams, which make her legs look stuffed and sewn up the backs. [...]. Sometimes, instead of the stockings, she has thin cotton socks, above which her legs rise white and sparsely haired, like a woman’s mustache. She has a mustache too, though not very much of one, just a sprinkling of hairs around the corners of the mouth. (Ibid.).

As the way Elaine describes Mrs. Smeath distinctly presents her as a more masculine figure, regardless of her conformation into the patriarchal culture of religion. Mrs. Smeath figures as the phallic mother, in contrast to Elaine's ethereal mother who even though does not perform the actions that society deems womanly, carries more feminine energy through her connection to the nature. Mrs. Smeath is Kristeva's phallic mother, standing on the threshold of the semiotic chora, and as the young Elaine asserts, she stands with God "all sewed up" (214) with him, adding "[God is] on her side, and it's a side from which I'm excluded. I consider Jesus, who is supposed to love me. [...], and I don't think he can be of much help. Against Mrs. Smeath and God he can do nothing, because God is bigger. God is not Our Father at all." (Ibid.). Similar to the concept of God the father, omnipresent and watchful, Mrs. Smeath becomes in Elaine's eyes, "the monstrous mother figure, containing all that is abject" (Tolan, 2007: 194). The biggest attestment to her abjection ultimately becomes her maternal body, which to the young Elaine is a sight of aberration, in its refusal of conforming to any particular gender role, and her diseased heart confusing the boundaries of the inside and outside of her body.

For Elaine, the semiotic and the symbolic forces of language are represented by her brother and Cordelia, these two forces are highlighted as stemming from the same core, thus, imbue seamlessly to create the theme of a metaphorical time travel. At the beginning of the novel, Stephen is situated on the monological discourse of scientific language, and Cordelia represents the semiotic. As Elaine states at some point Stephen becomes so immersed within science that he moves away "from the imprecision of words" (3). Unlike Cordelia, who, shows Elaine how imprecise words can be, for instance, the day they first meet, she tells Elaine that "'there is dog poop'" (83) on her shoe, Elaine tells her that it is only rotten apple to which Cordelia replies "'It's the same colour though isn't it?'" (Ibid.). Using the fickle bond between words and their connection to the world, Cordelia asserts her dominance, which shows the connotative aspect of words. If the physical matter cannot be transformed, the word that signifies it can be made to take on new meanings, creating a loophole. Stephen on the other hand is fixed and stable as he represents the denotative language of science when he says, "Time is not a line but a

dimension, like the dimensions of space. If you can bend space you can bend time also, and if you knew enough and could move faster than light you could travel backward in time and exist in two places at once” (3). In turn, Elaine achieves the speed of light; hence, existing in two places at once, but her achievement is done through language and art.

Using the literary chronotope rather than the scientific one, Elaine manages to bend both time and space. As Maurice Blanchot, who has had an heavy influence on Kristeva especially regarding her approach to the crisis of meaning, asserts in **The Infinite Conversation**, “All of our language-and therein lies its divine nature—is arranged to reveal in what “is” not what disappears, but what always subsists, and in this disappearance takes form: meaning, the idea, the universal” (34). In other words, the meanings of words do not rise out of denotative tendencies, but from the very gaps that transform the words into live organisms that can take on new significances when used within different contexts. Foregrounding language’s inability to name what is absent is the very thing that gives a voice to the unsayable. With language, one can describe what a thing is even if there is not a word that denotes it, causing something to appear out of the gaps of that description, like Elaine’s cat’s eye marble, “The cat’s eyes really are like eyes, but not the eyes of cats. They’re the eyes of something that isn’t known but exists anyway; like the green eye of the radio; like the eyes of aliens from a distant planet.” (73). In this context, cat’s eye marbles represent the instability of words and their relation to the objects they refer to. The name denotes its object regardless, which is a marble, but requires knowledge for the reference to be understood.

Elaine negotiates with the ambiguity of words and the unsteadiness of their reference through her recallings of Stephen and Cordelia. As she moves through time non-linearly, the line that divides Cordelia and Stephen as influences that represent the centrifugal and centripetal forces of language begin to mirror each other. As Stephen explains to the girls what an atom is, science itself becomes highlighted as a play of language, an inherent imprecision lying within its truth, especially regarding things that are absent. He tells them that atoms are “hardly there at all. It’s just a few specks held in

place by forces. At the subatomic level, you can't even say that matter exists. You can only say that it has tendency to exist" (287). Then, he makes a joke saying Cordelia, like atoms, has a tendency to exist, showing an insight over Cordelia's abject status that Elaine lacks at the time, but similarly For Elaine, like Cordelia, Stephen also exist as an abjected subject, who is both "here and there" (387). As it is highlighted in Bakhtin's writings, in its natural state the world itself is chaotic and order is imposed on it by people whose selves are fragmented in their original state. While it is the tendency of individuals to seek solace in the idea of an ending or conclusion, due to the unfinalizable nature of the world and the self it is a failed mission but nonetheless one that infuses the creativity of human beings. Regarding Bakhtin's notion of unfinalizability and its connection to creativity, Morson and Emerson write, "To understand language as creative, the self as unfinalizable, and history as fundamentally open, each had to be described so that creativity was inherent to it" (40). In other words, the categories of language, the self, and history need to be framed as constructions of the human conscious. Neither science nor language truly offers precision but both require creativity. As highlighted in the novel, science's connection to its objects recalls art's connection to the world, since both rely on some form of language, whether oral or visual, and within their search for a definite meaning or the collapse of it, the creative tendencies remain the same.

The female body is one of these absences for the girls, as it becomes something that constantly eludes definition provided by the illusive myths and metaphors used to cover what is perceived as the grotesque nature of the human body and its functions. Through her sisters, Cordelia is the one who provides the girls with grotesque images regarding the female body. In Elaine's words, "Cordelia, her voice lowered, her eyes big, passes on the truth: the curse is when blood comes out between your legs. We don't believe her. She produces evidence: a sanitary pad, filched from Perdie's wastebasket. On it is a brown crust, like dried gravy." (108). That the girls initially do not believe Cordelia foregrounds the ways girls are uneducated regarding their own bodies and instead, subject to the myth like definitions such as calling the menstruation cycle a curse, which alienates them further from the corporeality of their body. "[...] it's nothing like when you cut your

finger. Cordelia is indignant. But she can prove nothing.” (Ibid.). Cordelia’s inability to provide actual proof regarding an occurrence that will take place with her own body emphasize, even further the irony of that moment which shows how at very young ages girls are thought to internalize denial about their own body through being illiterate regarding the functions of it. The male body is the norm and the female body is the grotesque, unspoken other with its curses and blood. As discussed in the introductory chapter, with the female body transformed into something unspeakable the very site that is supposed to generate meaning is disturbed, since Elaine states how she has not “thought much about grown-up women’s bodies before. But now these bodies are revealed in their true, upsetting light: alien and bizarre, hairy, squashy, monstrous” (Ibid.). It is worst when they think of their mothers, since it is hard to imagine them as in regards to their bodies, stating that between them and their mothers there is an abyss of “wordlessness” (109), and the questions regarding the female body would be inappropriate to ask them since their mothers’ ultimate goal is perfect cleanliness, and the female body represents something utterly dirty. Moreover, with its refusal to be denotated, the female body, it both generates meaning and eludes it, which both fascinates and terrorizes the girls from a young age.

As a means to fill the blank spaces in her memory the narrative Elaine has to retrospectively and concurrently reconstruct is how she was metaphorically buried and reborn as a completely new person when she was a child. The first part of her rite of initiation begins with her literal burial by the three girls, “I have no image of myself in the hole; only a black square filled with nothing, a square like a door. Perhaps the square is empty; perhaps it’s only a marker, a time marker that separates the time before it from the time after” (126). In that nothingness she feels time and space merge to create an absent black hole in the succession of her memories, a point of change, which she cannot quite come to understand. Similar to Stephen’s hypothesis regarding the creation of the universe, something that occurs in a picosecond that is beyond the realm of imagination. However as Stephen asks, is there even such a thing as a moment before the first moment ““or does it even make sense to use the word *before*, since time cannot exist without space and space-time without events”” (389), which situates memories or events as things

imbued within each other. Thus, Elaine's traumatic time marker does not remain still but spills into every aspect of her life. Within the Gothic genre, as Diane Wallace states, "the metaphor of 'burial', then, is a particularly powerful way of figuring the erasure of the female self" (30). The incident of Elaine's burial marks the beginning of her creative journey, as it constitutes the first event that begins the process of her losing time.

The incident at the bridge acts as the final ritual for Elaine to situate herself back within her own body, her baptism into Kristeva's semiotic. According to Cordelia, the bridge and the ravine that runs underneath it, carries the dissolved people, since it passes through the cemetery, and adds that if one were to go near it or drink the water "the dead people will come out of the stream, all covered with mist, and take you with them" (88). As Fiona Tolan interprets the ravine that runs through the city, "rupturing the suburban landscape" (2007: 195) acts as the textual symbol of the semiotic and adds "The gap formed by the overgrown ravine disrupts the consciously structured suburban world, and Cordelia, functioning as Elaine's death drive, is compelling her towards this space" (Ibid.). The myth Cordelia creates around the ravine also supports this assertion as it calls to mind the River Styx, which is a river in Greek mythology that runs through the Underworld and functions as the border between the world of the dead- the cemetery- and the world of the living –suburban Toronto-. The river Styx is also the site that has the powers to make one invulnerable, as is the case with the story of Achilles, However, after the incident just the way it was for Achilles, young Elaine's newly gained invulnerability comes with a spot of vulnerability of its own especially regarding her particular memories Cordelia. After the incident, Elaine stops hanging out with the girls completely and erases their memories through a willed amnesia. She states how she is "happy as a clam, hard-shelled, firmly closed" (237). After the incident of the bridge, through a long process, young Elaine and Cordelia start to change places, and between them, a new power structure is established. Soon after, Cordelia's affiliation with the semiotic and the death drive causes an inability for her to function within the symbolic order and as Tolan surmises, "draws her towards madness and suicide" (2007: 194). Just like the twin with the burned face, Cordelia's spirit, or more aptly her memories, permeate adult Elaine's experience back in Toronto.

As the literal “I”/Eye of the narration, as her lost time of childhood permeates the cityscape Elaine perceives Toronto, the way a heroine of a Gothic novel would a scary ancestral house. Thus, the Gothic feeling of Toronto is achieved through the absence of Elaine’s childhood years that slowly become tangible through the way the city reflects them back to Elaine. As adult Elaine’s perspective reveals, the city and its buildings resemble “enormous gravestones of cold light” (9) and represent both “misery, and enchantment” (14). This city ties Elaine to itself through a past she can neither outrun nor confront, as it is symbolized with the reason for her return, which is her own retrospective art show. Upon coming back Elaine writes how in her dreams “of this city [she is] always lost” (14). Representing the city in a similar manner to a gothic castle with its secret passages and rooms, something vast, which threatens the boundaries of her existence, later on she writes how she “shouldn’t have come back here, to this city that has it in for [her]. [she] thought [she] could stare it down. But it still has power, like a mirror that shows you only the ruined half of your face” (483). The city plays a crucial role in the construction of Elaine’s eye/I, as it reflects two timelines back to her simultaneously, and stands as the final frontier Elaine must pass through in order to complete her journey. As *Cat’s Eye* is a novel of doublings, the industrial city finds its other, not in the places the Risleys stayed in their nomadic years, but in the chronotope of the ravine. As Fiona Tolan states,, the ravine functions as a “textual symbol of the semiotic,” (2007: 195), which “rupture[s] the respectable suburban landscape” (Ibid.), in other words, if the city represents the symbolic order, the ravine constitutes the semiotic process of interruption, as it signifies the abject that constantly threatens the borders of culture and its illusion of progress while also doubling as the semiotic chora.

For young Elaine, the ravine is a place of terror where she is constantly warned not to travel by herself, since it is believed to be a place of danger for young girls. From early childhood, the girls are warned about not crossing the bridge over the ravine by themselves, which makes the ravine a place that is both “dangerous” (221) and “forbidden” (Ibid.). Carol warns Elaine about how “There might be men down there, [...] These are not ordinary men but the other kind, the shadowy, nameless kind who do things

to you” (55-56), which associates the chronotope of the ravine with hidden figures of unknown terrors. Cordelia also adds her own twist to the myth of the ravine, as she connects it with the cemetery it runs through, telling the girls that “because the stream flows right out of the cemetery it’s made of dissolved dead people. [...] if you drink it or step into it or even get too close to it, the dead people will come out of the stream, all covered with mist, and take you with them” (88), which transforms the shadowy, nameless men into the ultimate abject of culture: the transformed corpses of the dead. The ravine is also home to a poisonous plant called the deadly nightshade, which becomes a recurring symbol in the novel, a flower that is both poisonous and alluring. According to Cordelia, a drop of poison from it can turn a person “into a zombie” (89). Cheryl Cowdy states how the use of ravines within Canadian literature is usually very Freudian in the sense that they resemble, “Freud’s system of the unconscious: they are dark, hidden, frequently the domain of childhood, and when they communicate, ravines have a language that seems to operate according to a logic of condensation or displacement like that of Freud’s dream-work” (69). Further adding that ravines also mirror the “ontological instability” (70) of adolescence. In other words, no matter what connotations are given to the ravine, a place of danger, or a place of freedom, it remains ambiguous as a place that is neither fully wild nor cultivated. A place of artifice that allows the merging of Elaine’s artistic vision and her reality, which is supported by the fact that Elaine goes through two separate experiences there, that she can only articulate in a dream-like manner.

All of this mythology surrounding the ravine ties together in the event of Elaine’s punishment by the girls, in which Elaine makes her entry into the semiotic chora that allows her to gain her artistic vision. Cordelia throws Elaine’s hat down the ravine and orders her to go down as a punishment for Elaine’s laughter when she falls down. After getting into the creek, due to the frozen water filling her shoes and snow-pants, Elaine finds herself unable to move, and says that:

The water of the creek is cold and peaceful, it comes straight from the cemetery, from the graves and their bones. It's water made from the dead people, dissolved and clear, and I am standing in it. If I don't move soon I will be frozen in the creek. I will be a dead person, peaceful and clear, like them. (223).

For young Elaine, the water is “made” from the dead people, rather than something that carries their residue, and in the process of merging with the creek, they become “dissolved,” “clear,” and “peaceful.” However, as adult Elaine will observe later on, the creek is also the place where the dead people; “wait, forgetting themselves atom by atom, melting away like icicles, flowing downhill into the river” (494). As Elaine tries to get herself out of the creek and into the bank, her memory becomes even more dream-like, as though she is seeing things around her as if they are the negatives of a photograph, “It's as if the snowflakes are black, the way white is black on a negative” (223), and she interprets the rustling of the trees as the dead people coming out of the creek telling her to “Hush” (Ibid.). However, the climax of the incident comes when Elaine sees a woman standing on the bridge, “She holds out her arms to me and I feel a surge of happiness. Inside her half-open cloak there's a glimpse of red. It's her heart, I think. It must be her heart, on the outside of her body, glowing like neon, like a coal.” (224). the woman speaks to her without actually talking, Elaine hears the words, “*You can go home now*” (Ibid.). Tolan interprets this moment as Elaine's entry to “death” (2007: 196), which is facilitated by her other Cordelia the representation of Elaine's death drive. This drive brings Elaine to confront the abjected mother/woman within her unconscious, which she herself becomes the second time she goes back to the ravine as an adult.

Within the structure of Toronto, and the suburban town Elaine lives, the ravine is a place where the civilization's abject are forgotten or repressed like the corpses from the cemetery, the wastes of surrounding suburban area, but most tellingly the girl who is

molested and strangled down at the ravine. Elaine observes how after the initial shock of the news, everyone just stops talking about her, “So she goes to that place where all things go that are not mentionable, taking her blond hair, her angora sweater, her ordinariness with her. She stirs up something, like dead leaves” (285). Different from the cemetery water, the waste, or the poisonous plants, the aggression done to the girl, and its literal proof; her dead body, is abjected from the suburban consciousness. As Elaine herself keeps emphasizing, from what she sees in the photographs, this girl is an ordinary looking person with ordinary clothes, the violence inflicted upon her turns her into something grotesque. The ravine, and the unmentionables it contains, symbolizes Kristeva’s definition of the abject as something banished but something that also always remains at a seeing distance, which takes the person towards a realm of collapsed meaning “It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what disturbs the identity, system, order” (1982: 4). In this context, the ravine as culture’s dumping ground becomes the very thing that haunts it from within. As the adult Elaine observes when she goes back to the ravine, regardless of the changes done for its development, it still contains, in Elaine’s words, “pruned and civic” (493), still carries its old dark undertones. Elaine says, regardless of the changes done, there is still “a rustling, a rank undertone of cats and their huntings and furtive scratchings, still going on behind the deceptive tidiness. Another, wilder and more tangled landscape rising up, from beneath the surface of this one” (493-494).

When the adult Elaine returns to the site of her childhood trauma, she finds Cordelia down at the ravine, as her abjected double, the side of her that she rejects but can never leave behind. This episode is also dream-like, and just like the hooded woman young Elaine sees on the bridge, Cordelia down the ravine only exists in adult Elaine’s imagination. After her retrospective, Elaine goes down the ravine in hopes of finding Cordelia, which symbolizes her eventual acceptance of her abjected double. Instead of denying their connectedness, Elaine lets the negative emotions to pass between them;

There is the same shame, the sick feeling in my body, the same knowledge of my own wrongness, awkwardness, weakness; the same wish to be loved; the same loneliness; the same fear. But these are not my own emotions any more. They are Cordelia's; as they always were (495).

Unlike the connection between the suburban town, and the ravine that carries its unmentionables, Elaine accepts her negative side by acknowledging the dark feelings while also releasing Cordelia from the ravine. "I am the older one now, I'm the stronger. If she stays here any longer she will freeze to death; she will be left behind, in the wrong time. It's almost too late" (Ibid.). Unless Elaine intervenes, Cordelia, or at least Elaine's version of Cordelia, will melt into the creek, as she becomes dissolved becoming one of the dead people that haunt the ravine. Through the releasing of Cordelia the ravine once again becomes only a ravine, cleared from Elaine's own personal history, as Elaine observes, "The bridge is only a bridge, the river a river, the sky is a sky. This landscape is empty now, a place for Sunday runners. Or not empty: filled with whatever it is by itself, when I'm not looking" (496).

Elaine's construction of her polyphonic subjecthood through deconstruction relies heavily on her creative processes. As Elaine herself admits as she describes her painting called **Falling Women** "A lot of my paintings then began in my confusion about words." (315). her paintings constitute a mode of communication that is outside the normative bounds of the language but still they are not enough by themselves for the articulation of Elaine's life-story. Sherrill Grace observes that by the time Elaine's narrative reaches the point of the art show, the reader already knows most of the paintings, and the underlying meanings they convey regarding Elaine's life, and this revelation emphasizes the way "the real autobiography goes on around them" (201). In other words, the connection between the narration and the paintings emphasize Kristeva's notion of an intricately connected

semiotic and symbolic, the painting confers a meaning to Elaine's life-story that her articulation cannot account for by itself. Paintings or the descriptions of them, like the semiotic keeps interrupting Elaine's narrative, revealing a cat's-eye-like perspective over the events that have taken place. The symbolism of her paintings works as the most obvious mode of deconstruction within the novel, as the construction process is done through Elaine's verbal narration. Elaine paints what has been abject to her, the people and events she excluded from her life in order to draw boundaries around her self, and the paintings give her a way of perceiving those very things that have remained at the periphery of her existence. The people she paints include her mother, Mrs. Smeath, and Cordelia, the people who have eluded a young Elaine as well as people she intrinsically connected through shared trauma and common stories.

As the reader reaches the chapter where Elaine goes to her art show, the already told events of the novel are paralleled in a different language. This language is what Kristeva calls the semiotic, the images that interrupt Elaine's narration within the symbolic order. The art show acts as a summary of the novel from within, but also as an acknowledgment towards all that cannot have been told, as they also highlight the inevitable gaps within Elaine's telling. "Nothing goes away" (3), Elaine, asserts at the beginning of the novel, and her paintings stand as proof of that as they symbolize, Elaine's literal attempt to paint what she considers as her lost time. She herself admits to this as she walks around the gallery "surrounded by the time [she has] made; which is not a place, which is only a blur, the moving edge we live in; which is fluid, which turns back upon itself, like a wave" (482). The paintings stand as evidence that long before she could articulate her traumas through language, she was painting them, thus, by painting the times she has repressed, she spatializes her traumatic memories. Her paintings end up as representations upon the gallery walls that can be re-arranged *ad infinitum*; "visualizing infinity" (259) As Stephen calls the Möbius strip, or like Stephen's drawing of the Klein bottle without an inside or outside. The life story can begin whenever and wherever, it can be altered and rearranged, containing all at once nothing and everything, as the gaps in the narration give as much shape to the story as the things that can be articulated with language

and writing. Similar to the form of the strip and the bottle, even for the subject of the life-story herself, there remains no position such as an inside and outside, which is foregrounded by the interweaving of the novel's narration and the art gallery. As Jane W. Brown observes the art show **Risley in Retrospect**, becomes "Risley in Retrospect the novel" (199), which situates Elaine both inside her story, as the subject of the art show, and outside as the narrator of the novel.

The function of a traditional autobiography is to piece together the "I" of the narration as a stable subject. Since the subject narrating the events of her life also stands as the object of the narration, the autobiographical genre is used to constitute a bounded and individualistic "I," and the telling of the events are used to draw boundaries around her identity. Further, on a symbolic level, autobiography is traditionally used to create an image of self with a unified identity. If Jackson's **Castle** is also considered as an fictional autobiographical account, it becomes clear that all through the narration, Merricat creates new borders around her and her sister, as she finally achieves her vision of the moon, the illusion of a safe and bounded existence; her voice becomes more authoritative and monologic than it was in the beginning of the novel, this need to have a bounded female subject was crucial to the project of first wave feminism, since for that particular period, the first object of feminism was to first attain to the position of subjecthood. However, in **Cat's Eye**, Elaine breaks her boundaries rather than creating them, which foreshadows the project of the third-wave feminists, as Elaine herself confronts, the whole notion of the subject itself is a perilous term⁴. Atwood's use of autobiography as a symbol changes throughout her oeuvre. As Sherrill Grace asserts, Atwood's novel **Lady Oracle** the autobiographical nature of the novel in relation to the construction and deconstruction of

⁴ In her book **Gender Trouble**, Judith Butler writes "the political construction of the subject proceeds with certain legitimating and exclusionary aims, and these political operations are effectively concealed and naturalized by a political analysis that takes juridical structures as their foundation" (5). In this context, even though, initially the need for a language that represented women as subjects was necessary, the project itself became paradoxical since ultimately the notion of representation inevitably carries within itself exclusionary terms.

the narrating self is symbolized by the labyrinth motif used within it, and in **Handmaid's Tale**, the labyrinth changes into the scrabble game that the novel's protagonist plays with the Commander. In **Cat's Eye**, it is the marble that represents the self and the way it is constructed, symbolizing a "completion-in-multiplicity" (200). In other words, Atwood transforms the elusive "I" lost in a labyrinth into a word-game, which finally transforms into the self Elaine creates, inevitably polyphonic and chronotopic, constituted by many layers of voices and experiences, which acknowledges the impossibility of a bounded and contained self or subject.

CHAPTER THREE

CHRONOTOPE AND POLYPHONY CAROL SHIELDS'S **UNLESS**

Carol Shields's last novel **Unless** was published in 2002. The novel is about, as the novel's narrator Reta Winters says "a woman writer who is writing about a woman writer who is writing" (208). **Unless** deals with the women problem in manifold ways while also deconstructing late twentieth century notions over the assumed redundancy for feminism itself. In the novel, Reta's life is unraveled to the reader, more and more, her life story becomes an overt, polyphonic testimony of the lives of others. The novel becomes Shields's exploration of themes regarding the concept of the female writer and the female subject, who are chronologically displaced in an era of illusive successes of the prior feminist waves. The fragmented but cohesive nine-month journey of Reta Winters is one of awakening and surfacing, as the novel echoes both the fairy tale of "Little Snow White," and the myth of Demeter and Persephone. Nevertheless, Shields does not only reconstruct these seminal stories through intertextuality but also employs metafiction to critique and parlay the position of the female writer and the problematics of constructing a female subject. This chapter will first address the genre conventions the novel utilizes to construct its own meanings through an analysis of its form and narration; then this chapter will analyzes in the light of Bakhtin's concept of polyphony and chronotope, the different ways the domestic and public spaces employed in the novel, and the dialogue this creates. Lastly, the discussion will move on to scrutinize the multifaceted means of constructing the female subject that the novel employs, with an emphasis on the silent woman that lies at the heart of it.

The novel is about Reta Winters' firsthand account of the time in her life where she was suffering from a "great unhappiness" (1), due to Norah's, her oldest daughter's, decision to live in a homeless shelter as she spends her days on a street corner with a cardboard sign around her neck with GOODNESS written on it. The Winters' are presented as a conventional upper-middle class family, with a house in suburban Ontario,

and three children. Reta's husband Tom is the town's physician, like his father before him. Reta herself is both a translator and a fiction writer. Reta's story begins with her daughter's departure, as she writes with the hope of understanding Norah's reasons for choosing to sit on a street corner. During this process, Reta ends up having to navigate many theories and interpretations from her family and her friends regarding Norah's situation. The most influential voice that haunts Reta during her quest to understand her daughter is the voice of Danielle Westerman, a holocaust survivor, a feminist pioneer, and both a mentor and maternal figure to Reta. With the impact of Westerman's feminist thoughts, Reta tries to understand her daughter's protest in the context of the excluded female subject, as she writes unsent letters to writers and publishers that do not mention much or any achievement by women. During this nine-month journey, Reta is also trying to finish her second book, a sequel to her prize winning first novel, in which she negotiates the place of the female subject. At the novel's dénouement, Norah is hospitalized due to the scars in her hands becoming infected and catching pneumonia. Her hospitalization does not only commence the process of her coming back home, but reveals the underlying reason for her chosen homelessness. From the recordings of a street camera, the Winters' learn that before Norah's departure, on a street corner near her house a Muslim woman set herself on fire in protest, and Norah gets the burns in her hands from trying yet failing to save the woman.

Similar to both **Castle**, and **Cat's Eye**, **Unless** utilizes tropes from the genre of autobiography as a means to emphasize the problematics of creating a central, and self-centered I. As Michael Holquist writes in his analysis of Gogol's "Notes of a Madman," autobiography creates the possibility of observing "a self in search of a writing that could be its life" (131). Holquist traces the literary modes of both biography and autobiography to the Greek encomia- eulogy-, which was traditionally divided into two parts, the first part being a sequential telling of the person's life and the second focusing on the essence of the deceased person with no regards to chronology. Holquist writes that it was St. Augustine who transformed encomia into the autobiographical genre that is known today. In his **Confessions**, he eliminated the necessity for the literal death of the person and

prioritized the symbolic death of the subject by foregrounding his conversion experience as the death of the subject, rather than the person, to gain the authority to narrate his life. In a similar vein, **Unless's** Reta Winters takes her cue in narrating her life story from a radical alteration that causes her notion of who she is to become uncertain, she writes after her daughter's departure, "I, her mother, was more absent from myself than she" (12). In the first pages of the novel, Reta is careful to outline that the story she is about to tell is about "[her] new life- the summer of the year 2000" (1). Like St. Augustine, Reta finds the interpretive authority to write her life story through the symbolic death and rebirth she and her daughter go through in the nine-month period of the novel. Nevertheless, unlike both the **Confessions** and "Notes of a Madman," in the process of narrating her life, instead of trying to "usurp authority" (Holquist, 137), she relinquishes it in the name of a polyphonic narrative that connects her construction of an I to many others'.

Unless explores the illusive authority of telling one's own story, which can only be constructed through the use and exploration of the stories' of others. The more Reta becomes unsure and questioning the more the story of her life fleshes out. In **Castle**, a literal and symbolic usurpation of authority takes place and, then, it is paradoxically abdicated. The sisters' murder of their family and their burial of Uncle Julian's manuscripts regarding the murders give Merricat reason and means to tell her story, nevertheless, in the end, she relinquishes the patriarchal authority she obtained by burning the house down. This action, similar to Norah's, results in an exile from the surrounding society and Merricat's story ends the moment the sisters become stories told by the townspeople. As Sherril Grace maintains, "[the autobiographical] 'I' is individualistic, asserting its separateness from others, its distinct boundaries, and unique qualities" (190). In this context, **Castle** usurps the mode of creating a bounded self for the female subject while also coding it as a failed quest when done in isolation. In the end, due to sisters' isolation, their life stories outside Merricat's narrative become a tale dictated by people who have been left out, in the forms of myths and scary stories that neither sister has any control over. However, in **Unless**, Reta achieves the opposite effect by writing her musings over Norah's self-imposed exile. In a sense, both the Blackwoods and Norah, in

Reta's words, want to "register [Norah's] existence" (310) through a voluntary abjection that at the very least cannot be ignored. Norah's chosen abjecthood disrupts Reta's life story, and as she tries to make sense of her daughter's reasoning, Reta ends up reconstructing not just her own life but also the life of Danielle Westerman, her mother-in-law Lois, and most importantly Norah. She achieves this by providing enough narrative space, through accepting in Bakhtinian terms the unfinalizability and polyphony of a life-story, and not claiming any authority over the events and characters that unravel in front of her eyes.

There is, ultimately, a far more profound reason than just the notion of gaining authority to Reta's tale, which is to create a polyphonic maternal text that connects to others in the hopes of creating a textual space that tries to mend the problem of female exclusion by constantly acknowledging its existence. To achieve this, Shields employs different modes of writing including, translation, anthology writing, novel writing, and memoirs. In the process of Reta's writing three central characters go through a phase of rebirth, albeit in different manners. As she herself asserts, Reta's project of writing becomes about "[typing her way] toward becoming a conscious being" (109). Her words recalling Adrienne Rich's assertion about living in the "time of awakening consciousness" (18), resulting from women writers writing their way out of the confines of the traditions that surround them. Similar to Rich's analogy, the process of awakening, especially for Reta and Norah, as Rich states, is "confusing, disorienting, and painful" (Ibid.). After witnessing the Muslim woman's self-immolation, Norah sees the world through new eyes, which causes as Reta observes "a deterioration [...] to the fabric of the world" (134). Particularly Norah's, and the event she is exposed to make her realize "the world that does not belong to her as she has been told. Again and again and again. She is prohibited from entering. From now on life will seem less and less life like" (Ibid.). This notion forces Reta to awaken and as Rich calls it "re-vision" her life, which creates a domino effect, as Reta becomes too focused on her own fiction, Danielle Westerman ends up having to translate her own memoir, first writing and then "re-visioning" her own life. In addition, through this process of translation which she herself claims to be a "creative act" (3), she

finally decides to write “about her mother, admitting, finally, that a memoir must have a mother somewhere in its folds. The two identities she never reconciled — daughter, writer — are coming together” (319). As Reta writes her second novel and her life story towards gaining a new kind of consciousness, in search for a place for her daughter, she creates a chain effect of awakening.

Even though as a Bildungsroman the novel highlights the notion of process, Reta’s story, as the chapter titles reflect, mostly consists of stasis, which foreshadows, even at the end of the novel, the possibility of something happening that has yet to take place. Reta does not merely transcribe certain days from her life for nine months during Norah’s absence, but like translation, through autobiographical writing she creates herself anew. As Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson write the second wave of autobiography criticism believed that the point of an autobiographical narration was not to be truthful but creative by “[r]econceiving self-referential narratives not as sites of the truth of a life but as creative self- engagements” (128). Reta’s story, a text with a mystery at its center, is not a tale told in the pursuit of an absolute truth of either who she is or the people that surround her. The construction of the whole text depends upon theories and interpretation that can neither be proved nor disproved. Shields, through her middle-aged narrator Reta both employs and inverts the subgenre of the Bildungsroman, as she tracks a story of a mother’s self-realization in the hopes of creating a bond with her daughter. Unlike the Bildungsroman, however, the story does not begin from Reta’s childhood, and only amounts to a nine-month period, recalling the period of a normal pregnancy. Nevertheless, from a Bakhtinian perspective, the Bildungsroman aspect makes it a novel of “emergence” (Bakhtin, 1987: 21) specifically because as Bakhtin maintains in this way, “Time is introduced into man, enters into his very image, changing in a fundamental way significance of all aspects of his destiny and life” (Ibid.). In this context, Reta is not the immobile and permanent subject she saw herself as before her daughter’s absence, and by maintaining a narrative around trying to interpret both Norah’s absence and silence, Shields creates a novel in which everything is imbued with the presentness of the time experienced, this feeling of

presentness creates a feeling of possibility for multiple futures right around the corner, thus, making polyphony the novel's central theme.

The persistent possibilities of change converge on Norah, the unmoving figure of the novel, creating the feeling of stasis, yet also emphasizing the process of becoming for each female character, particularly for Reta. As Sarah Falcus maintains, "Reta is poised between the past and the 'Not Yet'" (315). This "Not Yet," which is also the name of the last chapter, foregrounds what Falcus asserts as the "temporal construction of the novel" (Ibid.). Falcus argues that an overlooked aspect of **Unless** is its concern with the liminality and marginality of being middle aged. In her article, she argues that there is a tendency within the novel to see the ageing female body as a prison. Through the figures of Danielle and Lois, and their depictions by Reta, Shields emphasizes the prejudices and fears Reta has towards her own maternal connections. Through Reta's constant struggle to hold onto Norah, and her abjection of Danielle and Lois she firmly places herself on a temporal boundary, in which she is neither an old woman nor a young girl. This temporal ambiguity creates, concerning Reta's construction of a self, a Bakhtinian and Kristevan process of becoming. Falcus writes in regards to the chapter titles, which create a "sense of linguistic indirection [reinforcing] the structural and thematic emphasis upon stasis" (316), paralleled with the significance of stasis within a life story, lies the ultimate possibility of change, since each character of the novel, even from a state of stasis, cannot be diminished into subjects with stable boundaries. Like Reta, each subject is in the process of constant negotiation of their liminal boundaries. This is especially emphasized at the end of the novel when Lois gets her own monologue within Reta's solipsistic narrative in a chapter titled "Beginning With", and the mother-in-law is thus carried back, textually, to the center of the story, as someone with far more depth than Reta manages to convey, or as Danielle's acceptance of her role as a daughter at the age of eighty-six, opening up new possibilities for the character's self-image.

Unless presents two first person narrators, one is Reta herself and the other is Reta's own character Alicia, whose narrative destiny is under constant alteration as Reta

tries to figure her new feminist perspective. Alicia and her position within the fictional novel become pivotal and significant regarding Reta's quest to understand the silencing and marginalization of women in the bigger socio-cultural context. Firstly, as Reta's fictional creation, Alicia symbolizes a doubling of her author, as her novel begins with the sentence, "'Alicia was not as happy as she deserved to be' " (15), mirroring the same disruptive unhappiness Reta feels during the time she begins to write the novel. Even the construction of Alicia as a young and cheerful woman highlights Reta's fears and anxieties regarding her own middle-age, as she herself admits, after an interview about her book, she feels an impulse to "apologize for not being younger and more adorable, like Alicia in [her] novel, and for not having [Alicia's] bright ingénue voice and manner" (85). Reta also adds how between Ronan, the male protagonist of her book, and Alicia, it is "Alicia's skin [Reta wears]. [Reta sees] through her woman's eyes, reach[es] with her woman's fingers" (110). Thus, the first person narration of the novel becomes a means of masquerade for Reta demonstrating her creation of an alternative life she has not chosen for herself. This function of Alicia becomes even more significant when Reta suddenly decides against the happy ending she was so sure of at the beginning of the novel, and instead chooses to postpone the wedding of Alicia and Ronan, and decides that "if [the novel] is to survive, [it] must be redrafted. Alicia will advance in her self-understanding, and the pages will expand" (172-173). In the end, this decision for expanding Alicia's story results in the need for a third book in the series, as the sequel will not be enough to advance Alicia's process of self-realization.

Through Alicia, Shields also highlights the issues of the center parallel to the problematics of both the construction and the reception of the female subject. As Arthur Springer, Reta's new editor, says about Alicia

There's a golden quality about her. As though she were a gold autumn leaf among others less gold. I've thought and thought about what it is that draws me to your Alicia. It's not her sensuality, not that she is lacking in that department, not in the least. The way she has of sitting still in a chair. Just sitting. Her generosity, that's part of it. Her tolerance too. But what really makes me want to take her in my arms is her goodness. (212)

This comment, self-reflexively brings to mind Norah's criticism regarding **Madame Bovary** to her literature professor, Mr. Hamilton, who recalls Norah's position regarding the novel as "a perfectly viable view, [which was] Madame Bovary was forced to surrender her place as the moral centre of the novel" (217). The same fallacy occurs with Springer's interpretation of Alicia, his statement regarding her goodness and stillness acts as a foreshadowing device that will become a request for the centralization of the male character Ronan, as he believes "'A reader, the serious reader that I have in mind, would never accept her as the decisive fulcrum of a serious work of art that acts as a critique of our society while, at the same time, unrolling itself like a carpet of inevitability, narrativistically speaking'" (286). Nevertheless, he is unable to give any legitimate reason for his opinion, which renders him incapable from refuting Reta's claim that his judgment stems from the fact that Alicia is a woman. As Bethan Gunther writes "In light of Norah's marginalization, it is all the more urgent that Reta keeps Alicia as the center of her novel, if not to save Norah then at least to begin to understand, and even combat, the powers that have forced her into self-exile" (160). Since Reta's theory regarding Norah's situation is one of female exclusion, Arthur's prejudice against Alicia's centrality to the novel acts as a confirmation regarding the place of the female subject. In addition, by keeping her as the main character, who is a double for both Reta and Norah, Reta manages to centralize a symbiotic version of her relationship with her daughter.

Similar to **Cat's Eye**, **Unless** uses Kristeva's concept of the semiotic order of language to shape the narrative. In **Cat's Eye**, the art show acts as the other-narrative used to fill in the gaps of Elaine's defective narration. Paintings and their symbolism become the means that foreground the way the Kristevan semiotic both interrupts and maintains

the symbolic order of meanings while also providing a frame to the narration. In **Unless** however, the semiotic language the paintings represent are transformed into Norah's ambiguous silence, and much like the paintings, with differing interpretations, Norah's reticence becomes in itself an invitation for constant interpretation. Nora Foster Stovel maintains how **Unless** "is a novel of interpretation- how to interpret Norah's defection from life" (53). However, unlike the paintings in **Cat's Eye**, with their ever-present challenge to stable meanings, Norah's silence, though disruptive and thought provoking, functions to highlight the unsustainability of the semiotic order within culture. As Judith Butler maintains, the trouble with Kristeva's theory is that it accepts that the symbolic order will always be dominant over the semiotic. In **Castle**, what will remain of the girls will be the stories of the townspeople, in **Cat's Eye** Elaine's verbal narration takes over the paintings, which only come to signify certain ruptures in her narrative, and themselves are verbally described; in this sense, Butler poses a relevant question: "If the semiotic promotes the possibility of the subversion, displacement, or disruption of the paternal law, what meanings can those terms have if the Symbolic always reasserts its hegemony?" (1999: 102). With **Unless**, Shields gives a complicated answer to this question through Reta, who finds triumph in quotidian experiences and subversions, Shields brings together the Kristevan concept of the semiotic as a force. Hence, Reta is pushed into what Butler calls the necessary means to subvert the law, by recognizing the fact that everything is molded within the patriarchal discourse, and nothing can exist outside of it, thus forcing her to work within the molds that have shaped her gendered subjectivity.

From a Bakhtinian perspective, the first rule of character construction within a narrative is to situate the said character chronotopically, only through this tentative placement a character as a subject can begin to accumulate meaning. The most important space concerning Reta's construction of a self is her house on a hill in suburban Ontario. Reta's conception of her home figures as a safe haven, unlike the connotations it had for Merricat Blackwood or Elaine Risley; the domestic sphere in **Unless** is neither a symbol for imprisonment nor a marker that symbolizes an entry into the symbolic. The history, and the construction of the house recall the Blackwood mansion more so than the house

Elaine occupied in her young years. Reta's house has a hundred years of history, and for the most part of it, it was used as a farm. However, even though the Winters' own the house, it is still remembered as "The McGinn House" (51). Reta finds herself trying to construct a narrative around the McGinn family, through the things they left behind. The history of the house neither disturbs Reta nor causes any alienation. Reta says regarding the geography and the history of the house:

We live on a steep hill. This is rolling country on the whole, so our rocky perch is a geological anomaly, chosen no doubt because it offered a firm foundation as well as a view. The house is a hundred years old, a simple brick Ontario farmhouse that has been much added on to by its several previous inhabitants, and by us. It has weathered into durable authenticity, withstanding the scorchings and freezings of the Ontario climate. (49)

Like the house in **Castle**, Reta highlights its firm foundation, its ancient history, and how this history makes the house into a natural matrix for polyphonic stories for the lives of others. It is a house that has literal marks left by other people, and not only its firm foundation is an anomaly but also its durable authenticity resulting from its withstanding of scorchings and freezes speaks volumes for one particular absent inhabitant of the house, Norah.

When compared to the Blackwood house, which only contained a rich history of the Blackwood lineage, the McGinn house, in a way, provides Reta with its rich and polyphonic history, "non-rooms" (51) or "half-finished spaces[s]" (Ibid.) to imbue her own familial history upon it. Moreover, the McGinn House carries what Gary Saul Morson and Caryl Emerson call a "chronotopic aura" (1990: 374), which designates a particular event or place that have been used recurrently within a certain genre to the point that when it is used within other genres "they may 'remember' their past and carry the aura of the earlier genre into the new one" (Ibid.). Moreover, not only the historicity of the house but also the trope of a "house on a hill" carries connotations regarding the Gothic

genre's use of isolated houses that imprison its female inhabitants. As Morson and Emerson add, "Much as diverse languages of heteroglossia may confront each other dialogically, so may diverse chronotopes" (Ibid: 426). In other words, every dialogue takes place within certain chronotopic structures that are always in dialogue with each other. In **Unless**, Shields utilizes this chronotopic dialogue to signal a change, especially through Mr. and Mrs. McGinn and their unknown rumored tragedy that might have something to do with Mr. McGinn and his gun cabinet juxtaposed to the Winters' happy and serene life. Reta admits to often thinking about the family: "[Reta] never met them, but they linger nevertheless. They left traces" (52); through the residues they left within the house both Tom and Reta, in a manner of a game, reconstruct what their family life might have been like, thus sharing the same space at different points of time, causes a dialogue between two unrelated families.

Shields's writing does not carry the same terror towards the domestic space that the writings of the first wave and second wave female writers' carried. Instead, the house and the domestic duties attached to it bring a similar peace to Reta as her writing, while also admitting the similarities of a house to the human body. As she writes excitedly about the prospect of cleaning her house the next day, she makes a clear connection between the two, as she says, "I'm not so thick that I can't put the pieces of my odd obsession together, wood and bone, plumbing and blood" (61). Shields invokes the same symbolism that Shirley Jackson uses namely the house as the Kristeva's maternal chora, but unlike Jackson's imprisoning house, the house motif Shields employs is complex, unfinished, and openended. Like the characters of the novel, the house is not seen as a finalized structure, but as a place open to alterations and new future possibilities. As Fiona Tolan writes, "Reta speaks as the other- as the theorized object of a second-wave feminist discourse that rejected the home" (2010: 7) and adds that "The domestic remains instead an ambiguous space in [**Unless**]- a site of pleasure, comfort and intellectual engagement from which one does not need to be rescued but to which one must not be confined" (Ibid: 12). Through Reta's organic connection to the house, Shields creates a maternal textual space that is neither menacing nor fixed, but a liminal safe haven that one can come and

go as one pleases. The house does not function as imprisonment with the oppressive force of phallic maternity like in **Castle**, nor does it function as a passage into societal norms that creates the gendered subject like in **Cat's Eye**.

Similar to the way the novel subverts the maternal home, in comparison to Margaret Atwood's use of suburban Ontario and Toronto, the perception Shields provides of both the suburban and the urban structures also differ dramatically. Reta's story, and the lives of her kids' in Ontario do not carry the same traumatic markings that Elaine's perception reflects upon it. For Reta, Ontario is, where her home and her local library are and there are no particular spaces that carry terrorizing myths, like the ravine in **Cat's Eye**, if anything the suburban town is "prosperous" (2) and the place that orders Reta's life rather than disrupts it. In addition, Reta's version of Toronto in comparison to Elaine's menacing one also takes on a new outlook. As Reta observes, "The city of Toronto, monumental and lonely, glowed in front of me. Its outskirts are ragged, though its numbered exits pretend at a kind of order" (25). The city, if anything, is majestic and colossal for Reta, and has a level of order to hide its irregularities. The differing uses and contrasting point of views regarding the suburban town and the city in both novels highlight to a greater effect of the function of chronotopes concerning the construction of the characters. The way Elaine perceives Toronto as a malevolent space, with buildings resembling gravestones, thematically reveals a narratological concern regarding the way Elaine's traumas are constructed but also the terror experienced generally concerning the process of urbanization. In contrast, Reta's narrative uses both the public and the domestic space as a means of ordering Reta on stable grounds, hence situating her house as both roomy and cozy, and Toronto as a harmless big city. Through this chronotopic sureness and stability, Shields, as Alex Ramon writes manages to "find ways of combining an exploration of the interiority of the individual self with attention to the wider social world" (13). Moreover, it is not the space but the way it reflects the passage of time that is troubling for Reta, since Shields's construction and perception of the concepts of inner and outer spaces are complicated as a subject's own consciousness as a place that it can never leave behind.

The one particular place that stands out for Reta is the street corner Norah chooses to inhabit during her silent protest, but knowing the “textual archeology” (8) of the corner does not help Reta in putting the pieces together of Norah’s affliction. According to Reta, the street corner Norah chooses to inhabit,

[...] has its own textual archaeology, though Norah probably doesn’t know about that. She sits beneath the lamppost where the poet Ed Lewinski hanged himself in 1995 and where Margherita Tolles burst out of the subway exit into the sunshine of her adopted country and decided to write a great play. (11)

When Reta claims the corner has a textual archeology, it is meant literally, as both the names mentioned are fictional names without any real life correlations. Moreover, the street corner symbolizes two moments in two different person’s lives. For one, it is the spatial coordinate where it all comes to an end, and for the other it symbolizes a new beginning, with great outcomes, especially for a woman who has adopted the country rather than being born in it. Nevertheless, Reta focuses on the wrong past, since it is that street corner where the self-immolation of the Muslim woman took place. Such discrepancies of perspective and knowledge stand as subtle challenges to Reta’s interpretations regarding Norah’s situation by showing the inconsistency of Reta’s knowledge and Norah’s lived reality. Norah becomes a mystery for Reta as she herself admits, her daughter’s new chosen way of living gives her an “unreadable immobility” (16). Norah’s situation, more than anything, proves Reta to be a poor reader, which is emphasized further when Reta recalls the last conversation she had with her daughter, unconsciously marking the moment when Norah started to become unreadable for her, she writes, “I was recognizing something now. I put on my reading glasses and looked at my daughter again, closely” (127). After this moment, every single event that follows falls together to further highlight how much of herself Reta projects onto Norah in the name of trying to construct a narrative web around the person she thinks Norah has become.

Reta's life follows an ordinarily temporal and spatial trajectory, up until the point Norah decides to live on the streets, which, causes the notion of an unhinged and threatening future. In her descriptions of Norah's situation, Reta reveals that in their final conversation Norah told her parents "She could not come home. She was on the path to goodness" (12). For Reta this unobservable journey situates the concept of goodness as "abrupt and brutal. It's killing [them]. What will really kill [them], though, is the day [they] don't find her sitting on her chosen square of pavement" (13). In this context, Norah's self-abdication introduces into Reta's life narrative a temporal instability, which up until this point have had "ordinary plot lines of a life story" (12). Norah's situatedness on that particular street corner comes with temporal connotations that are unforeseeable for Reta, like her fear of the possibility that one day she will not find her there. Since as Norah emphasizes, she is on a path, a journey, Reta has to live with the fact that she cannot interpret or securely narrativize the end of this path, which will come to represent an uncharted territory for Reta even at the end of the novel as will be argued later on in this chapter. Even though Reta is both self-authoring and authoring a fictional novel, the effect of Norah's decision leaves her uncertain, as she herself says, "I'm desperate to know how the story will turn out" (16). Nevertheless, neither the reader nor Reta ever gets to find out. At many levels **Unless** refuses the illusion of the knowability of a life story, even when it ends with death. Even though Norah wakes up, the novel never goes beyond the point of theorizing what she might do after she gets better; the same refusal for closure is also mirrored with Reta's fictional universe, as she decides that she will write a third book for the series, thus, also leaving Alicia's life at a threshold of possibilities. As Reta herself remarks "We only appear to be rooted in time. Everywhere, if you listen closely, the spitting fuse of the future is crackling" (236). Moreover, the life stories within the novel refuse to end in a manner that subdues the crackles of a fuse like future that is always on the verge of exploding.

The character of Danielle Westerman represents a different version regarding Reta's fear of the passage of time and the future, which is the ageing female body. Danielle from the very beginning of the novel acts as both a double and a maternal figure for Reta.

Even though, throughout the novel, the love and respect Reta feels towards Danielle is very clear there is also a sense of a certain ambivalent antagonism towards Danielle that Reta cannot quite put into words. The framing of the doubleness between the two women is neither as close as the bonds of Constance and Merricat Blackwood, or as traumatic and aggressive as Elaine and Cordelia's bond of mutual abjection. Similar to Constance who acts as a nurturing maternal figure, Danielle provides emotional and textual support concerning the maternal story and text that Reta is in the process of creating. As Falcus maintains "Reta positions Danielle as other to everything she holds dear and that confirms her own identity- her motherhood, her wifehood, her relationality. In doing so, she shores up a binary between herself and the aged Danielle" (320). Danielle as an old woman becomes the abject, as Kristeva maintains in **Powers of Horror**, the old age Danielle represents for Reta is "something rejected from which one does not part" (4). Danielle's abjection is doubled as Reta observes after hugging her that "Her craving for physical touch has not slackened even in her eighties, though nowadays it is mostly her doctor who touches her, or me with my weekly embrace, or the manicurist" (8), thus, situating Danielle as the old maternal figure that still desires. Ultimately, the unconscious binary Reta draws between herself and Danielle represents the firm boundary that she is trying to create around her own self, to create an illusory denial, which is shadowed by the knowledge of its impossibility, that Danielle's faith will not be hers. Resulting from her life choices regarding motherhood and marriage she will somehow manage to be different from Danielle, but ageing is not something Reta can part as she herself observes that the very future she fears always lies at her periphery.

Reta's career begins with her translations of Danielle Westerman's French writings. French is Reta's mother tongue, coming from her mother who spoke "a musical French" (146). Moreover, Reta's connection to language on a literal level is already polyphonic. She claims that this "doubleness [clarifies] the world [...]. Every object, every action, had an echo, an explanation. Meaning had two feet, two dependable etymological stems" (Ibid.). In addition, Danielle Westerman for Reta constitutes the doubleness that clarifies Reta's I as well as her writings, acting as the others' that shape Reta's own

translations and novel writing. Through this act of translation, the voices of the two women become imbued together, and in constant dialogue. As Reta admits “[Danielle] is the other voice in [her] head, almost always there, sometimes the echo, sometimes the soloist” (151). Nevertheless, this statement carries paradoxical connotations since Danielle speaks French and, throughout the narrative, whenever Reta recalls one of Danielle’s feminist statements, they are always in English, as Reta’s translation, which is in itself an act of creation. It is not simply their history beginning from the days Danielle taught Reta in the University of Toronto that creates the symbiotic relationship of the two women but also the connection that stems from their shared mother tongues, which builds their working relationship as an author and translator that creates the possibility for a polyphonic relationship between the two. It is also this relationship that causes Reta to think more critically of herself as a writer, as she writes once she felt like she was “in Danielle’s shadow, [...], and needing [her] own writing space” (7). Once again signaling the need Reta feels for separating her identity from Danielle’s.

Norah is the one subject of the novel that constantly eludes interpretation or any firm boundaries being drawn around her. Even though, the narrative arc is built up around her, she remains, even by the end, textually non-present. Most of his career, Bakhtin championed notions regarding speech, language, and dialogue but in his “Notes Made in 1970-71” he distinguishes between two terms regarding the moments speech stops, which are quietude and silence. As Graham Pechey writes, “The elaborating subtext of quietude is a sentence in the passive voice (Nothing was heard); the subtext of silence is a sentence in the active voice” (137). In other words, silence requires an active participation from the part of the listening subject, Pechey also adds, “Silence makes us aware that what founds our humanity is not a ground: it is the ever-shifting boundary between speech and its cessation” (Ibid.). In this context, silence is both a boundary phenomenon, and a container for speech itself. Silence becomes the “ultimate ‘loophole’; speech with reservations so absolute that it reserves itself altogether; the ultimate measure of one who wants to ensure that the last word is never spoken” (Pechey, 138). Norah’s silence functions at this very level: By ceasing to talk, Norah creates around herself a constant dialogue. Her silence,

thus, feels endless and infinite. It is through the figure of Norah that the novel steps into an uncharted territory regarding feminism and politics of identity. Silence, like the Kristevan maternal chora, acts as a container for speech that is yet to come. A semiotic articulation that precedes language, thus, like the maternal chora, the meanings produced by this very silence are semiotic. Just as the semiotic disrupts the perceived order within the symbolic, Norah's chosen silence also disrupts the life of her family and most importantly her mother. When she refuses the possibility of a dialogue within language, she slowly begins to cease as a representable subject.

Judith Butler's criticism of Kristeva, and the feminists who have pursued to make their cases through identity politics with the hopes of creating a unified female subject for the purpose of easy representation, is that the notion of the subject is never as simple as just its gender. In her book **Gender Trouble**, Butler makes the argument regarding feminism's efforts to create a politics of identity by assuming that the category of women by itself is enough to constitute it, which remains problematic since identity politics by their very nature are both "legitimizing and exclusionary" (5). Similar to the search for a unified identity for women, the politics of representation itself remains suspect since representation is inevitably achieved through language, which can both help to "reveal" (3) as well as "distort" (Ibid.). This is the point in which Reta's and Norah's relative perspectives come into conflict. Acting upon what she knows and understands of feminism, the best Reta can do is to assume that what Norah is going through is happening in regards to the way women, in general, unified, and universal, have been excluded from the general discourse. Shields is not necessarily criticizing Reta's efforts, but by leaving Norah and the Muslim woman's story at the margin, she highlights their ultimate ineffectiveness. Reta, in her journey to understand both the concepts of goodness and feminism, constantly overlooks the experiences that do not figure safely into her frame of reference. Moreover, Reta represents the feminism prior to the current moment, while Norah's silence represents, as the last chapter's title suggests the "Not Yet" of feminism.

Firstly, Norah's silence parodies the socially accepted and monolithic outlook towards the concept of femininity. There are many instances in the novel in which Reta positions Norah as a snow white figure, which has been a pivotal subject of feminism since the first wave. Regarding the tale of Snow White, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar write a version of "Snow White" in which the figure of the step-mother represents the female artist trying to destroy the "conventionally feminine" (1994: 360), and through the figure of Snow White, the notion of conventionally feminine is defined through "the silence, immobility, and beauty of the daughter-heroine [displays] in a glass coffin" (Ibid.). The words used in this depiction, are also used by Reta regarding Norah all throughout the story, which figure in prominently in Reta's description of Norah in the hospital, she writes;

Norah was asleep, with an oxygen tube connected to her nose, Snow White in her glass case, and the girls and I are gathered around the bed like curious dwarves. The skin of her face was white and puffy. Someone had brushed out her hair so that it fell cleanly on the pillowcase and on the shoulders of her blue hospital gown, tied in a bow at the back of her neck. (301)

Even after the journey Reta goes through, the myth of Snow White still remains but not necessarily with heavy regards to Norah but concerning the position of Reta herself. As Gilbert and Gubar observes, "the emergence and survival of an artful [...] mother implies the possibility of constructing a durable and public female future—a line of literary descent that can speak itself forward" (1994: 389). In this context, the normative and complacent supposed feminine nature of Norah's protest become parodic since it is done in the name of disrupting the symbolic order, which activates her biological mother Reta to become, like the stepmother, crafty and creative in order to create a polyphonic maternal text, which takes after the maternal chora, to give her a container to create meanings that will subvert the law of the symbolic order.

As Reta represents the feministic notions of the generations prior to her, Norah's action parallels a return to the underlying female myth that lies beneath the identity politics of feminism. Since the concepts of the self and the subject are created through language and surrounding discourses, every harmful notion that the waves of feminism have tried to dispute regarding the female subject they have been trying to construct, only kept those notions alive. Butler's view on this matter is quite clear; before a subversion can occur, feminists first need to accept that even the most material things, like the human body, are constructed through language, which are by their nature patriarchal. Moreover Butler writes "If subversion is possible, it will be a subversion from within the terms of the law, through the possibilities that emerge when the law turns against itself and spawns unexpected permutations of itself" (1999: 119). In this context, Norah signifies that very moment of an unexpected permutation regarding the connotation of the law, as her situation to a comic level mimics that of Snow White, she manages to carry the private sphere or the domain of the maternal into the public, as an unmovable and unavoidable force. Even though Norah situates herself in a position of silence and impenetrability, and she is not hidden from the public like the Blackwood sisters. The extreme invocation of inner and outer spheres in **Castle** works to construct "a binary distinction that stabilizes and consolidates the coherent subject" (Butler, 1999: 171). In this context, amidst the ruin of the house as the representative of culture, the ultimate female myth is created by the merging of Constance as the symbol for the good mother and Merricat as the wild and creative child Butler maintains that the need for this binary in the first place is to assume a "mediating boundary that strives for stability" (Ibid.). The pivotal point that is missed in trying to create a coherent gendered subject is, ultimately, neither Constance nor Merricat with all their dialogic connotations can stand for the strife of all women. Moreover, Reta's pleas to writers and publisher to include more women, though a necessary activism, in itself proves not to be enough as she herself keeps ignoring the plight of women she does not know.

Instead of relying on a construction of a firm binary between an inside and an outside, Shields employs the complex and problematic notions of a center and its margin

to draw attention to the fallacy of the representative politics. As Margaret Scheffler writes, “the vague encounter between Norah and the ‘other’ woman cannot be pushed to the margins by the reader as it is by the society in which it occurs” (224). The story of the Muslim woman is repeated a few times during Reta’s quest to understand her daughter, but due to the lack of attention it is always pushed aside even at the point when it is revealed as the main cause for Norah’s silent protest. Through this effect, Shields achieves to transform the narratively marginal into the central theme of her novel. As Reta herself admits in the end,

My own theory — before we knew of the horrifying event — was that Norah had become aware of an accretion of discouragement, that she had awakened in her twentieth year to her solitary state of non-belonging, understanding at last how little she would be allowed to say. [...] but it is also probable that I was weighing her down with my own fears, my own growing perplexity concerning the world and its arrangements, that I had found myself, in the middle of my life, in the middle of the continent, on the side of the disfavoured, and it may be that I am partly right and partly wrong. (309-310)

Reta, who spends nine-months trying to interpret her daughter’s unreadable silence, refuses to centralize what she terms simply as a “horrifying event.” Even though the Muslim woman and Norah, by that point, are thoroughly merged through their burnt skins, the burnt women go only as far as to symbolize a traumatic event that causes a brutal disruption of her life within Reta’s narrative. On Shields’s part, this negligence is profoundly purposeful, as Scheffler asserts, “the lack of attention accorded to the incident deliberately demands the reader’s engagement” (225). In other words, Shields centers her novel, through the doubling of Norah and the nameless Muslim woman, on the very margins that Reta cannot even come close to represent.

This marginalization of the central concern of the novel functions in a way that introduces into the narrative the complications that arise from trying to form an identity around the category of women. As the doubling of the Muslim woman and Norah shows in its indescribable brutality, there can never be a unified and finalized subject of any gender, race, or religion. Esra Melikoğlu maintains, “Reta’s contemplation of Norah’s encounter with the Muslim woman reveals the incomplete resolution both in Canada and in her fiction of colonial gothic discourse” (212). In this context, what Reta ignores so readily is the “historical unhomeliness of Canada” (Ibid.), that is signified through the unnamed Muslim woman who does not get neither a before nor after. From this point of view, Reta herself as a character functions as a critique towards the construction of a female subject who can so readily assume a meaning concerning her connection to the notion of a home that she feels like she belongs. As Bethany Guenther posits, Shields seems to be asking, “If such extreme actions by women have so little impact, [...] what are we to do?” (161). On the other hand, asking this question does not mean Shields does indeed provide an answer other than situating Norah as a potential character that might usher in a new perspective by choosing a liminal existence. The discourse surrounding the Muslim woman is first brought out within a conversation between Reta and her group of female friends, which shows their shallow perspective regarding the incident. In the conversation, one of the friends mention the Muslim woman, whose identity was never discovered due to her burns. The event is called “‘Terrible’” (118) and then swiftly forgotten as the women move onto a different subject. Even when the Muslim woman’s tragedy resurfaces again at the end, it is “doomed to irrelevance” (Guenther, 161). Nevertheless, through Norah, Shields seems to be suggesting that there is still hope for a future understanding regarding the things that have been outside of the comfort zone of first and second waves of feminisms.

The merging of Norah and the Muslim woman takes place on a literal level, as through the fire the woman’s skin literally burns into Norah’s hands, symbolizing not just a transgression of boundaries between the self and the other but the collapse of them altogether. As Scheffler highlights, “The mingling of the women’s skins initiates the

shocking meeting of many different worlds, including those of private and public, domestic and political, and ‘western’ and ‘eastern’” (230). In other words, through the melting touch Shields envisions a traumatic merging that is “Not Yet” representable, which also recalls Butler’s analysis of subject formation regarding Merleau-Ponty’s notion of a self. In her book **Senses of the Subject**, Butler writes that according to Ponty’s philosophy “the ‘I’ who feels comes about only consequent to the touch, thus avowing a primacy of the undergoing of touch to the formation of the feeling self” (42). Ponty does not claim that there is no conception of a self, prior to the touch, but it is through touching that the process of self-representation is instituted. Butler adds, “This does not mean that we are all touched well or that we know how to touch in return, not only that our very capacity to feel and our emergence as knowing and acting beings is at stake in the exchange” (62). In this context, when bodies are taken as the constructs of language, chronotopically and polyphonically produced, the act of touching becomes a dialogical relation that foregrounds the self’s ultimate intersubjectivity, since to be able to imagine an “I” at all, the subject needs to be initiated as a sentient being by the touch of another. With the Muslim woman’s flesh melting into Norah’s, she goes through a literal process of gestation, like an embryo she roots herself onto a fixed space for nine-months, before she is taken to hospital, where she finally awakes.

The symbolism of the self-immolating woman and the process it creates are not romanticized or justified. Shields does not present the incident in a way that it is justified as long as it betters Norah, the privileged white girl. If anything, the anonymity of the woman regarding her identity and her motivations permeate the text as an absence that cannot be filled no matter what is done in her name, since literally she does not have one. In a sense, Norah is the lucky one as well as the burdened, since she becomes the intersubjective self that has lived to tell the tale of an event that eludes representation altogether. As Melikoğlu states, the future that is represented by Norah is one where the notion of home and belonging becomes dissolved since she was, in symbolic manner “willing to cross the border to erase a politics of cultural polarity inside and outside Canada” (221). Norah symbolizes a collapse of firm borders regarding identity politics

the moment she decides to act rather than remain as an onlooker with disregard to her own wellbeing. Nonetheless, her action does not make her a white savior, the woman dies, and so does her story. Norah remains as a promise that has “Not Yet” been fulfilled, as she signifies a path towards the uncharted territories of goodness and existence.

At the climax of the narrative Reta can only participate to the story as a voyeur, as she finally figures out what her daughter went through by watching the security tapes of Norah’s attempt to help the Muslim woman. At that point, watching the tragedy from behind the screen Reta as an observer is spatio-temporally far removed from the actual incident. She narrates the events she observes in a war-like fashion. She writes,

Without thinking, and before the news teams arrived, Norah had rushed forward to stifle the flames. The dish rack became a second fire, and it and the plastic bag in which it was carried burned themselves to Norah’s flesh. She pulled back. Stop, she screamed, or something to that effect, and then her fingers sank into the woman’s melting flesh — the woman was never identified — her arms, her lungs, and abdomen. These pieces gave way. The smoke, the smell, was terrible. (315)

Not only the woman’s flesh is described to be melting but also Norah’s hands sink into hers and after that, the structure of Reta’s sentence becomes unhinged in a sense. Right in the middle of a coherent sentence, she jams in the fact that the woman was never identified and then lists the parts of her body that she claims to have “gave way” and describing right after a sensation she could not have possibly felt from a video recording of the event. Even though Reta watches the event through the protective shield of a screen, she still narrates it in a war-like fashion she has seen first-hand, The more the events become gruesome and tragic the more Reta’s account of them becomes jumbled. Regardless, Reta’s verbal

account reveals another aspect of the encounter, which is, as Scheffler argues, “the violent and unexpected breaking of the skin’s surface allows Norah to ‘feel’ the ‘other’ world, which falls apart at her touch even as it burns her” (229). The world in this context figures as the body of the other woman, situated at the very margin of the whole novel.

In the second chapter of the novel, a dialogue takes place between Reta and an old scientist friend regarding the theory of relativity and whether it can be situated on any moral ground. The dialogue is very clear, even though Reta claims not to understand the concept. Reta asks Colin,

“Would you say,” I asked Colin — I had not spoken for several minutes — “that the theory of relativity has reduced the weight of goodness and depravity in the world?” He stared at me. “Relativity has no moral position. None whatever.” [...] “But isn’t it possible,” I said to Colin, “to think that goodness, or virtue if you like, could be a wave or particle of energy?” “No,” he said. “No, it is not possible.” (22)

Regardless of Colin’s firm rebuttal of Reta’s question, the way the novel situates the Muslim woman in relation to Norah begs another perspective regarding the concept of relativity and the morality that is attached to it. The Muslim woman is a textual absence; since nothing is known about her other than that she is Muslim, which is merely inferred from her traditional dress, hence, through her marginalization in a narrative that is written by a middle-aged upper-middle class woman about the absence of her own daughter, consequently, the Muslim woman proves that there is indeed a morality attached in regards to who is assumed to be the central observer of an event. As Scheffler writes, “The push to heal Norah means that the ‘other’ woman risks not only a lack of commemoration but also continued erasure in a narrative that hinges on her but allows her only a secondary

and subservient role with Norah as the centralized norm” (236). Shield, ultimately, gives this task to the reader of interpreting the fallacy of having Reta as the central observer, who is twice removed from the main narrative arc of the novel.

Reta’s position regarding the Muslim woman is parodied in her conversation with her editor Arthur. As mentioned in the beginning of this chapter, one of Arthur’s requests regarding Reta’s book is that she changes the main character of her novel from Alicia to Ronan, because from his perspective, which is heavily influenced by the privileges that come with his gender and money, Ronan is far more interesting and his journey is far more easily accessible than Alicia’s. This notion is covertly echoed in Reta’s inability to deal with the situation of the Muslim woman, and through that very absence Shields seems to be implying that, the readers are simply reading this novel from the perspective of the wrong observer. Reta’s own position and privilege, naturally causes her to centralize her daughter as the norm as she completely disregards the woman with no known past or future. Reta’s narrative fails for many reasons, the parts of days she pieces together do not hold. Even chronotopically, the notion of a center and margin are confused as both the house and the street corner fail to constitute any identity. In comparison to all the other previous novels of this dissertation, certain select spaces in certain times were used not only to highlight the places of conflict but also as places, which themselves were in conflict, regarding the notions of inside and outside, the center and the margin. Through this use, each chronotope highlighted something of its central consciousness and it is chosen other. In **Castle**, Merricat and Constance are constructed as heavily tied to certain places in their house, the kitchen, the cellar, and the garden, which reveals their relative connection to nature, and a need to break away from society altogether. In **Cat’s Eye**, the connection between Toronto and the ravine does not only emphasize the fragmentation Elaine feels in being a gendered subject, but also puts her relationship with Cordelia into a new perspective, by positioning Toronto at the center and making the ravine, the margin or the abject. What Shields achieves in **Unless** is a completely new perspective over the notions of center and margin, as she never once allows the novel’s main character of it to neither speak nor exist.

CONCLUSION

Even though the novels that have been discussed in this study were written during different periods, they all have in common the growing problematics of constructing a gendered subject. As discussed in the “Introduction,” feminist movements and women writers of the late twentieth century were heavily influenced by the poststructuralist approach concerning subjectivity. Deconstructing the subject meant accepting that the notion of an I cannot exist in isolation, hence, after being deconstructed, the only sure thing that remained of the subject was that it was a dialogical construction that was always in a process. In this study, I have tried to show the ways these women writers adapted and appropriated certain patriarchal traditions, and used the polyphonic and chronotopic nature of prose novels as a commentary upon the ways that the female subject is still being objectified, and the futility of fighting this objectification through constructing the category of women as something unitary and whole.

My analysis of **Castle** attempts to show the way Jackson parodies the notion of a bounded female subject. Through the appropriations of the traditional tenants of the Gothic genre, Jackson exposes the fallacies of being both the object and the emerging subject of the patriarchal discourse. All throughout the novel Merricat and Constance become voluntarily more abject, and in the said abjection, they find safety and stability that their positions as social beings cannot possibly offer them. Nevertheless, the ending is not supposed to be a happy one but instead recalls Danielle Westerman’s interpretation regarding Norah’s protest, making one’s existence count by ceasing to exist. In the end, their land becomes a threshold for the townspeople, and the sisters become two pair of eyes that haunt the now public space that was once their impenetrable fortress. Their isolation becomes parodic in its exclusion. The novel shows that the notion of a unitary female subject, which consolidates the traditional binaries that have been attributed to women by the patriarchal discourse, can only cause them to lose ground and become even more abject than they were before. Hence, the chapter that discussed **Castle** analyzed the way Jackson used the chronotope of a symbolic castle with its relation to the Gothic genre.

With the use of the symbolic fortress, Jackson carries the notions of an inside and an outside to its extremes, especially its polyphonic relation to the construction of a stable female subject that the first wave feminists aimed for.

In **Cat's Eye**, the project of a bounded subject is completely abandoned, as the novel's protagonist Elaine discovers gradually, with the help of her paintings, the polyphonic nature of her own conception of her I/eye. The novel's utilization of the autobiographical genre foregrounds this fact even further, as it highlights the impossibility of any life story to be told in isolation. Without people like Cordelia, Mrs. Smeath, and many others, Elaine's life story would not have made sense. In the same manner, Elaine's connection with the city and the ravine was explored to analyze further the importance of the chronotopes in constructing a subject. The chronotopes of the city and the ravine comes to represent the symbolic and the semiotic forces that produce the subject, and in order to gain any form of coherence, Elaine must retrace her steps and confront her abjected double in the ravine, by returning to the city that she has exiled herself. Elaine's retrospective art show also becomes a space where the forces of the semiotic and symbolic come to clash. Her paintings arranged upon the gallery walls chronologically to become more intelligible only become more persistent in disrupting Elaine's narrative. In the end, by freeing Cordelia and accepting their connection, Elaine positions herself as a boundary phenomenon, her life story is multiple, taking place simultaneously within liquefied time, and her subjecthood depends on the arbitrary way her past will resurface, and be interpreted.

In the final chapter, once again the use of the autobiographical genre was analyzed in relation to the construction of the female subject, however, unlike **Cat's Eye**, **Unless** uses the genre not only to foreground the futility of trying to construct a subjecthood that is impermeable but also to highlight the problems of representation in regards to the privileged position of the observer. **Unless** becomes a criticism of a feminist movement that forgets that there will always be stories that are out of reach, especially, as long as there still remains a need to create a normative way of existing as a gendered subject. The

progression of all the three novels prove a need for new ways of seeing and telling that go beyond the construction of a gendered subject, and show that the main issue for feminist politics should be finding new ways to confront the problems of representation that by its very nature functions on the basis of exclusion.

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